Peggy Parsons at Prep School

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PEGGY PARSONS
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CHAPTER I—THE SERENADE

Peggy Parsons wove her curly hair into a golden braid, and stretching her slim arms above her head yawned sleepily.

"Oh, you mustn't do that," sniggered her room-mate out of the semi-darkness of the one-candle-power illumination. "They don't allow it here."

"Don't allow what?" said Peggy, beginning to prance before the mirror to admire the fluttering folds of her new blue silk kimono, which had been given her by a cousin the week before school opened, with the delightful label, "For Midnight Fudge Parties."

"Don't allow what?" she repeated curiously, bobbing up and down before her reflection, "can't I even *yawn* if I want to?"

"No," her room-mate unsympathetically insisted, "they teach us manners along with our French and mathematics, and yawning isn't one,—a manner, I mean. Yawning is enough to keep you from getting high marks. This is a finishing school we've come to, please remember."

"It will finish me," sighed Peggy, with a final whirl of blue draperies, "if I can't do as I like. Why, I *always* have."

"I'm glad I've got you for a room-mate, then," said the other girl heartily. "It will be such fun to see what happens."

Peggy blew out the candle and crept across the room, in the darkness, nearly colliding with a little rose tree that had been given to the girls to brighten their room against their possible homesickness.

"What's going to happen now is that I'm going to sleep," she laughed. "And I'm glad I've got *you* for a room-mate, Katherine Foster, just—anyway."

And both girls smiled into the darkness, for their first day at Andrews had given them a sense of pleasant anticipation for the rest of the year.

Just as their vivid memories of the preceding twelve hours began to mix themselves up confusingly with dreams, the sound of singing bursting into triumphant volume under their windows caused both sleepy pairs of eyes to pop open.

"Katherine—?" breathed Peggy excitedly.

"Peggy—?" whispered Katherine, "oh, do you suppose it *is*?"

"Andrews opened late, and the other schools were already well into their football and basketball stage: that afternoon the Amherst team had been in town to play the local college football eleven, and there had been rumors that the glee club had been among those who cheered on the Amherst side."

The song came up now, sweet and strong, with its sure tenor soaring almost to their window, it seemed.

Swiftly and silently the two were out of bed and had pattered across to peep down. There they were! There they really *were*, in the moonlight, the glee club, singing up to the open dormitory windows.

"Cheer for Old Amherst,
Amherst must win.
Fight to the fin-ish,
Never give in.
All do your best, boys,
We'll do the rest, boys,
For this is old Amherst's da—ay.
Rah, rah, rah...."

Peggy felt her arm being pinched black and blue, but she was beyond caring.

"O—oh, it's heavenly," she sighed.

"Peggy, it's a serenade," breathed Katherine happily.

"Of course it is," assented Peggy, as if she were used to this kind of thing, "and it's a very nice one."

"Peggy, oughtn't you to—to throw down flowers when you're serenaded?"

Katherine demanded suddenly.

"Oh, yes, you *have* to," Peggy agreed, so that she might not show how ignorant she was of the requirements of so delightful a situation.

"We haven't any." Katherine's tone was forlorn and heartbroken.

"Wait," cried Peggy, scrambling down from the window seat where she had perched, "the roses,—off the rose tree."

And she ran to their treasured plant and seized it, jardiniere and all, and ran back to the window so that she might not miss any of the singing while she was despoiling their little tree of its blossoms. From every window in the wing a dim figure might be discerned behind the shaking lace curtains. With the plant tucked firmly under one arm Peggy leaned out dreamily.

"It's all a lovely thing to have happen," she said, "now I'm going to begin and throw the roses down. Ouch! Goodness,—oh, dear!"

She pricked herself on a thorn and in jerking away her hand she forgot that she was holding anything.

The rose tree toppled an instant on the window-sill and then went down, flower pot, jardinière and all, into those singing, upturned faces, two stories below. There followed a frightful crashing sound, and then a stupefied silence.

Peggy, covering her face with her hands, turned and ran from the window, jumped into bed and pulled the sheet over her head.

"Oh, they're dead, they're dead, and I've killed them," she thought miserably to herself.

She never wanted to hear a glee-club again, she never wanted to look into the face of a living soul. This was a fine ending of a wonderful day, this was, that she should have killed, goodness knew how many fine young men, and talented ones, too. Just when they were singing up so trustingly, for her to have hurled this calamity down upon them! She shook with sobs. Oh, she had only meant to do a kind deed, a *courteous* deed—and she had killed them. She buried her poor little crying face deeper into the pillow.

After a few moments she felt her room-mate shaking her, and when she reluctantly uncovered her tear-stained face she was astonished to hear laughter.

"It's all right, come back to the window quickly," Katherine was chortling, "it's—just great."

Oh, the glorious shaft of light that shot across Peggy's mental horizon! Then they weren't dead. No one—not even a heartless room-mate could laugh at her if she had really killed them. She dashed her hand across her eyes and went back to peer cautiously down in the moonlight.

Each of the singers brandished some tiny thing in the shining white light of the moon, could it be a—flower—a—*rose*?

"Little Rose Girl!
Little Rose Girl!
We'll sing and shout your praises o'er and o'er,
To you ever, we'll be loyal,
Till the sun shall climb the heavens no more!"

Peggy caught her breath. They were all singing straight at *her* window,—and oh, moonlit clouds! and wonder of stars!—to *her*.

"Oh—oh, thank you," she said softly, over and over, "thank you, thank you. I'm so glad you're alive,—and I'm glad I am, too."

Fastening the tiny flowers in their buttonholes, the glee-club began to move off. Peggy sat still in the window seat, her hands clasped tightly in her lap.

The cool moonlight drifted in around her, and she breathed it in slowly. Katherine came and curled up beside her.

"I don't feel a bit sleepy now, do you," she said, "and I'm glad we showed we liked the serenade."

Peggy smiled and then she gave one of the forbidden yawns.

"Oh, it's nice to be alive, and to be young, and to be away at school," she murmured, disregarding Katherine's observation. "And, just think, to-morrow we have a perfectly good new day to wake up into."

CHAPTER II—BEING A BELLE

"To think that one of my young ladies—one of MY young ladies," the principal repeated impressively, "should have been guilty of such a misdemeanor—"

"What's a misdemeanor?" Peggy whispered in her room-mate's ear as they sat in chapel and listened to an address that was evidently going to be serious for somebody.

"Sh," said Katherine. "She means us."

"Means *us*?" demanded Peggy incredulously. "Why, I never did any misdemeanors in my life."

"As to throw—or hurl—or drop a flower-pot down to the pavement from a window in my school," the cold voice continued.

"O—oh," murmured Peggy, "I thought maybe she'd seen me yawn."

"Now I am going to put my young ladies upon their honor to tell me which one of you showed so little regard for me and for the school as to conduct herself in this manner." The principal lifted her chin in a deliberate way she had, "and as you pass out from chapel I request the young lady who has this particular thing on her conscience to come forward and tell me that it was she who did it."

The lines of marching girls swung down the aisles, and Peggy rose with them. "I haven't it on my conscience," she told Katherine, "but I suppose I ought to tell her."

"I will go with you," offered Katherine generously. "It was just as much my fault, and I'd have done it if you hadn't."

But Peggy shook her head and threaded her way up the aisle to the principal's desk.

There she paused, waiting.

"Good-morning, Miss Parsons," the principal said pleasantly, for she had taken an especial fancy to Peggy the day before when she had been left at the school by her aunt. And looking down into that gleeful little face this morning, shining as it was with all the joy of living, and the irresponsible happiness that comes only with a free conscience, how could she dream of connecting Peggy's approach with the confession she had requested from the girl who had dropped the rose tree.

"Good-morning," said Peggy, her face crumpling into its funny little smile, "I didn't mean to."

"What? Didn't mean to—child, are you telling me—?"

There was certainly nothing of the hangdog about Peggy.

She nodded.

"I was just as sorry as you are for a time," she continued, "but you see it made them sing to me and I *can't* be sorry about that, can I? Nobody could. It was so beautiful."

She explained simply.

"I'm very sorry such a thing should have happened," the principal said solemnly when the recital was over. "The other young ladies are going to see a performance of the 'Blue Bird' this afternoon, and this prevents your going. I cannot permit you to go, of course, after this, much as I regret it."

Peggy turned away, a little twinge of disappointment in her heart. She had heard the girls discussing the matinée party for to-day, and she had never dreamed of not going with them. As she left the chapel Miss Carrol, the youngest teacher, timidly approached the principal.

"I am going to chaperone the girls to-day, am I not?" she asked.

"Yes, Miss Carrol."

"I thought I'd venture to suggest that Peggy Parsons be forgiven this once—I don't think she did anything so very terrible—and that she be allowed to come with us to the first party. Don't you remember when *you* were away at school—how heartbreaking it was if you were shut out of anything, and how easily a fit of homesickness came on to blot out all the sunlight of the world? Don't you remember—Mrs. Forest?"

Mrs. Forest didn't remember at all. It wasn't just because all such experiences for her had been very long ago—many women remember all the more tenderly as they grow older,—but she had set out to be a good disciplinarian, and the girls she graduated from her school must be as nearly alike as possible, she wanted them all run in the same mold of training. But Miss Carrol's pleading voice and her eager eyes did what Mrs. Forest's own reminiscences could not do for her—they softened her attitude toward Peggy and finally she gave her consent for Peggy to go.

Peggy, flying back to her room, her heart full of disappointment, unaware of the change in her immediate fortunes brought about by Miss Carrol, heard her name mentioned by a group at the foot of the big staircase.

"This is really a very clever paper little Miss Parsons has written for my English class," one teacher was saying, tapping the folded sheet Peggy had labored over as the first of her work for Andrews.

"Yes?" politely inquired another. "That's rather unusual for Andrews. We have so many beautiful girls, but so few brilliant ones. Peggy Parsons may be popular—and she may develop into a genius, but she'll never be a belle, will she? Not like some of our girls."

Peggy's feet grew heavy on the stairs. She went miserably on to her room and there carefully locked the door, and went and stood before the mirror. She had never been conscious of just how she did look before. She had never thought of being beautiful, but much less had she thought of being NOT beautiful. That was too tragic. She saw a little sober face, with clear brown eyes, and goldy flyaway hair above them.

"Oh, people will only like me when I laugh," she cried, and her face crinkled into its familiar expression of merriment, and she watched the fine dark eyebrows curve upward, and the dimples dance crookedly into the flushed cheeks.

"Ye—es," she said slowly. "It isn't so bad then. But I *will*—be a belle, anyway. You see if I'm not, I will be one and surprise them all. Maybe I've never tried to make myself look pretty before. I will try awfully hard now. And I'll turn out the most wonderful belle of them all, I shouldn't wonder. So there, now."

She danced back from the mirror, her hair-brush in her hand.

"I'll begin at the top," she said, "and I'll see what I can do."

Just then Miss Carrol knocked at the door.

"Come in," sang Peggy blithely, her spirits more or less restored by the prospect of the task she had set herself.

The door rattled.

"I can't," announced Miss Carrol's voice.

"Oh, I forgot," cried Peggy, and she ran to the door and turned the key. Flinging it open, she laughed up into Miss Carrol's face. "Come in," she invited a second time, "I'm *very* glad to see somebody even if you've only come to scold me. *Have* you come to scold me?"

Miss Carrol shook her head, and explained that Mrs. Forest had relented, and she was to be of the matinée party, after all.

Peggy hugged her gratefully.

"Excuse me," she said, "for mussing up your dress, but I just had to. People have been hurting my feelings all the morning and now you come and are—kind. And it means that I can be one right now. I'll be one for this!"

"One what?" asked the youngest teacher, puzzled. "You girls have the oddest things in your minds half the time. What is it you're going to be now?"

Peggy hesitated, and then she came over and whispered.

"A belle," she said with her lips near Miss Carrol's ear. "One of the teachers said I couldn't be one."

To her hurt surprise, her companion threw back her head and laughed. "Oh, is that all?" she said. "Well, that's nothing dangerous. I must run along now, Peggy, child, but all the girls are to meet in the parlor at half-past one for the matinée. We must leave promptly at that time."

Katherine's trunk had not arrived yet, so she planned to go right to the parlor after luncheon and wait there for the party to assemble, as she had no other dress to wear than the blue serge she had on. But Peggy left the table in a flurry of excitement and began to lay out all her prettiest things. A dainty little brown velvet suit, with a chiffon waist, and an adorable hat that came dark against her light curls promised well. She manicured her nails, humming all the while, then she steamed her face and dashed cold water on it till it was all glowing. She did her hair twice and it didn't suit, so she took it all down and experimented with it again. Her hair curled irregularly, and did not lie sleek and smooth and flatly rippled like the hair of the girls who had theirs marcelled. So she borrowed Katherine's electric iron and with a few swift touches sought to make her own natural, pretty hair look artificially waved.

She used powder for the first time. After rubbing her cheeks with a rough towel to keep the glow, she spread on the powder as thickly as she dared. Her nose was alluringly chalk white when she had finished. It was only talcum powder but enough of it had its effect. The girls of Andrews were not allowed to wear jewelry, except in the evening, unless it were a simple band bracelet or a tiny,

inconspicuous gold chain and pendant.

So Peggy closed her jewel case with a snap against the temptation of a long gold snake bracelet with emerald eyes that would have made her feel very much more dressed up.

In the early stages of her dressing she thought she heard someone calling up the stairs, she thought there was an unusual stir of girls clattering down into the hall, but she was too engrossed in the process of becoming beautiful really to sense what might be going on. Once she even thought she heard her name, but she was just applying a precious drop of concentrated violet to the lace at her throat, and though she called out mechanically, "What," she received no answer, and decided she had been mistaken.

At length, complete, she surveyed herself happily. "I guess I look almost as pretty as the actresses, now," she approved. "I'll go down to the parlor—it must be nearly half-past one."

She went down the stairs, with a curious sense of the silence of the house. Why weren't there more girls trooping down with her? She felt a chill of misgiving when she reached the parlor door. No laughter drifted out, no sound of chattering came from within. With a quick fear she opened the door and paused wonderingly on the threshold as a perfectly empty room met her gaze.

She was too late to start with them—perhaps she could catch up yet. She would hurry to the theater and perhaps they had waited for her in the lobby. Panting, she tore across the lawn and boarded the first street-car. It seemed to go so slowly—as if they'd *never* get there. She found herself tearing the little lacey handkerchief she had taken from her bag.

There was the theater. She pressed the bell, and, getting off before the car had come fully to a stop, breathless, she entered the building. No group of girls, no Miss Carrol. She looked up wildly at the clock above the ticket seller's window. Four o'clock, it said! Almost time for the show to be over! Oh, how awful, how awful, where had the time gone? What had happened to her? Fighting back the tears at the futility of everything, she approached the ticket window.

"Are—the—Andrews girls in there?" she faltered.

That was a silly question and she knew it. Because, of course, they were in there, this was where they had been coming—and she had, too, for that matter if she could only have gotten here on time. But at the minute she could think of nothing else to say and she was conscious of a vague hope that the ticket-seller would help her, would suggest something. She would gladly buy her own ticket and get in if only she could get to their box afterward. But she didn't know which one it was, and she didn't know how to manage it, anyway.

"I don't know if they are," the ticket-seller was replying, casually. "How should I know?"

Peggy turned dejectedly away from the window. This was more than she could stand. Never in her life had she felt so little and so helpless and so—yes, so homesick. She couldn't go back to the school and have to face possible questions. She would stay downtown somewhere until it was time for the matinée to be over and then she would return about the same time the others did.

She drifted out into the waning sunlight of the street, and looked hopelessly about her. Next the theater was the public library. This looked like a refuge and she went in and walked despondently over to the librarian's desk.

"Please find me something to read—about—about girls having a party," she choked.

————

When she was back at school, in her own room, clad once more in the loved blue silk kimono, the ordeal of dinner and curious questions over, Katherine, her room-mate, looked up from her algebra book and said suddenly,

"Oh, Peggy, we missed you so."

"Did you?" cried Peggy wistfully. "Well, I've decided something. I don't care a bit about being a belle. I'd rather get to places on time, and feel like myself,—and be just Peggy Parsons, after all."

CHAPTER III—A BACON BAT

An eventful day for Peggy came after two weeks of school. In it began a curious series of happenings that added flavor to her whole school life, and gave her, finally, the power to be, as her room-mate laughingly said, "sort of magic."

And all this came about through so prosaic a thing as bacon. The domestic science class, well under way with an excellent teacher, decided to have a "bacon bat," after the custom of the Smith College girls, all by themselves on some bit of rock that jutted into the river.

Peggy had helped Katherine do the shopping for the treat,—Katherine had been at Andrews for two years now, and knew just how it was done. Then the seven girls of the class started off, each with a paper bag in her hand, for the

method of conveying the supplies to the picnic grounds was always very informal for a bacon bat. There were no little woven picnic baskets to hang picturesquely over their arms, there were no daintily packed little shoe-boxes of sandwiches. There was just the jar of bacon strips in a paper bag, the bottle of olives in another paper bag, and the two dozen rolls, a generous supply, in the biggest paper bag of all. These were the simple requisites for a bacon bat, and even the olives were not necessary, Katherine termed them useless frills. There was a tiny box of matches, too, that Peggy slipped into the pocket of her red jacket. It has happened that a merry group of girls has gone on a bacon bat with everything but the matches, and then unless they were Camp Fire girls and knew how to coax fire out of two dry sticks they met a terrible disappointment, when, their appetites all worked up for the occasion, they found they couldn't cook the party after all.

If you were on good terms with the grocer, he kept a box of matches—the old fashioned kind—under the counter and offered you a dozen or so, loose, when you bought your bacon. But Peggy had wanted to buy a little box, insisting that if she had to start the fire a dozen might not be enough.

"Where are we going to have it?" Peggy thought to ask as they strolled, laughing, along the road away from the school.

"On the River Bank near Gloomy House," cried three girls at once, "that's the ideal spot."

"Near—what?" asked Peggy in concern. It didn't sound very picnicky to her.

"Right there, ahead," said Katherine, pointing, "right through those grounds, and down to the water—because, of course, we can hardly have our fire except on some sort of little stone island—with water enough to put it out if it got rambunctious."

The girls were turning now over the long, dank grass, and making their way in the direction of a great empty-looking ramshackle old house with sagging porches and dull windows.

"Nobody lives there, do they?" Peggy asked.

"Oh,—sh—yes!"

The girls tiptoed over the grass, skirting the lawn in order to keep as far away from Gloomy House as possible. Peggy was not yet familiar with the traditions of the town in which Andrews was situated. It seemed strange to her that after the girls had chosen this place with such unanimous enthusiasm they should assume such an air of discomfort and mystery now that they had come. She studied the old house, dignified even in its decay, with its trailing, rasping vines blowing against the pillars of the porch, and its sunken, uneven steps, and then quite unaccountably she shivered and hurried past it as fast as the other girls.

"I don't want to come here for a picnic," she panted, "if it's all so queer. Why didn't we choose some nice sunny place with a little stream to drink out of, and one big tree for shade? It's so dark and overgrown, as we get through here, that it seems more like an exploring expedition than a regular picnic to me."

"Oh," cried Florence Thomas, the best cook in the domestic science class, "we can fry bacon down on those rocks in the river, and there is a grape-vine swing on the bank that goes sailing way out over the water with you. Why, there just isn't any other place so nice for a picnic—here you always feel as if you might have adventures."

"Adventures, at a picnic, usually mean cows or snakes," sighed Peggy, "I hope we don't have any."

The girls clambered down the steep slope to the water, and Florence and Dorothy Trowbridge began at once to gather twigs and branches.

"How are we going to cook this bacon?" asked Peggy suddenly, "when we get our fire? Nobody brought a frying pan."

"Frying pan!" echoed Florence over an armful of nice dry chips and twigs. "We get sticks."

Peggy saw that each girl was breaking a branch from a near-by tree, testing it to see that it was not "too floppy," as Katherine put it, and would be green enough not to catch fire easily. Peggy found a delightful little branch, and began stripping the end, as she saw the others do. The fire was by this time crackling and it was a temptation to begin right away, for the walk had made them hungry—or, perhaps, they hadn't needed the walk: healthy girls like healthy boys are always hungry. But Florence reminded them that their bacon would simply be burned to a crisp if they thrust it in the flames now, so they waited a few minutes, reluctantly enough, until the red and blue sparks sputtered down to a steady glow, hotter and hotter at the heart of the fire. Then the girls each pierced a piece of bacon with their pointed stick and held it gloatingly into the red glow. Peggy enthusiastically opened rolls, so that the crisp hot slices might go sizzling into place as soon as they were taken from the fire, and the roll might be clapped together upon them.

"Isn't this comfy?" asked Florence, munching her first fiery sandwich. "If the rain and wind had never come, I suppose you could find the ashes, on this flat rock, left by every class that ever went to Andrews. Ouch!—Mercy!—Peggy, what did you let me bite that for, when the end was still burning?"

Peggy laughingly dipped up a cupful of water from the river and passed it to poor Florence, who was trying to wink back the tears from her eyes.

"If you drink that now you'll smoke," she warned delightedly. "Girls, girls,—fire!"

"I—don't—care—" gulped Florence, waving the rest of her roll and bacon

through the air to cool it. "Hot as that was, I guess old Mr. Huntington of Gloomy House, up there, would be glad to have it. If he can smell the smoke of this little feast—with that lovely amber coffee Dorothy is making—I guess he wishes he was a girl and could come down and get some. Just think," she turned to Peggy, "in twenty years he's never had any hot coffee—or more than enough to keep a bird alive."

Peggy sat down on a stone and poised an olive half-way to her mouth.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"He's very poor, you know," said Florence.

"Too poor to buy coffee?—I should think somebody in the town—"

"Oh, my dear," interrupted one of the other girls, "scared to death! Nobody'd think of offering to do anything for him. He's the proudest man in the world. He used to own most of this town, but everything has drifted away from him. He never goes anywhere—nobody ever sees him. He wouldn't want to see anyone. He telephones to the grocery for just a few things once in a while, and that's how he gets along. Why, Peggy, you look so funny."

"While we're sitting here, having a party, do you mean to tell me the man that lives in Gloomy House is starving?" asked Peggy in a hushed voice.

"Well, sort of hungry, but don't you worry about it, we can't do anything about it, Peggy." Florence handed Peggy a fresh roll with a crisp slice of bacon temptingly projecting from the ends. "He couldn't have been starving for twenty years, you know—but it would be nearer that than I'd like to experience for myself."

Peggy's head drooped thoughtfully. The sunlight, glinting down here and there through the dense green of the trees, shone in a little patch of light on her brown-gold hair. She was a vivid little person, with laughing black eyes and cheeks that flared red through their tan. Her brown arms were clasped over her knees now, as she studied the moist, pebbly sand at her feet.

"*I'd* have made him some coffee," she said at last, her crooked dimple flickering into view for just an instant.

"No, you wouldn't," denied Florence Thomas, "nobody has been in that house to do anything as daring as that for years. There's a mystery about it, I tell you—and, in spite of story books, nobody likes to probe too deeply into mysteries. Some people even say that a relative of Mr. Huntington's stole all his money from him and that's why he has to live so poorly. Yes, there are lots of stories—"

Peggy brushed the crumbs out of her lap serenely.

"How silly," she said, "as if anybody's stealing from the poor old man were reason enough why all the rest of the townspeople should stay away from him and leave him poor," she said. "What has that to do with my making him some

coffee? Even if he'd been the one who stole—still I don't see the application to this particular question," she concluded.

"Well, there are other tales," insisted the crestfallen Florence, and, their coffee cups in their hands, the girls gathered around to tell Peggy many harrowing incidents connected with the great house back from the river, and she heard them quietly, piercing slices of bacon with her stick the while.

"Let's go up and cook him a dinner," she cried, springing to her feet when they had done. "We are a cooking class, aren't we, and that's the best thing we do, isn't it? And here we go on just preparing all the good things back at school for us to eat ourselves—it seems, well, piggish. Wouldn't it be lovely to demonstrate our next lesson by bringing all the materials up to Gloomy House and cooking up a big, wonderful dinner, and having it with Mr. Huntington? We can't give him a million dollars or anything like that, but we can make one day a lot brighter—and, besides, I can't stand it to think of anyone hungry—*will* you, girls? What do you say?"

She stood before them, lifting her slim hand for the vote, her eyes shining with eagerness to put her plan at once into execution.

The other girls gasped. Peggy, although she had been with them so short a time, had won a large place in their admiration.

"He wouldn't let us," reminded Florence, puckering her forehead thoughtfully. "Didn't I tell you he'd bite anybody, fairly, that dreamed of trying to offer him charity? Peggy, I believe you're partly right, though, maybe we could do something, but it would never work that way."

"Well," said Peggy promptly, sitting down to think it out, "how can it be done?"

For to Peggy life presented no unsolvable problems. She never thought of cluttering her joyous way with impossibilities. Once a plan seemed good to her it was only a question of How, and not of Whether.

"We might invite a lot of people to the school," timidly suggested one of the young cooks.

"He'd never come," Florence shook her head.

"Well, then," cried Peggy, "here we are! Let's give a series of dinners—at the houses of the trustees, and the different girls in the class, just to show what we can do, and we'll have the accounts put in the town paper, so he'll see what we're doing, and *then*—" her eyes shone and she could hardly talk fast enough to let the girls see the glory of her new idea, "then we'll go to his house and ask permission to give *him* one, and it won't be charity or anything, and it will be fun for everybody—oh, girls, isn't that gorgeous?"

"OOoo—oo," shivered Florence at the thought of really committing herself to such a daring decision. "Ye-es, I think we might do that. But we'd never have

the courage to go and invite him."

"Peggy would," championed the timid one. "Let's appoint her a committee of one."

"Unanimously appointed a committee of one," shouted the other girls gleefully. "Peggy, how soon will all this be?"

Peggy laughingly flung aside her toasting stick, sprang erect, and tried vainly to smooth back her flying gold-toned hair. "Right—NOW!" she declared triumphantly, "we won't wait to give it to the trustees first."

"Good-by, Peggy," murmured Florence demurely, and the others drew closer together as Peggy actually turned her back on them and went up the slope to Gloomy House.

Surprised at her daring, overwhelmed by the boldness of the thing she had undertaken, they watched Peggy disappear over the top of the river bank.

CHAPTER IV—THE INSIDE OF GLOOMY HOUSE

Up the long walk to Gloomy House, her feet sinking in the wet leaves that had fallen from the branches overhead, Peggy went slowly, her heart pounding.

She was doing what no one else in town would have dared to do, and as she neared the old house, with its tumbled-down step, she began to wonder if perhaps she was afraid.

"Walk on, walk on," she whispered to herself, for she knew that if she hesitated for an instant she would run. And how could she go back and face the cooking class if, after all her planning, she was a coward now?

So mechanically she walked on, and at last she found herself really ascending the creaking steps. When she stood on the porch with its leafless and ragged vines flapping in the wind a kind of chill unreality seemed to shut her in. She hurried to ring the bell so that someone—anyone—would come and she would not be alone. The bell was an old fashioned one, and as she rang she heard it jangling emptily through the house. It was certainly a very dismal way for callers to have to announce themselves.

When the unpleasant sound had ceased the house and everything about it

settled back to silence again. This lasted and lasted. Peggy clutched nervously at her little red jacket. What if nobody would come at all? There was no one TO come, except Mr. Huntington himself—and now he evidently wasn't going to. She might have known. She was overwhelmed with a sense of failure. Those lovely hot muffins she had dreamed of preparing for him, that wonderful steak, smothered in onions, that delicious— Down the uncarpeted stairs inside she could hear the reluctant thud, thud of footsteps!

Oh, he *was* coming.

Gratingly, the door swung open and a man's head looked cautiously out.

Peggy reflected that Mr. Huntington looked a great deal more scared than she was, and the thought helped a little.

"How do you do?" she asked faintly.

Mr. Huntington looked down at the vivid little figure in the red coat, and his eyes widened.

"A—how do you do?" he said mildly.

Well, he wasn't going to eat her, anyway, so she needn't be so frightened, Peggy decided with a breath of relief.

"Oh, Mr. Huntington," she said with a surprising increase of confidence, "I came—I came—I—came—" but the confidence had evaporated before she could find words to explain.

"I see you did," replied the old man, still mildly—and could she believe that twinkle in his eyes was a smile? Perhaps he didn't often have much to smile about, so that this was the best he could do.

"Won't you come in?" he invited, as an afterthought.

And Peggy followed him into Gloomy House.

The hall was stately, with its wide folding doors opening into the library on one side and a dining-room on the other. In it were an old tall clock and a black walnut hat-rack.

"It's a little chilly in here for you, I'm afraid," said her host politely.

The day had been cool even out in the sunshine and they had been glad when their crackling fire was made on the river bank. But in this damp, big room there was a biting quality out of all proportion to the temperature outside.

"It's not—at—all—cold," stammered Peggy, through chattering teeth, trying to make her tone of everyday courtesy like that Mr. Huntington had used.

"I just wanted to invite you to something," she plunged bravely into her mission. "It's a special treat to be given by our cooking class of Andrews school."

"To invite—?" Mr. Huntington looked vaguely puzzled and alarmed. "My dear young lady," he protested, "I haven't been invited to anything in twenty years." Then an understanding look came over his face. "Oh, I see," he murmured. "How much are the tickets?"

"Oh," cried Peggy, hurt and chagrined, "oh, there are no tickets—oh, *no*, that's not the way it is at all. You see the cooking class is—awfully proud of itself and we can stand burned hands and horrid blackened dishes that we couldn't at first. And we can get awfully good dinners, too. So we thought that instead of just getting them up at school and eating them ourselves, we'd give a series of parties around at the homes of the girls and the trustees of the school and I—I thought we'd come and give one at your house, too," she wound up breathlessly.

The old man looked as surprised as she could have hoped.

"But there is no young girl here who goes to the school," he said finally, "and I am not a trustee."

And all of a sudden the explanation that Peggy had thought so complete showed itself up at its true value, nothing at all.

"N—no," she admitted, crestfallen, "that's so."

The misery in her face made Mr. Huntington want to do something for her.

"If the girls of the school simply want a place to give a party—is that it?—somewhere away from the school itself, where they can be more free,—I should be distinctly terrified at the presence of so many young ladies after so long a time of solitude, but still I think I might go through with it—why not let me give them a party, if they will be so kind as to cook the things I furnish?"

Peggy's round eyes studied Mr. Huntington's face thoughtfully. How people hated to admit they were poor! Here he was offering to buy enough food for a dozen hungry girls when he himself had barely enough to eke out a scanty meal from one week's end to another, according to the girls' stories.

"Oh,—please," she hastened to put in. "That's part of our course, knowing what to buy and all that, and we do so want to have a few real chances to use all the knowledge that is being pounded into us. If I can go back and tell those girls—" her breath caught in her throat for an instant at the prospect of such a triumphant moment, "if I can go back and tell those girls," she repeated, "that we can give a party in Gloo—I mean here, why that will be the best time I've had this term!"

The old man was looking at her quizzically.

"For some reason you apparently want to very much," he mused. "Well, you are the first person who has come to me in a number of years with the idea of giving something rather than taking. If only for that reason I should encourage you to have your way. For the last twenty years people have been coming to me now and then—whenever a certain rumor starts up afresh—wanting this, that and the other: subscriptions to charities, money to put their children through school: capital to start them in business. But I always tell them," he chuckled softly, "I always let them know that I am very poor."

Oh, then, he didn't mind having folks know, after all. Peggy winced at the

open way he spoke of it now, after all her efforts to conceal the fact that she knew his poverty.

"Oh," she said uncomfortably, "you're not *very* poor. I'm poor, too. My aunt sends me to school, but when I am graduated I'm going to earn my own living!" She shot it out at him, all breathless to see the effect of so astounding a piece of news. Something at once so tragic and so thrilling.

"You are?" queried the old man absently. "Well, I sometimes think those are the happiest days of a person's life—the days of piling up their fortune—"

"Of—of—my goodness!" gasped Peggy. "*I'm* not dreaming of piling up a fortune. What could I do that would be worth very much? I'm going to—I'm going—to—"

"Yes?" asked the old man.

"I might teach something—they say I'm good in English, or I might—why I might *cook*. Wait until you've tried this dinner I want to get up for you and then maybe you can recommend me for a position as cook sometime—oh, now you see you *must* let us have the dinner."

"I see it now, of course," smiled Mr. Huntington. And then a look of real eagerness came over his lonely face. "What day had you—thought of for the festivities?" he asked.

"Oh," began Peggy thoughtfully, "there are lots of good days for it—any Sunday or—"

Mr. Huntington murmured something, she wasn't quite sure what. She paused inquiringly. She mustn't let him know she suggested Sunday, because of its being a proverbially lonely day for people without family or friends, and if he had a different choice—

"Thanksgiving," he was saying slowly to himself, so low that Peggy could hardly hear him. "Thanksgiving always is a—hard day to get through."

"Hard! Why, it's gorgeous! Oh, if we only can get our ice-box principal to let us, I'm sure the girls would *love* to give the dinner on Thanksgiving. It will give us an opportunity to learn how to fix turkey and cranberry and all those things. We will settle that, then, because I'll tease my head off when I'm talking to Mrs. Forest—I'll even kiss her if I have to, and in the end she'll say 'Bless you, my children, go and give your party.'"

"And I shall say bless you, too, I shouldn't wonder," murmured the old man, with a hint of a smile in his eyes. "It's been eighteen years since Thanksgiving meant anything in this house. My daughter was here then, with her husband and baby son. But—"

Peggy looked around the dark, gloom-filled interior of the Huntington house and wondered where they were now, the rest of this family, that had cherished Thanksgiving day. But she did not want to ask and hurt Mr. Huntington's

feelings.

"Well," she assured him eagerly, "we'll just have a perfectly wonderful party. And I'll bring my new chafing-dish and Katherine's percolator and we'll make the fudge and the coffee ourselves."

"Fudge is a necessary part of the affair?" the old man smiled questioningly.

"Of course," assented Peggy in surprise. "That was about the first thing I learned to do at Andrews,—make the most wonderful nut fudge and plain fudge and sea-foam."

"And yet some people still cling to the idea that too much education for girls is dangerous," murmured Mr. Huntington. "Now *I* shall be heartily in favor of it from this time forth."

"I guess I'll go back and tell the girls everything," Peggy sighed contentedly, "they'll want to begin planning the grinds right away. You won't mind being ground, too, will you?"

"Aren't you mistaking me for the coffee, young woman?" laughed her new friend. "That would be rather a mean trick to play on an old man, seems to me."

Peggy's face was scarlet. She did not know whether he was entirely in fun or not. The language of the school world was equipped with a strange vocabulary to outside ears, and she felt very guilty for letting Mr. Huntington fall into such a humiliating mistake.

"Grinds are just—gists," she explained hastily, and went out of the door as Mr. Huntington held it open for her, with a sense of having made everything clear.

CHAPTER V—MANAGING MRS. FOREST

As Peggy started running back to the place she had left the girls, she became aware that someone in a blue Peter Thompson had come up the hill to wait for her, and was at the moment gazing intently toward Gloomy House, while the wind flapped her skirts and fluttered her hair free of its ribbon.

"Katherine, Katherine," shouted Peggy, and the figure started to life at once and came tearing toward Peggy until they were like a couple of young express

trains about to collide at full speed.

"I'll save you, I'll save you," Katherine was crying breathlessly. "I'll be there in a minute,—I'll save you, dear."

And then the collision happened.

"Oh, oh, oh," gasped Peggy as she and Katherine rolled over each other, a whirling mélange of blue dress and red coat, down the steep slope of the river bank right into the midst of the waiting group of bacon batters.

Around them as they sat up, still seeing stars, and aching from the bumps newly raised on their foreheads to their scratched knees and ankles, arose a hubbub of questionings, consolations and reproaches.

"Oh, my—land!" moaned Peggy, winking the dust and bits of dried leaves out of her eyes. "I hope you don't feel as badly as I do, Katherine. What made you say—" she spoke now in a puzzled tone, for full consciousness was coming back, "whatever made you say that you would—*save* me? Instead you nearly killed me, you know."

"Why, I—ouch! my poor arm—I was going to save you from the ghosts and things at Gloomy House, of course," answered Katherine indignantly. "You were gone so long and we were all so worried, that I climbed the top of the hill to see if I couldn't make out what had become of you—and then there you were flying away from that awful place like mad, scared to pieces at something. Naturally, I hollered that I'd save you. What kind of a room-mate would I have been if I hadn't?"

The tears suddenly started to Peggy's eyes. She felt just at the moment, in spite of her bruises, all the beautiful thrill that is inspired by the discovery of absolute loyalty and affection in a room-mate. The autumn sunlight glinting down on Katherine's yellow hair suddenly seemed to Peggy like a halo, and impulsively she reached toward her.

"It was fine of you, Katherine," she said, "but I didn't need saving—I was running because I was in a hurry to tell you people that the dinner is on. And Mr. Huntington doesn't mind the grounds—I mean the grinds, but I'm so wounded I can't talk straight,—and we're to have it on Thanksgiving if Friend Forest will let us. Girls, he's perfectly wonderful—"

"*Oh*, dear," sighed Katherine, "and all that worry on my part for nothing."

"And all your injuries for nothing, too," sniggered Florence Thomas heartlessly. "You infants with your terribly impromptu manner of returning to our midst will be the death of me yet. Peggy, please draw a long, calm breath and then let us in on what really happened in Gloomy House."

To an eager audience, then, Peggy told the whole outcome of her adventure, interrupting herself now and then to suggest, with some irrelevance certain dishes that would be particularly desirable as part of the dinner.

"Do you suppose Mrs. Forest will ever let us do such a novel sort of thing?" asked Katherine as the girls, after stamping out the remains of their little fire on the river rocks, gathered up their coats and sweaters to go back to the school.

"Not—for—a—minute." Florence Thomas dashed their hopes with tones as firm as Mrs. Forest's own might have been in speaking of the matter.

Peggy was rubbing her black and blue forehead thoughtfully.

"Peggy!" cried Katherine, "Florence doesn't think Mrs. Forest will have it."

Peggy smiled, a long, slow smile, and her black eyes narrowed to mere laughing slits. "She'll be crazy about it," she insisted.

It wasn't until dinner time that the girls, in their dainty evening frocks, already seated at the various little tables, with the candles gleaming onto their flushed cheeks and powdered necks and arms through the pink candle shades, learned what Peggy intended to do to Mrs. Forest to make her prophecy come true. Some of the girls had declared she meant to try hypnotism, others poison, and some said she was planning to have the President of the United States wire that Mrs. Forest should yield to her will.

Peggy, herself, came in to dinner late. This in itself was an awful offense. Every head, blonde, dark and red-gold had long since been raised from the grace, and were bowed again, more enthusiastically, over the soup. Oh, the tiny little chiffon "swish" that rustled out from Peggy's lovely blue frock, and the gentle, ladylike tap, tap of her pretty little blue slippers as she moved across the glazed floor of the dining-room and bent for an instant at Mrs. Forest's place to whisper, "Pardon me," rather as if she were conferring a favor by her notice than apologizing for a heinous sin. Then she slipped into her chair, which happened to be at Mrs. Forest's very table, and sat, sweet and erect, with the soft candle light over her gold-glinting hair, in her radiant black eyes, and deepening the wonderful, sweeping color of her face. Her slender neck was delicate and proud as a princess'. The other girls' fingers rested motionlessly on their soup spoons for an instant, during which they looked at their Peggy, spellbound. There was an air of graciousness, of regal beauty about her. There was no trace of the poor little Peggy who had once tried so hard to be a belle and had failed so miserably. This Peggy was lovely in some wonderful, heart-stopping fashion that made them all marvel.

Mrs. Forest's eyes traveled over that graceful figure and the sternness gave way to something else. The little Miss Parsons was developing into the very type of girl to make Andrews most proud, she reflected.

Each year when June came she took the girls who had perfect records for behavior to Annapolis for one of the hops. When Peggy had come in late she was deciding Peggy should never hear the marine band under her auspices or dance with any lads in uniform. But as she considered what other girl in the

school would do her so much honor as this wonderful, angelic appearing little creature, or whose program would be more eagerly filled by the good-looking young midshipmen who always crowded with enthusiasm around the Andrews girls?

"Mrs. Forest," began Peggy in a worldly, conversational tone, after a few minutes, "isn't the old Huntington place beautiful? And did you ever notice that large portrait in the hall—the Sargent?"

Mrs. Forest gasped. "In the hall?" she asked sharply, "*IN* the hall?"

Peggy nodded.

"Mr. Huntington belongs to one of our old aristocratic families, here, Miss Parsons," the principal began pompously. "He is a very proud and very retiring sort of person. Since he lost the vast fortune of the Huntingtons he has never cared for society and no one is welcome in his house. Although I am acquainted with the members of all the first families here, I have not had occasion to meet Mr. Huntington—though we all know him by sight. And I should prefer that my young ladies did not demean themselves and me by *peering in at the hall windows* and ferreting out the Sargents on the wall."

"O-oh," breathed Peggy, with the tiniest little society sigh. "Mr. Huntington is a very good friend of mine and as I stopped in to talk a moment with him today—"

One of the girls choked and ignominiously thrust her napkin almost into her month to keep back the strange chortlings and chucklings that were trying to break forth.

Mrs. Forest's eyes grew round, but her face had that set expression maintained by a person who wants to show no surprise whatever, even in the face of one of the greatest shocks of her life.

"He is a friend of yours?—I didn't know," she murmured, all honey.

"Yes, and he so approves of my being in this school," continued Peggy, with a graceful little rushing eagerness. "He says he thinks we learn just the right things. I told him about the cand—I mean I told him the things we learn and he said he approved of higher education for girls. He would like to meet you, Mrs. Forest."

"So?" said Mrs. Forest in rather pleased surprise. "Well, I never thought he cared about meeting anybody—did he say anything like that, really?"

"Say?—why, he wants us to go there for Thanksgiving dinner!" cried Peggy rapturously. "You and me and the whole school!"

The utter strangeness of any such desire on Mr. Huntington's part,—its incredible suddenness—was already beginning to fade out in Mrs. Forest's practical mind before the economic advantages such an invitation offered. Times were hard that year, and while she liked the girls to be wonderfully well satisfied with

the holiday dinners at the school, nevertheless turkey, cranberries, pies, almonds ran expenses up greatly. In one stupendous jumble the necessary preparations had been oppressing her mind now for several days, and all the scratch pads on her desk were covered with scrawling figures indicating the amount of money it would take to put so elaborate a dinner through.

If anybody in the town was so markedly peculiar as to invite a whole school to Thanksgiving dinner, she felt an immediate inclination to take advantage of it.

Around the table as Peggy had finished speaking, and while Mrs. Forest toyed with her salad, went a barely audible chorus of groans from the girls. How could Peggy do such a short-sighted thing as to include their principal in the plan? She knew as well as anyone that her presence would spoil everything. In their hearts they had known that some one of the teachers would have to go along with them even if the impossible came true and they were allowed to give the party. But they had hoped it would be Miss Carrol, and that Mrs. Forest would be safely shaken off with her blightingly rigid ideas of discipline for at least that one day. Now Peggy had hopelessly gotten them into having her if they went at all. Peggy pretended not to notice their unhappy glances in her direction.

"That's very kind of your friend," Mrs. Forest was saying in a sugary voice. "I'm sure the school ought to feel honored at an invitation to Huntington House—"

"*Gloomy* house," whispered Florence Thomas, who was sitting on the other side of Peggy.

Mrs. Forest frowned slightly. "To Huntington House," she repeated mouthingly. "It used to be the center of all the social activities in the town a long time ago. But after the fortune went—and the daughter and her family went away—"

"Yes, wasn't that too bad," murmured Peggy. "His grandson is older than I am, now."

"You know him, too?" asked Mrs. Forest quickly.

"No," admitted Peggy. "I haven't met him—yet."

"You think Mr. Huntington was perfectly—serious in his invitation? It was a definite one?" Mrs. Forest asked thoughtfully.

"Yes, very," Peggy assured her. "And we girls are going to cook the dinner,—to show what clever people you are training up in this school, you know."

For Peggy had decided within herself that Mrs. Forest need not know that the girls were going to purchase the supplies for the dinner, also. If Mr. Huntington made a good impression on the principal just as things were, then let well enough alone, was her idea.

A curious, weighing look had crept into Mrs. Forest's eyes. Peggy thought she was trying to decide whether or not to permit the girls to accept, and to go

herself. But the principal's next remark showed that she had already come way beyond that phase of the question and was actively considering even the remote advantages that might accrue as a result of their joint appearance at Huntington House on Thanksgiving day.

"Perhaps," she said softly, "perhaps—Mr. Huntington's affairs are turning out a bit better nowadays and he might be willing to donate fifty dollars to the new gymnasium we need so badly."

Peggy put her hand over her mouth to stop the sudden exclamation of dismay that she must otherwise have uttered. The school did need a decent gymnasium, everybody knew that. And Mrs. Forest besought every rich girl who came to the school to interest her parents to the extent of getting them to give contributions. For five thousand dollars they could build a very nice one, large enough for their comparatively small school, and well enough equipped to start. Once in a while a girl in the spirit of generous affection for Andrews gave ten dollars or so out of her allowance, but the fund was not coming along very fast.

The idea of going to a party at Mr. Huntington's house and then dunning that poor old man for a portion of the expense of building something in which he could really have not the least particle of interest was particularly repugnant to Peggy.

"Graft, Mrs. Forest," she said daringly, shaking her finger and laughing a little. "Regular graft, and no fair."

As Mrs. Forest flushed and tried to smile Peggy recalled the curious remark Mr. Huntington had made about people coming to him for money every time "certain rumors" came up afresh. She pondered over this.

"I will write a little note of acceptance," Mrs. Forest mused.

And, after dinner, to the anguish of all the girls, she did.

"That was the only way she'd let us go," Peggy told them all in self-defense, and then in the delight of definite plans their joy in the prospect returned.

CHAPTER VI—THE BEAN AUCTION

You wouldn't have recognized Gloomy House if you had seen it before the An-

drews girls' ministrations and then walked into it in company with those gay young people on Thanksgiving noon. All spick and span and as gloomless as a house should be on that wonderful day, it was made cheery by leaping flames in the big fireplaces, and by gorgeous, flaunting chrysanthemums in tall vases. Mr. Huntington was all dressed up for the occasion and came forward to greet the guests, now in their best clothes, just as if he had not said good-by to most of them an hour earlier when they ran out the back door toward their school, clad in checked aprons and equipped with scrubbing brushes and brooms and mops.

Mrs. Forest, of course, had not been one of the broom brigade, nor of the more aristocratically occupationed cooking contingent, either. She swept magnificently into the room and gave Mr. Huntington a high handshake that was meant to impress him very much, but didn't.

"I think the dinner is nearly ready," called a gay little voice from the kitchen, and Peggy's head was thrust through the doorway, all bright with its crooked dimples much in evidence. Her fair hair was curling moistly around her forehead and her face was all pink and hot from being so near the stove for so long a time.

"It's been a terrible ordeal if you want to know it," complained Florence Thomas, her assistant, laughing as they brought the dinner to the table. "I feel all sizzled up and roasted, and both my hands are cut and burned beyond recognition. But if *anyone ever* saw such a wonderful dinner before, I envy them the experience, that's all."

The long-unused table at Huntington House was one of the most gorgeous sights that the hungry eyes of school-girls ever beheld. Mr. Huntington himself looked as if he could hardly believe he was awake when he saw its lavish magnificence.

The girls in their enthusiasm had given the dinner many touches that more experienced housewives would never have happened to think of. The color scheme was golden orange and brown. The center-piece was a triumphant pumpkin hollowed out and scalloped and laden with oranges, grapes, and very red apples. The turkey smoked in the middle of the table with the vegetable dishes clustered around it. And in most beautiful script, worked out in nuts and stem raisins arranged on the tablecloth, was the word "Thanksgiving."

At each place was the "grind" with the person's name on it, and such shrieks of laughter as filled the room while the girls, the principal and the old man trouped around the table reading the funny legends, examining the ridiculous souvenirs appended, all in a hurried and eager endeavor to find their own places! Not nearly all of the girls could sit at the table—there were sixty in the school,—but the grinds were arranged near together and then each girl took her plate with a plentiful helping of everything and sat down in one of the chairs by the fireplace or against the wall of the great dining-room.

Mr. Huntington was not "ground" so very badly, after all. He found at his place a quaint little box painted to represent a house, with tiny doors and windows marked on it. It bore the legend "Gloomy House," and falling from the door were weird little pasteboard roly-poly objects labeled "Glooms." These were flat but stood erect by virtue of wee standards at the back pasted to the paper yard of the house. They were in all attitudes of scurrying away with ridiculous faces expressing grief. A slip of paper invited: "Lift the roof of Gloomy House and see why the Glooms flee."

Mr. Huntington laughed with the rest, but his hand slightly trembled as he slowly lifted the roof of the little pasteboard house. Inside were sixty fudge hearts and a further assurance, "Sixty hearts of sixty girls."

Could it be possible that there were tears in his eyes to make them glisten suddenly like that? Peggy looked down at her grind to hide the sudden swift seriousness that passed over her own face, when her eyes met something so incredible that she burst into shrieks of laughter. She had prepared most of the grinds with the others, but of course hers had been kept a secret and she had not seen it until this minute. Hers and Katherine's were in one, being nothing more nor less than two smashed dolls somewhat jumbled up in appearance, one wearing a blue Peter Thompson and the other a red coat. There were black and blue bumps painted on their dented foreheads. Around the waist of the red-coated doll went a ribbon on which was lettered frantically,

"S.O.S., S.O.S."

And around the blue-dressed one a ribbon declared,

"I'll save you! I'll save you."

The verse that accompanied it went as follows:

"Humpty and Dumpty met on a hill.
Humpty and Dumpty had a great spill.
All the king's horses and all the king's men
Couldn't put Humpty or Dumpty together again."

When full duty had been done to the main dinner the beautiful pumpkin and mince pies that were Katherine Foster's own effort were brought in with wild cheers to greet them, that not even the pokes and taps and frowns of Mrs. Forest could do anything to check.

"Miss Parsons—" began Mr. Huntington, rising in his place.

"Peggy," she corrected from the other end of the room.

"Peggy," he began again, "asked me to let her go through with this experiment in order that some day I might conscientiously recommend her for a cook. And I want to say—" he raised his voice, "that after the spread I've had to-day I'm willing and anxious to recommend any one of you sixty girls, domestic science class or otherwise, to anything in the United States that you may want."

The girls interrupted with joyous laughter.

"And if there *is* anything any of you can think of now that she'd especially like to have, I'll do my best to get it for her," he continued.

The girls, of course, took it all as merely a polite speech and liked it very much, but Mrs. Forest felt that here was an Opportunity, spelled with a capital. She carefully brushed the crumbs from her lap and rose, while to their horror the girls heard her say, "If your kind offer includes all of us, Mr. Huntington, there is one thing we all want very much and perhaps you would be willing to help us a little toward—"

Peggy coughed at this minute so violently that she completely distracted the attention of everyone from Mrs. Forest, and it was some three minutes before the spasm was entirely over and other sounds could be heard again. Peggy was exhausted from the wracking efforts of that cough and she sat limply back hoping for the best. But Mrs. Forest was suavely beginning again.

"To go back to what I started to ask, Mr. Huntington, there is one thing that Andrews has wanted for a long time and a little contribution—"

Here, oddly enough, Katherine was seized with a fit of coughing that rivaled Peggy's in violence and duration.

"Somebody else will have to think up something better next time," she whispered out of the corner of her mouth a few minutes later as her gaspings ceased. "It isn't *natural* to have any more of us affected that way."

"Poor girls," murmured Mrs. Forest, "they must have gotten overheated getting the dinner and this room is cooler. Well, as I was about to say—"

At this point Florence Thomas quietly fainted dead away and toppled into a little chiffon heap on the hearth rug.

A slight titter of delight rippled through the room, incongruously enough, and Mrs. Forest glared at the offenders.

"Why, how heartless of you," she said, bending with difficulty and lifting her pupil's limp head and patting her perfectly normally rosy face. "Have you some whisky, Mr. Huntington? In an emergency of this kind I think it is perhaps permissible to give it—"

But before Mr. Huntington returned, Florence was beginning to sigh her way back to consciousness and her eyes fluttered open and she shook her head when the spoon with the whisky was offered.

"Why—why—where am I—did I—faint or something?" she murmured innocently, and dangerous as they knew their mirth to be, this was too much for the girls and they shouted out their appreciation in laughter that was beyond their efforts to control.

Of course Mrs. Forest must have understood, but someway they didn't care. She would have to be "sport enough to stand for it," in their own way of putting it. And she seemed to be, for she did not pursue the subject of the contribution further in their hearing, and how could they know that she tagged Mr. Huntington into the library while they were all clearing off the dishes and put the whole proposition to him there in what Peggy would have called her graftiest way?

When the girls themselves came into the library for the great game of bean auction which was always one of the merriest features of an Andrews spread, Mrs. Forest was looking quite unconscious of any rude intentions and Mr. Huntington's expression was one of whole-hearted joy and happiness, so they could not even guess what had transpired.

On the library table was piled a fascinating collection of little packages, wrapped in varicolored paper, some daintily tied with ribbon, others knotted about by the coarsest twine. These were of all shapes and some looked soft and others hard. "Nothing over ten beans," was the inscription placarded above them.

Each girl had brought one package which was to be auctioned off for beans distributed in equal numbers among the bidders.

"Only ten beans for each person," warned Peggy as she doled the smooth little white objects into outstretched hands, "so don't bid recklessly."

By careful hoarding it was sometimes possible to buy in several articles for one's ten beans—in which case, of course, some bidder who waited too long went without anything.

Just as Katherine Foster took her place as auctioneer, Mr. Huntington went out of the room and came back in a few minutes with a curious, awkward looking bundle, very small and done up in brown wrapping paper, which he laid among the other flaunting offerings. Few of the girls noticed his action in the confusion of finding good floor space to sit on, but Peggy saw his hand drop the queer little package and she determined then and there to bid on it, so that he would think the girls wanted his article as well as those they had brought for each other.

Rows and rows of eager figures seated on the floor in spite of crisp taffeta and pretty satin gowns, raised flushed faces toward the auctioneer as she lifted the first package with maddening deliberation and read its advertisement,

"Whatever young girl looks at me
Something bright and fair will see."

The wrapping was the gayest of red tissue paper and the spangled ribbon that went around it made it seem the most desirable affair the girls had ever looked at.

"Two beans—" shouted Florence Thomas joyously.

"Ladies and—and gentleman in the singular—" cried the auctioneer, "I am insulted by the offer of two beans—*two—insignificant—white—beans*—for this gorgeous and inspiring package, with goodness knows what all inside. Now come, friends, hasn't some young lady the wish to—" she consulted the advertisement attached to the bundle again, "to see something bright and fair?"

"Five beans!" offered Daphne Damon from the back row of bidders.

"Going—going—" began the auctioneer, when Mrs. Forest, who had chosen a big armchair, from which to view the proceedings, rather than the floor, woke up to sudden interest in disposing of her beans, and ignoring the specification of the first part of the package's announcement, called out condescendingly, "Ten beans!"

Of course nobody could bid any higher than that and the prize was knocked down to "that lady over there, with the black silk dress and the diamond earrings."

Amid a breathless silence Mrs. Forest unwrapped her purchase and disclosed an attractive little vanity mirror,—but, oh, for the faith that you can put in advertisements,—when she held it before her face and looked at it she didn't see anything bright and fair at all!

The auctioneer's voice was already announcing the next article. This was an alluring thing in green tissue.

"Somebody's heart and soul was in this," Katherine read out impressively from its advertisement.

Florence Thomas bid it in for seven beans and opened it to find the sole of a worn out slipper and a heart-shaped candy box.

The pile steadily dwindled but Katherine did not pick up Mr. Huntington's package until near the end. It certainly did not look inviting. Peggy's heart gave a bound as it was lifted high in the air and the auctioneer began to praise it. She felt so sorry for Mr. Huntington that he did not know how to make his offering as attractive as theirs. She was sure nobody would bid their last few beans on that when there were still several delectable looking bundles on the table. And, to make it worse, the inscription that was supposed to extol its virtues merely said, "This isn't worth as much as people think." Why, mercy, no one in his right senses could think it worth *anything* done up so roughly as that! In a swift generous impulse Peggy bid "Ten beans!" in a loud voice, and with a glance of surprise and pity, Auctioneer Katherine handed her the prize in silence.

Peggy rather hesitated to open the poor little thing there before them all, but, glancing up, she saw Mr. Huntington's eyes upon her with a curiously bright

gaze. Something about the anticipation in his look reassured her and she tore off the wrapping hastily at last. There was a red cigarette box inside and she blushed furiously.

"I guess this was meant for the one man of our party," Florence said, peering over her shoulder and tapping it humorously.

But Peggy was beginning to be certain that the box had only been used because it was the right size and that there was something—possibly even something interesting—inside. Gingerly she lifted the cover and drew out two slips of paper folded, then unwrinkling them on her knee she looked down and gasped, while a wave of brighter crimson swept over her face.

The first was a check for five thousand dollars! It was made out to Andrews, with a ticket attached saying, "For the new gymnasium." The other was a check for one hundred dollars made out to bearer, with a note to explain, "for use in giving other people kind little parties as you all have to-day given me!"

What did it mean? Peggy stared across at her friend, and found him smiling delightedly that she had been the one to bid it in. *Poor* Mr. Huntington! Never again could they call him that—why, why—Mr. Huntington was *rich*, fabulously and wonderfully and *generously* rich, and they had never known. Through her mind flitted the memory of his remark about the recurring rumors that caused people to come to him in search of donations to various things. Again she thought of that odd phrase of his, "When one is piling up one's fortune—"

"Oh," she gasped, the deliciousness of their "charity" party sweeping over her. "Oh, how strange everything is all of a sudden! I think, perhaps, I'm asleep or something, this is just the crazy, impossible way things go in dreams. Florence, please pinch me."

But when Florence did, she yelled "Ouch" in a voice that was wide awake enough, so she knew those uncanny checks in her hands were real.

"The gymnasium is to be named Parson's Hall," smiled Mr. Huntington, "that's the condition, and it's really to be Peggy's gift to the school. The school would never have had it—that is from me—on any other score. The small check is Peggy's own—and I waited until I saw your eyes watching me, child, before I laid the package on the table, for I hoped you'd be the one to bid for it out of the kindness of your heart."

Mrs. Forest had turned pale at the mention "gymnasium" and now she jumped from her chair and made her way to Peggy's side with an almost youthful alacrity.

"How—wonderful, how delightful, how kind, how thoughtful, how perfectly splendid," she cried, reading the check with dazzled eyes. "Mr. Huntington, I thank—"

"Thank Peggy," he said, somewhat shortly and walked over to the fireplace.

Peggy's heart was full of happiness. To be able to give something to Andrews that would last always and would bear her name!

How beautiful that was! This school that had already meant so much to her in friendships and worth while knowledge not all out of books,—how very glad she would be to come back to it some day and see the neat little gymnasium, with her name on the building, full of romping girls that loved each other as she and Katherine did, and had the same glorious, care-free outlook on life that she had now!

"I wish I could say—half of what I'm thinking," she murmured, looking gratefully up at Mr. Huntington with moist eyes.

He merely smiled. "Or I wish that *I* myself could, after a day like to-day," he answered after a time.

A kind of quiet settled down on the girls and they talked in low pitched voices, laughing only in a comfortable undertone while the sense of homelikeness and good feeling grew and grew and struck deeply into each heart, bringing those inner visions that belong to Thanksgiving day, but need just the right atmosphere to make them perfect.

Sixty separate groups of dear home people were being vividly pictured in that one great room, sixty different houses were suddenly mentally erected within that house. Ever and ever so many beloved voices were imagined right in among the murmuring *real* voices of the friends about them.

And, contradictory as it may seem, keeping pace with their happy contentment in the moment went a big, aching, sweeping longing in each girl's mind for just one minute in mother's arms, one instant of her dear, real, understanding presence. And from under sixty pairs of lashes bright tear drops were fought back, while each girl, wrapped up in her own heart-ache, believed that she alone was experiencing anything like this and that the others were all as free from such homeward thoughts as they had been when screaming with laughter a few hours ago over the grinds in the dining-room.

Thus all our experiences we go through much more in common with the rest of mankind than we suppose. But this is especially so in school and college, where a great number of young people of the same age and of more or less the same station in life are placed in exactly similar environment. The same tears, the same laughter, the same desires and the same satisfactions all girls who have gone away to school have felt in varying degree. And now here sat this roomful of girls, each suffering in the same new and unexpected way at the same time and each believing her mental situation to be strangely different from anything ever experienced in the world before.

The spell had even affected Mrs. Forest, too, for when she rose to gather up her flock she gave a great sigh and spoke with a curious gentleness that the

girls had never associated with her pompous tones.

"I think, young ladies, it is time we went back to our school, now. And I'm sure we'll join in thanking Mr. Huntington for the best time we have had this season. And we are very grateful for his most kind gift to Andrews. If he would care to come to our school musicales and entertainments nobody would be a more welcome guest than he. Get your wraps, young ladies, and we will take our departure."

The girls scrambled up from the floor and went reluctantly to the hall, where they slipped into great fur coats, and fastened rubbers on their daintily shod feet.

"Good-by, good-by," they called from the door, and troops and troops of them went down the whitened walk, laughing back expressions of appreciation.

Peggy had whispered in Mrs. Forest's ear just as she was about to leave, and Mrs. Forest had nodded her head graciously. So Peggy went to Katherine and drew her back from the crowds of those preparing to go home, and when the rest had gone the two girls went back to the fire and sat down in great arm-chairs on either side of it, while Mr. Huntington mused into the blue flames and began to see there a picture of something that had happened long ago.

"So you want to hear why I have to be alone on Thanksgiving day unless outsiders take pity on me, do you?" he asked, for Peggy had begged him at the door to tell her about his daughter and the grandson that would be older than she. It was daring, but she felt very strongly that someway Mr. Huntington wanted to talk, wanted to tell someone, and she believed she and Katherine and he were good enough friends now to make it possible for him to tell his story to them.

"Well," hesitated the old man— The girls settled themselves more comfortably in the great chairs and leaned forward, their chins in their hands, while the whimsical light of the fire played over them now in rose-colored flickers of light, now in lavender brilliance.

"I suppose I'd better begin at the beginning," said Mr. Huntington, and in a quiet, halting, reminiscent voice began his strange story.

CHAPTER VII—MR. HUNTINGTON'S STORY

"Our family has always been rich,—I cannot remember when the Huntingtons were not supposed to have everything they wanted. I myself have not let the great estates of my ancestors slip through my fingers as the people about here imagine. Instead,—it may surprise you—I am richer far than any Huntington has ever been before."

Peggy gave a delighted little gasp.

"Yes, because the values of my holdings have gone right on increasing and I have used practically nothing for myself, you see. People outside think that no man would appear to be poor as I do, with none of the luxuries of life, and really be rich, for the common rule is the other way, isn't it? Even at the cost of mortgaging house and home most people buy the outward shows of wealth in order to seem to be rich even though they are poor.

"My daughter was the most beautiful girl in the state when she was young. Her mother died when she was eighteen and so just as she began to want parties and entertainments I was obliged to do all the planning and looking after her myself. Lovely as she was, and rich beyond the dreams of neighborhood avarice, I naturally thought she would marry some kingly young fellow with a position equal to her own. But she didn't—she married—"

He looked for a long time into the fire, and Peggy ventured to break the silence, "but that wasn't a very democratic way of looking at things, was it? Don't you believe a rich girl might like a very poor man, and the other way round, too?"

"She married, with my reluctant consent, a young fellow who immediately tried to get me to sell off great portions of my property and turn the money over to him for investment in some crazy oil well he had out west. He tried in every way to get control of this or that piece, using fraudulent means, it seemed to me. Finally he—borrowed a vast sum of money from a man down state—it was easy for anyone so safely connected with the Huntington family to borrow whatever he wanted—and this he sank in the well, which never amounted to anything and gave him no means of paying even the interest on his debt. With the interest greatly overdue, and no prospects, howsoever dim, of getting back his money, the rash investor from down state came to me and demanded that I reimburse him for my son-in-law's rascality—though perhaps that is too strong a word to use."

"And you did—*didn't* you?" begged Peggy, anxiously.

"Of course," agreed her friend. "He knew I would, though he never mentioned the transaction to me himself, but left the news for his creditor to break.

"They lived with me here five years and when my little grandson was two years old, I planned how I could do the most for him, arranging his education and travels in my mind so that all the bright future I had hoped for my daughter might be realized in him. But when incidents like the one I just told you of began to

happen frequently and any considerable sum of money I gave my daughter went also into the stupid oil proposition that never yielded any profits or, indeed, paid back a cent of the money that it ate, I determined to go on with the thing no longer and talked to my daughter and my son-in-law so plainly that they agreed to go away and not involve me in such transactions again."

Katherine timidly interrupted, "I suppose they—didn't write much after they'd gone?" She was still puzzling to account for the complete loneliness the old man had endured for so many years—even the conduct of his disappointing son-in-law did not, to her mind, wholly explain why a man would be content to forego all manner of acquaintance and friendship ever afterward.

The fire crackled loudly and protestingly, as if it, too, shared her thought and would like an explanation. Peggy never stirred nor moved her eyes from the thoughtful and sympathetic contemplation of Mr. Huntington's face.

"No," the old man hesitatingly answered Katherine. "No—You see—, well, I am afraid I spoke very harshly to the man and my daughter heard. He made no kind of defense whatever and—even then I—I was ashamed, but I knew right to be on my side and I felt very long-suffering as it was. My daughter caught up my grandson and faced me. I shall never forget the proud expression in her poor, hurt eyes."

"'You shall be paid back every penny, father,' she said, 'if you have to wait until this baby grows up and earns enough to cancel his father's debts. It is not likely we could meet so great an obligation by our own unaided efforts—and Jo is not a moneymaker, but my son shall be trained to think of nothing but making money until the whole amount is ready to return to you. We shan't send you little dribbles,—not one cent until the entire amount is gotten together—oh, I know how much it is, I have kept track. We shall scrimp and save and earn and plan until you are paid. Nor will you ever hear of us again if I can help it until my son stands some day in your doorway with his check in his hand to pay you back.' And with that they went away—"

"And they haven't ever paid you back? And that is why you were poor for so long?" questioned Katherine, believing that at last she had the solution.

Mr. Huntington smiled at the absurdity of this.

"They haven't paid me back, but the sum they owe me scarcely leaves a perceptible hole in my fortune. No, but the year after they left I happened to read the notice in a New York paper of my son-in-law's death. No address was given, nothing but just the notice and that was all. Knowing my daughter as I did, I was sure that, at whatever cost, she would persevere in her determination to pay me back and would keep to the letter of her declaration even to the point of going out into the world and earning her own living. The thought of that beautiful, carefully brought-up girl, with so harrowing a responsibility on her shoulders

was more than I could bear and I employed detective agents in a vain endeavor to find her and her boy. I myself searched everywhere in the east, but, will you believe me—never from the day she left my house to this—have I found one trace of her or been encouraged, in any way to hope that I should ever see her face again. Now do you begin to understand? Now can you think it natural, perhaps, that I should want to live as poorly as possible, and deny myself as I knew that poor girl was doing? Could I continue in luxury when she was in want? Only by making myself suffer under the most rigid economy, with the idea that every penny I could save and add to my fortune I would bequeath to her boy, in case he could ever be found, has made my life possible to endure. I have felt bitterly toward almost everyone—I don't know why. And I never expected to have in my life again the sunshine that you and the rest of my sixty little friends, have brought to me to-day."

Peggy drew a long breath. "Well, it's been a real Thanksgiving, then, hasn't it? And I'm so glad, Mr. Huntington, I'm so glad you liked the party—and I—I—I'm sorry about—"

"Do you know," Katherine broke in, "I think it's all coming out right. I never had such a funny feeling. But someway I seem to be sure that Mr. Huntington will find his grandson right soon—I don't know why I should feel this way, but I do."

"Cassandra," murmured Peggy. "We're just having the Fall of Troy in Greek class now, Mr. Huntington, and Katherine is carried away by the idea of being a prophetess. It *would* be nice if we could see the future," she added wistfully, "but I always feel as if I had more happiness in the present than I could really take care of,—and if I was always looking ahead to more—"

"You," said Mr. Huntington, "yes, *you* would feel that way. Most people would say that the gift of prophecy was withheld from us in order that we might not see so much grief and hardship ahead of us that we would lose the incentive to go on."

But Peggy was so far out of sympathy with that point of view that she laughed.

The early darkness of the winter afternoon began to deepen in the room and blur all the shadows together. The dancing firelight did its best to fight off the dusk, leaping up with spurting little flames and glowing fiercely red at its heart. But the purple and gray twilight deepened steadily into black everywhere except in the one bright corner of the room where the flames still kept guard.

"Well," said Peggy, sighing, and untangling herself from the comfortable chair in which she had been curled, "time for us to go home, I suppose—oo—oo—out into all that cold after all this warmth! My hundred dollars, Mr. Huntington—I don't know what I'll do with it—" she puckered her brow thoughtfully, "I don't

know anyone else to give a party to so—"

"Buy a big fur coat with it, like some of the other girls wore," advised the old man, "then you'll never think about going out into the cold as anything but a pleasure."

"Oh,—a fur coat!" cried Peggy, "why, mine—mine has just the mangiest bit of a fur collar, and I've been proud enough of that—wait, just *wait* till I get a wonderful young caracal!"

With their hands linked closely together in Peggy's muff the two girls made their way down the walk, and at the street they turned back and waved cheerily to the silhouetted figure that still watched them against the glowing doorway of what had once been Gloomy House.

CHAPTER VIII—CHRISTMAS HOLIDAYS

The days and weeks seemed to fly by after that, each one full of interest to Peggy, who liked Andrews better and better and was increasingly glad each hour that she had come. Through Mr. Huntington's help she was able to do a great many delightful things for other people, and she took happy advantage of his warm interest in her projects.

December rushed along toward Christmas and Peggy began to feel just a trifle sad because her aunt had written nothing about her coming home for the holidays, while almost all the other girls were going. She rather hated to think of the empty halls of Andrews in vacation time with no company other than that of Mrs. Forest. But one day Katherine had looked beamingly up from a letter and had then jumped up and thrown her arms around Peggy's neck with the explanation that Peggy was invited home with her by all of Katherine's folks.

Oh, what an enthusiastic preparation began then, what long discussions as to whether to take the blue crêpe de chine or the golden satin, what oodles of postcards were dispatched to friends with the good news and new temporary address on them!

To be part of the great business of going away for vacation! Peggy's heart thrilled every time an expressman tramped through the halls bearing some girl's

trunk on his broad shoulders. Any afternoon now they might come for her trunk, hers and Katherine's, packed delightfully in one, after many friendly quarrels as to which one should have the left hand tray and which the right and who could lay her shoes in the lower compartment and which should take her manicure set, since one would do for both girls, and trunk room was precious.

When, seated at last, breathless and full of anticipation, in a taxi with their trunk up on top, the two girls waved through the window to those who had not yet gone, Peggy was too happy to speak, and two bright red spots burned in her dimpling cheeks and her eyes were as blue with excitement as electric sparks.

She had never ridden on a train—a Pullman—before with just girls as company. Her aunt had always taken her the few places she had been. Yet now she was actually buying her ticket herself and checking her trunk, and then boarding a great, wonderful, cross-country de luxe train,—she and Katherine, all by themselves, with as grown-up *sang-froid* as if they had "all the while been conductors or brakemen," Katherine expressed it joyously.

The porter put their suit-cases under their berths, and Peggy's little gloved hand dropped a quarter nonchalantly into his palm while she tried to twist her eager, excited mouth into a traveled expression.

"Well," murmured Katherine, settling back comfortably on the plush seat, "we're really on our way. Oh, Peggy, I'm so glad you're going with me—oh, won't it be fun to introduce you to father and mother and brother Jack and the canary bird!"

They had taken an early afternoon train, and it was a long while to wait for dinner. The wonder and glory of the dinner Peggy was already picturing.

"I'm hungry just thinking about it," she said, when the train was well under way.

"Let's have the porter get us something," suggested Katherine, "what would you like—a lemonade?"

"OO-ooo," breathed Peggy, rapturously, "can he get it for us?"

"Why, you can order *anything* on these good trains," declared Katherine grandly. "A little later we'll get some cards and look up two girls to play bridge—the train's full of our girls and people from the colleges. Then we'll go back to the observation car and—"

Peggy shivered blissfully. "My," she said, "isn't life full of experiences, though?"

————

"Shall we wear our hats into the diner, Peggy?" asked Katherine, importantly, when the windows of the train were squares of blackness speckled by flying snow

whirling past and the waiter had gone through calling out, "Dinner is served in the dining car in the rear ... first-call."

"Is that the thing to do?" hesitated Peggy—"and must we wear our coats, too? I'd rather put our hats into these paper hat bags the porter brought a while ago, and leave our coats here, and—and just go back in a real homelike appearance."

"All right," said Katherine, smoothing back her pretty hair before the tiny oblong mirror in their section, "and, oh, Peggy, how hungry I am!"

With the excitement of a brand new experience shining in their eyes, their youthful heads held erect as they walked, and their little serge skirts swishing over their silk petticoats, the two girls went down the aisle in growing and pleasant consciousness of being observed by many, through car after car of the long train in their hungry search for the diner.

Each of the vestibules was snow-powdered and slippery and cold—oh, so cold, and it seemed that always just as they came to one the train lurched and shook so as to nearly knock them off their feet.

And then, all of a sudden, there they were in the diner itself—but what was this mob—this perfect horde of other people doing there standing patiently lined up against the long narrow wall before they came to the table part of the car?

"Katherine!" cried Peggy in consternation, "they're waiting to get in. We'll *starve* before our turn comes!"

And all the long patient row of people laughed, for nowhere else in traveling is there a more open and friendly spirit than among those poor patient and hungry sufferers lined up to wait their turn to be served at dinner. Groups returning began to push by them after a while, their faces as satisfied in expression as the others were anxious.

"You see," Katherine thought it out, "we came at the first call, but our car was so far away that by the time we could get back here, all the people from the nearer cars had gotten ahead of us."

But once seated facing each other at a little table, with the electric candle shedding its radiant light on the white cloth before them, and with the pale snow outside fluttering against the windows, and all so warm and comfortable inside, the tedium of waiting was forgotten and all things beyond the scope of the immediate attractive present were blotted out from their contented spirits.

They leaned their elbows on the table and looked across at each other with blissful satisfaction.

"Peggy," said Katherine, and "Katherine," began Peggy eagerly, and then both in the same breath they demanded of each other the answer to the momentous problem of the moment, "What are we going to eat?"

Never had a menu seemed as full of wonderful possibilities as that one,

never had "Milk-fed chicken with Virginia ham" tasted finer when it was brought, and never, *never* had two more healthy young appetites been brought into play than Katherine and Peggy manifested while the train rocked along with them at breakneck speed taking them faster and faster and faster right into the heart of Christmas vacation.

After the edge of their hunger had been worn off and they had turned their attention more delicately to ice cream and *demi-tasse*, their thoughts drifted backward to events at Andrews, which seemed already very much in the dim and distant past.

"Katherine, when you said you felt as if Mr. Huntington would soon find his grandson, did you have any reason for saying that, or was it just to comfort him?" Peggy inquired reminiscently.

"No, honestly, Peggy," insisted Katherine, "I could feel it in my mind just like anything that it will happen. Did you notice I didn't say anything about his daughter? That was because I had no such feeling about her—so you see it wasn't just to make him feel better at all. It's strange, isn't it, how thoughts about the future come to you sometimes?"

"Never do to me," laughed Peggy with a shake of her head. "Just think, Katherine, I didn't ever even have an idea until I actually saw you that I was going to room with anyone like you at Andrews. When I used to wonder what my room-mate would be like, I always thought of some—entirely different kind of a person—and I was afraid maybe she'd want the window shut when I wanted it open, or she'd be a grind and I'd bother her,—and when I saw you—"

"Were you satisfied?" teased Katherine across the table.

"Oh—" sighed Peggy in mock rapture, and then she smiled her sweet, frank, confident, dark-eyed smile straight into her room-mate's eyes. "I was just about as glad as they make 'em," she declared.

Katherine was thinking.

After a while she spoke.

"I know what let's do," she said radiantly, "let's go to Madame Blakey when we get to my house and ask her about the Huntington boy."

"Who's Madame Blakey?"

"Oh, I forgot you wouldn't know. She's a clairvoyant and reads the future out of a little glass of water. Yes, and you needn't smile. Sometimes it comes out just as she says. I've never been, but some of the business men in our town believe in every word she says."

"I—I'd be afraid," Peggy demurred.

"She doesn't tell you the horrid things—just the ones worth while knowing—don't you think it would be thrilling to go?" Katherine poised her ice-cream spoon half way to her mouth while she waited for Peggy's wild delight in

the scheme which she felt sure must come.

"I—I—don't know—" Peggy disappointingly murmured. "Does she have curtains painted with red and gold Turkish half-moons and all that? And does she fade off into a—" she shuddered, "a—trance? Because I don't want to see anything like that, honest, I don't. Of course, I know the trances are just make-believe, but I don't like them."

"No," Katherine hastened to reassure her, "sometimes I think it would be fun to go to one who did those things, but this one doesn't make much of a show of it, I've heard, and if the folks would only let us go—"

"Perhaps we owe it to Mr. Huntington," Peggy decided at last, "to find out where his grandson is for him, even by clairvoyant means like that. Perhaps we ought not to let an opportunity or possible chance slip by—"

By this Katherine realized she had won her wish and that her little friend was beginning to be as eager for the adventure as she was and was merely trying to translate it into a favor to somebody else before plunging into it heart and soul.

By this time the girls had finished their delightful dinner and they left a quarter on the waiter's little tray with all the dignity in the world. My, how independent, how experienced, how completely adult it made them feel to be deciding the amount of tips and then handing them out with such sweet grandeur of manner. The waiter smiled and bowed as he pulled out their chairs, but they themselves were so exactly the type of traveler that any waiter would prefer to wait on, with their grave consultation with him as to the choicest dishes and their evident enjoyment of life in general, that perhaps he would have been nearly as polite had they given him only ten cents—but, of course, it's impossible to say for sure. Waiters are but waiters, and they have certain expectations and have grown accustomed to seeing them realized.

Back on the perilous journey through snow-coated vestibules the girls took their swaying way, laughing light-heartedly at each swerve of the train and trying to work out some Sherlock Holmes system by which they might be sure of finding their own car.

"I knew a girl once," said Katherine, "whose car was taken off at Buffalo and hitched to another train while she was promenading on the platform outside, and all the baggage she had in the world went off to school, leaving her behind. It was a horrible experience—"

"Must have been," sniggered Peggy, "but if you're trying to scare me into thinking perhaps we won't find our car at all you'll have a hard time of it, because we're in it now!"

And so they were. There were the familiar fur coats over the arms of the Pullman seats at last, there were the copies of the gayly covered magazines that they had left behind them, and, indeed, there it all was—home. Home as only a

Pullman car can be home to young people who adore traveling and have plenty of interesting experiences and company to while away the journey.

"Ah," they cried, sinking back into their seats, "this is nice, isn't it, after all that walk? How smoothly the train runs when you're sitting still, but how jogglety it goes when you walk through the cars."

"Oh, well," said Peggy, with a mighty yawn and stretching her little locked hands before her lazily, "I'm perfectly happy, and I feel so contented I'm almost—sleepy."

"Almost—" indignantly laughed Katherine, "I feel free to say that you're the most perfect imitation of a sleepy head that I ever saw—imitation, I said, Peggy, imitation—" she cried, ducking, for Peggy had reached for her hair to pull it.

"Let's imitate sleeping heads instead of only sleepy ones then," suggested Peggy when all her attempts to wreak vengeance upon her room-mate had proved unsuccessful.

"Porter, will you make up our section next?" asked Katherine as that white-coated individual went by. And Peggy stored it away in her mind that when you wanted to address him you called him "Porter." It was difficult to explain exactly why, but this impressed her as just the highest mark of knowing the proper thing that she had seen yet. Now if *she* had been forced to ask him the same question she had a feeling that she would have begun with "Say."

"How shall we sleep—you in the upper, or me, or both of us in the lower so that the upper needn't be let down at all and then we can have plenty of room to dress in our berths in the morning without bumping our heads."

Peggy agreed to this last plan as the best, and a few minutes later the two snuggled down into the cold sheets to be lulled almost instantly to sleep by the rhythmic motion of the train and the even sound of its metal click, click on the rails.

"Good-night," murmured Peggy sleepily just before drifting off into the great shining world of dreams with their marvelous adventures that do not tire but rest and equip the dreamer afresh for the series of real events crowding in with the new day.

"Goo—ood—night—" answered Katherine in an even drawlier tone, but her room-mate was already asleep and did not notice it.

CHAPTER IX—THE FORTUNE

TELLER

Oh, the glory of waking up in the morning and then before you have time to wonder where you are, seeing the telegraph poles flying by! On a train, on a train, on a train, Peggy's joyous thought kept time to the sound of the wheels on the rails. After looking interestedly out for a few minutes on a barren sort of white crusted country, level as a prairie and without house or building of any kind, Peggy turned and shook Katherine heartily by the shoulder.

"Poor child," she shouted into the other's reluctant ears, "I hate to waken you, but open your eyes and tell me if you think we're nearly there?"

"Where?" murmured Katherine and sank back into the peace of slumber.

"Why, there, THERE, at your home—will—you—wake—up?" Each of the last words was accompanied by more vigorous shaking, "as—I—said—" shake, shake, "I—hate—to—waken—you—"

"Yes, you do," reproached Katherine in perfectly normal tones, turning staring mockingly at her room-mate. "Yes, you hate it—I thought you were a wreck, you shook me so hard."

"I am a wreck after all that difficulty to make you wake up," declared Peggy serenely. "Now, let's hurry and go to breakfast."

"Do you know what your new name is going to be as soon as we get back to school?" threatened Katherine.

"No," indifferently.

"Pig Peggy."

"Oh," said Peggy, "well, I'll look you up one in the dictionary,—maybe in the *Latin* dictionary, and then you'll never know what it means and can't pay me back for it."

It is surprising how quickly two girls can be ready for breakfast when they hear the waiter crying out "Last—call for breakfast—" through a rocking train.

Grape-fruit, coffee, and toast was what they ordered, and then they laughed to find that every other girl in the diner was eating exactly the same thing. For grape-fruit, coffee, and toast is the college and school girl train-breakfast the country over.

"I feel as if I'd been away a hundred years," said Katherine excitedly as the train at last pulled into the station. "Oh, they'll all be down at the train, I wired them to. And how proud I'll be to show them you, Peggy, and tell them that you are the one they've heard so much about in all my letters since the very first, which was full of your rose-tree episode."

The porter had already gone ahead with their bags, and they, peering eagerly out of the windows as they made their way to the platform, sought to catch a glimpse of Katherine's family.

As they stepped off it seemed to Peggy that a veritable whirlpool engulfed them. On every side were enthusiastic people kissing her and Katherine indiscriminately. And she in her gladness to get there and her happiness in meeting with such friendly acceptance kissed them back with impartial enthusiasm, Katherine's mother and father, her younger sister, an aunt, and three "kid brothers"—these were the reception committee that were now hustling the girls to the big waiting automobile that belonged to Katherine's father and overwhelming them with expressions of pleasure and welcome.

The house, when they came to it, was a great homey affair, with many rich rugs and pictures that did not, however, dazzle by their magnificence but seemed to fit into the general atmosphere of comfort. Peggy, who had never visited in so wonderful a place before, danced from attic to cellar, as light as thistledown, and sent the whole family into roars of appreciative laughter at her naïve and hearty approval of it all.

"You're home, now, Peggy," Katherine said.

And Peggy nodded happily. "Why, of course," was her comment. "It certainly feels like it, and I *love* every darling member of your perfectly grand family, Katherine Foster."

Two days after their arrival the Fosters had a Christmas party for them, and for the first time in her life Peggy helped to trim a Christmas tree, and wrap up such an enormous number of tiny tissue-covered bundles that her fingers ached from tying string.

There was the grand march around the tree, the gorgeous Christmas supper, and afterward dancing and dancing and dancing until Peggy's head whirled and her very heart beat time to music.

On Christmas day there came for each of the girls a fascinating little package bearing the Huntington address on the outside. Katherine's was a woven gold chain with a delicate and beautiful pearl pendant attached, and Peggy's was a watch with a good sized diamond sparkling in its handwrought gold.

"Oh—how *lovely*," breathed she in ecstatic surprise, and then suddenly her face clouded. "We forgot to send him a thing," she reminded contritely.

"Never mind," comforted Katherine, "we'll go to the clairvoyant and help get his grandson back for him and I guess that will mean more to him than any little set of cuff links or knitted tie we might have given him."

"So we will," mused Peggy, "do you think we could go to-morrow?"

Not the morrow, but the day before New Year's finally saw Katherine's family persuaded to let the two girls go to Madame Blakey, who had really a

considerable reputation in the town for correctly reading futures in her glass of water. Not that Katherine's father and mother believed in that sort of thing, but they actually knew people who seemed to, and they could see no harm in permitting the girls to go. But when the two daring experimenters with things yet to come had been conveyed by James, the chauffeur, in their big touring car to the residence of Madame, they found all the blinds closed and no sign of life about the place anywhere. A woman from next door told them that Madame Blakey had gone away on her vacation to visit relatives.

"Well," sighed Katherine in miserable disappointment, "I suppose other people have to have vacations too. But it does seem heartbreaking that all our plans should be spoiled and poor Mr. Huntington should never find his grandson, after all."

"Yes," agreed Peggy, brushing away the baffled tears, "isn't there somebody else in town who—who sees things ahead?"

"Oh," objected Katherine, "not that mother would let us go to—but listen, we might go first and then explain all about it and she'd understand our motive. Let's look in the personals of the newspaper. Sometimes there is one advertised there."

So they sent James for a paper and eagerly scanned its columns until they found in inviting, bold type, "Madame La Mar, palmist and clairvoyant. I read the future: I tell your past: consult me about your business or your heart affairs."

"Ah," cried Katherine, and she read the address to James, while she squeezed Peggy's hand under the heavy robe.

A few minutes later the machine had drawn up before a frowsy little apartment building, very different from and far less prepossessing than the neat, newly painted little house of Madame Blakey's.

In spite of James' expression of mild surprise, the two girls got out and entered the building, searching as they did so for some card or call board by which they might locate Madame La Mar's rooms. There was no lock system on the doors and no cards of residents. They went on into the main hall and saw a row of uninviting doors, each with some name scrawled on it in pencil. On one door alone was a soiled visiting card bearing the proud name of Madame La Mar.

"Do you dare knock?" asked Katherine.

"Maybe I will in a—in a minute," hesitated Peggy. "Don't you think perhaps we'd better have James in?"

"No," said Katherine, "he's right out there, anyway, and could hear us if we wanted him for anything, and this apartment must face the street, so we could lean out and call him if it gets too trancified for us in there."

But they did not have to work up their courage to the point of forcing themselves to knock on the door, for the great Madame La Mar herself, hearing

their whispering voices, now threw it open and stood before them in all the magnificence of tight fitting black velvet embroidered with occasional sequins that glittered here and there.

She was a big woman with vivid black eyes and black hair turning in places to gray. Her cheeks bloomed with an unnatural radiance, and her eyebrows were the longest and the most arched and the most charcoal dusky that Peggy had ever seen off the stage.

"Ah," crooned a honeyed voice, "did you want to see me?"

Katherine, speechless, nodded.

"Was it about—did you want a reading?" There was a very professional business-like quality now creeping into the voice in addition to its first honeyed accents.

"Yes," Peggy answered up.

"Did you have an appointment or have you ever come to me before?" temporized the woman.

"No," said Peggy, "but we thought—we thought you might be willing to see us anyway."

"Yes, yes, indeed, come in," said the woman vaguely. "Come in and we will have a little music."

The girls were seated, full of bewilderment, in a sunny, rather vacant room, while the seeress swished across the floor like an animated mountain and, going over to a piano on which the dust shone, sat down and began to play a simple exercise like those Peggy had practiced when she was a child and had her fingers rapped if she made a mistake.

In increasing wonderment the two watched the self-confident figure picking out its little exercise and apparently completely oblivious of their presence and as thrilled by the feeble tinkle, tinkle it was accomplishing, as if the sound were a whole orchestra of beautiful music.

After a time she stopped, and turned to the girls with a small smile. "I like music," she said. "Oh, so fond of music. I'm taking lessons."

"She needs 'em," whispered Katherine.

"Did you enjoy my little roundelay?" she inquired anxiously.

"It was—it was very nice," Peggy tried to say politely. "But we thought you were Madame La Mar, the fortune teller."

"I *am* Madame La Mar," responded the woman, as pleased as peaches. "Yes, indeed, who else could be her, you know?"

"Her grammar!" groaned Katherine in a tiny voice.

"Now if you will come into the studio," the woman urged, "I will read for you from the past, present or future or all three of them. Just state your desires."

"There was something special," Peggy told her, "we thought you might be

able to read ahead for us."

"Of course," agreed the generous creature, "anything. But my charge is a dollar a person."

"That's all right."

"Then come in. Now the young lady in the caracal coat sit on my left, please, and you other on my right. I shall want you to keep very still and not disturb the workings of the supernatural. Which would you rather have me do, tell you by cards or by your palm or by the crystal?"

"Will—will one be just as effective as the other?" asked Peggy doubtfully.

"Be as what?"

"Be as effective, as good, you know, Madame La Mar."

"Oh, yes," explained the seeress condescendingly. "I can tell it one way as well as another and I never make a mistake. I'm not like some of these people in this town—limited, you know, to a single style. You can choose any sort whatever and it goes with me. I'm a woman of my word, I am," her voice was rising, "and I challenge any other clarvoy'nt in this town to tell as much for the money as I do, why—"

"Yes, yes, I'm sure," pacified Peggy. "And now suppose you tell us something. It's what we came for."

"With the crystal," Katherine put in, "and maybe our palms too."

"No, not our palms," cried Peggy in consternation, looking at the rather dirty red hands of the husky fortune teller. "I think the crystal alone is best."

"Well, then." The red hands caught up a little crystal globe that was lying on the table. "All look into this with me, just as hard as you can," she urged, "and think with all your might about the question you want me to solve for you, and pretty soon I'll see things come in here and that will be the future."

The room settled down to a curious, stifling, nerve-racking silence while the prophetess gazed into her gleaming crystal.

She was breathing hard, and after a time it seemed to the two girls that a faint film or cloud went across the glassy brightness of the little globe, and this filminess took vague shape and disappeared.

Each girl thought as hard as she could. "How can we find Mr. Huntington's grandson for him? Where is he now?"

Finally, in a sepulchral voice, startlingly different from her own, the woman began to speak: "I see a girl," she murmured.

This beginning was so far from promising and so utterly different from what they had someway expected that Katherine burst out into hysterical laughter. "She could see two of 'em if she looked very hard," she chortled too audibly in her friend's ear.

"There, you've broken the spell," complained the woman peevishly. "How

can you expect me to find the future for a pack of laughing hyenas that don't believe what I'm telling them, anyway?"

"Oh, please," said Peggy, much ashamed of Katherine's rude outburst, "we want to hear it, and we will perhaps believe it when we have heard something. Indeed, Katherine wasn't doubting what you *did* say, you know—she only—"

"Quiet," hissed the woman.

Was it true that a cloud, filmy and light and vapory went drifting across the clear crystal surface again? The girls felt no impulse to laugh now.

"I see a girl—I see snow—"

Katherine thought that she couldn't help it if she looked out of the window, but this time refrained from comment and held her breath while she watched the mysterious smoky appearance of the crystal.

"I see a loss of a long time ago—many years—relative torn from relative—"

Peggy and Katherine clutched at each other's knees.

"Walking, walking, so tired," mumbled the woman, "a long white field. I see an initial—let's see what the initial is. Is it A? no, it is not A. Is it B—no, no, now I have it, it is H."

Peggy gave a tiny scream and the voice continued:

"Cold, very cold, far east of here and a little north. A college room, a mandolin, a young man plays on the mandolin. Also I see—" the voice rose excitedly, "a school lawn, a moon, this time it is warm, I do not understand it, and a group of young men are picking up little—little roses from the ground, and a girl leans from a window—"

"Peggy," screamed Katherine, "she means the time the rose tree fell out."

Here the prophetess burst into tears and shoving the crystal away from her declared that she would not read another thing for two such ill mannered young ladies who dragged her in and out of her trances just as if these were not the worst kind of nervous strain. She was through with them, she was. Just as she was beginning to see something of interest they shouted at her and spoiled it all. What kind of spirits would remain in a room with two girls that acted like that? They could pay her their dollar apiece, they could, and go, and she would go back to her music and think herself well rid of them, she was sure. Thank them, and *good-by*, and please don't ever come and bother her again with their hoydenish ways. Could they find their way to the street? She, for her part, was too unnerved to take them.

With their heads still whirling from the queerness of it all the two girls groped their way out through the dark hall and drew in great breaths when they were once more safe in the sunlight of the street. They stumbled forward toward the car, where the imperturbable James was awaiting them. As they were about to clamber in Peggy clutched at her room-mate's sleeve.

"Look back, she's watching us," warned Peggy, and there sure enough in the window of the room they had just quitted were the outlines of the great figure of the black velvet prophetess, a curious brilliant fixedness in her dark eyes.

"I think she got her initial from the door of your car, Katherine—look."

Katherine's father's initials were H. B. F., Howard Baker Foster, and of course the seeress could have seen them, looking down into the street as she was now.

"Maybe," demurred Katherine, "but, Peggy, someway I don't believe she did. I think that H stood for Huntington just as all the rest of her story seemed to have some truth in it, and if only my feelings hadn't gotten away with me we'd be there yet, hearing all the things that are ever going to happen to us, I'm perfectly convinced."

"Well, evidently, Young Grandson is in college somewhere," interposed Peggy flippantly. "You remember about the college room and the mandolin? I'm glad that his poverty didn't prevent his getting a fine education, anyway. Now we've got a clue, all we have to do to find him, friend Watson, is to go to all the men's colleges and walk through all the dorms until we come to a room from which the gentle tinkle of a mandolin steals forth—and then, and then—we knock on the door. Young Grandson answers it, and—there we are. We take him back to Mr. Huntington and all goes well. And listen, Watson, my dear detective companion, I think our search through those colleges is just going to be one of the jolliest things that ever happened to two nice-looking girls."

"You forget that we won't know Young Grandson when we see him."

"Clues, my dear Watson, clues. No detective ever went far without finding clues. First, we shall run across his picture in one of the college annuals. And we shall say, 'Why, here, what a strong resemblance this picture bears to Mr. Huntington, of Huntington House.' And that's the first thing. We read under the picture and find that his name is John James Smith, and then we go to the registrar—"

By this time the car was rounding the Foster drive, and the two girls alighted, in haste to tell all of Katherine's interested and somewhat disapproving family about their adventures with the soothsayer.

Each of the small brothers agreed with Katherine that it must be all true, but that was the only support she found at home for her belief.

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When it came time for the girls to start back to Andrews, they were torn with conflicting emotions. They were glad they were going back, and yet they could hardly bear to tear themselves away from the home that seemed now to belong

to Peggy, too. So when they and their suit-cases were at last regretfully taken to the train by the entire family, the girls were dissolved in a flood of tears as they settled themselves for the journey, and the train had been under way some two hours before they managed to say a single word to each other.

CHAPTER X—MISS ROBINSON CRUSOE

It was the snowiest part of the season that Katherine and Peggy rode back into when they returned from their Christmas vacation in the Middle West.

The school grounds shone and blazed under a triumphant sun, and out around them as far as they could see was a great white world. One of the most important gifts of the Foster family to the two girls had been two pairs of snow-shoes: not the poorly constructed, make-believe affairs that are sometimes on sale in cities where there is never enough snow to use them, but real Indian-made shoes for which Mrs. Foster had sent to Canada.

Naturally, they wanted more than anything else to try them. So the first day that Mrs. Forest gave them permission they went out on the porch of the Andrews dormitory, comfortably dressed in white sweaters and white tam-o'-shanters, with moccasins on their feet and their beloved snow-shoes ready to strap on in their hands. After some grunting and much tugging the shoes were adjusted, and then the two expected to fairly sail over the white world, away, away, like ice-boats, as fast as the wind. But, oh, for the things that look so easy! There was a good crust over the snow, but at the first step—well, Katherine seemed to be trying to walk on her head instead of her feet, that was all. In trying to pick her up Peggy herself fell headlong, and there they lay, ignominiously waving their snow-shoes in the air, shrieking with laughter and so limp from their merriment that they could not get up again.

It was only after many attempts that they stood erect once more, powdered over and caked with snow where they had plunged through the crust, and very red in the face and still shaking with laughter.

"I put my toe down first," gasped Katherine between spasms, "just as I would if I was walking ordinarily. I forgot that father said the foot must come

down flat. I've seen people snow-shoe, but I never—t-tried it—oh, dear me, I'm almost exhausted to start out with."

Then once again, with the utmost gravity, the two made the attempt, and Peggy almost at once got the wonderful swinging motion of the far northerners that makes snow-shoeing one of the most delightful and exhilarating sports in the world. To be warm in the midst of cold, to glow from forehead to feet with life and heat and happiness, all this glorious new experience she was feeling for the first time. But Katherine could not put her foot down correctly and failed to get into the rhythm of the thing at all. And as sure as they came to a hillock over she went helplessly, and remained deep in the snow until Peggy pulled her out, with scant sympathy, but with much merry appreciation of her snow-powdered face and its look of wondering appeal.

Nevertheless, in spite of difficulties and delays, they had covered two meadows and a large open field without more stress of adventure than they found pleasant. All of a sudden Peggy pointed ahead. There, gleaming on before them, straight ahead and over the crest of a bit of rising ground, were the glistening snow-shoe marks of another explorer who had recently gone that way before them. The sun shone into the criss-cross pattern of the steps, which seemed to the girls to be both invitation and challenge.

Katherine adapted the quotation, laughing. "If I could leave behind me any such even tracks as that it might be worth while going on, but when you can't get the swing of it, Peggy, you can't keep warm, and while I want to learn, sometime, I think it wasn't born in me as it was in you, and it will need several practice attempts before I can be in your class at all. So I'm going back—for now—do you want to come, or are you going on—?"

Peggy looked back toward the familiar roofs of Andrews, and then she looked away out over the barren fields in their whiteness, new and untouched save for the gleaming snow-shoe tracks that called and called to her to be as adventurous as they.

"I guess I'll go on," she said, a hint of abandon in her voice.

"Well, good-by, hon," said Katherine, meekly taking her leave. "I will get about as much more of this as I want going back, but I hope you have a nice time—and—and end up at tea somewhere just as we were going to."

"Tea by myself would be horrid," Peggy called after her. "I won't be long, but I just must have some more, I love it so."

Then she turned her face to the snow-shoe tracks, and with a little gay song on her lips took up their trail.

"I'm Robinson Crusoe," she told herself blithely, "and these tracks are the good man Friday's. And we are the only two people that there are at all, and both of us have been finding it so lonely by ourselves."

Several of the Andrews girls had snow-shoes and Peggy wondered which one the maker of these tracks might be.

"I'll try to walk right in her steps," Peggy decided, "and then I'll get just the right method—but, oh, my goodness, what a tall girl she must be! These footprints are so far apart I can't possibly take such long steps. She must be a wonderful snow-shoeist—maybe she won't want to walk with me even when I do catch up to her, since she's apparently so much more expert."

With ludicrous attempts to fit her steps into those of Friday, she pursued her way until at last she had climbed the hill where the tracks had at first been lost, and there they were continuing, forever, it seemed.

Without hesitation Peggy followed. Lost to all but the exhilaration of a brand new exercise, and the stimulus of the cold wind that yet never chilled her glowing face, she kept on until Andrews was a thing of the past, and she could not have found her way back except for the tracks she was making now. And then all of a sudden she noticed something was different. The footprints no longer gleamed in her eyes, and the beautiful dazzle of the snow was blotted out. In an instant more a whirling mass of moist snow flakes was falling about her, obscuring everything but their own fantastic, falling selves.

"Well," decided she promptly, "I guess I'll be getting back."

But when she turned back the wind came rushing in her face and took her breath and nearly blew her down.

"Well," she changed her mind. "I guess I won't. Friday, where are you—you must be somewhere out in this sudden storm, too. And if I could only find you I wouldn't feel as lost and shaky as I do now. Misery loves company—not that I'm miserable—but something"—she choked back a sob, "something seems to be gloomy in my heart."

Since she could not go back, and since the thought of coming up with Friday was a very comforting one, she plodded on, winking the snow out of her eyes and shaking it off of her cap and out of her hair.

She could scarcely see the tracks ahead of her now, as the new snow was fast obliterating them, and her own steps were made with increasing difficulty. Anyone who has ever tried to snow-shoe over soft, new-fallen snow knows the hardship of Peggy's predicament.

All at once she discovered that she could not lift her left foot at all. Try as she would, it would not rise and swing forward to its next step.—Paralyzed! The horror of her situation, there all alone in the cold and snow, out of sight of everybody, slowly being paralyzed with no one to know or care, filled her with momentary hopelessness.

"Oh, Friday," she thought, "I don't see how you could have snow-shoed so far ahead of me as not to have been caught up with by now. Dear, dear, if I

could only find that girl, maybe she would try to drag me to some farm house, or something. If she's one of the Andrews girls she wouldn't want me to freeze to death out here all by myself. Maybe if I called very loud she'd hear and come back—"

"Hello!" she shouted forth into the snow-filled world. But there was no answer and the sound of her own voice, so hollow and lonely, did anything but cheer her up, so she did not try again.

With one last great effort of will she tried to move the stubborn left foot. It was useless,—stuck in the snow and helpless it remained.

"Oh," she murmured, the tears beginning to run down her cheeks to mingle with the wet snow flakes melting there.

All of a sudden a dark form loomed up out of the blinding snow immediately ahead. There was the jar of a collision. Peggy clutched her hands together, not knowing whether to be glad or terrified.

And then she saw that the figure was that of a very red-faced young man, who was also wearing snow-shoes.

"Friday!" Peggy cried out, realizing in one illuminating instant that this was the track-maker she had been following as Crusoe.

"No, it's Saturday," replied the young man, somewhat puzzled, "but I don't see what that has to do with it. I'm awfully afraid I hurt you, bumping into you like that, but I never dreamed there was anyone about in a storm like this. Have you seen anything of a little dog? I lost him a while back."

"No," shivered Peggy. "I'm afraid there isn't much use looking for him if he's very little. Here am I a perfectly strong girl and yet even I can't go any farther. I—can't—go—another—step—" Sobs fought with her words, and the young good-looking face grew redder than ever.

"Tired?" he asked, "so tired that you can't walk? Well, then, I'm mighty glad I came. Wait just a minute till I get a deep breath and I'll carry you. The extra weight will make us sink in a lot in this soft snow, but if you don't mind the joggly walking I can easily manage—"

Peggy shook her head. "No, you'd better go on by yourself," she insisted. "I think a person would be awfully hard to carry in snow-shoes, they'd hang down and flop about so. And I'm sorry about your poor little dog, but I think it isn't any use your waiting for him. You'd much better save yourself," she advised.

"Now,—come," said the other.

"Listen, I'm paralyzed," Peggy confessed. "My left foot just won't—won't work, you know, I can't get it to snow-shoe another step. It just stays still. It's paralyzed—"

What was that—could she believe her eyes? The young man had glanced down sympathetically enough toward the paralyzed foot but was it any subject

for such wild fits of mirth as he immediately went into? Was it right that he should laugh and laugh and point, speechless, and then clap his hand over his mouth and go off again?

"You are very cruel and perfectly horrid," cried Peggy sharply, "and I hate, I *hate* you!"

"O—oh, pardon me, little Hot-Temper, but look back at your snow-shoe, *please*," and the laugh distorted his face once more.

Painfully and indignantly Peggy screwed her cold face over her left shoulder and looked down.

"Why—why," she gasped all out of breath, with astonishment, "how did it get there?"

For there, comfortably ensconced on the back of her snow-shoe, waiting for a free ride, sat, as perky as you please a plump puppy, his head cocked interestedly on one side, and his wide mouth open in an inquiring fashion as if he would like to know what she was going to do about it now that she had found him out.

"The—the—smart little thing!" Peggy couldn't help exclaiming. "There he was, being a parasite, while I was supposed to do the walking.—Only it's a good joke on him, as I couldn't."

"As soon as the soft snow fell, I suppose the little fellow sank in pretty deep every step," the young man grinned, stooping and sweeping the quivering, frisking body into his arms. "And the rascal was going to take it easy as soon as he saw your snow-shoes coming along. Lucky I missed him when I did,—and you're not paralyzed now, are you?"

"No," laughed Peggy, "it seems I'm not. Oh, wasn't that funny? There I was dying all by myself a minute ago of something that I didn't have at all."

"I say, what we ought to do, though—there is a tea house somewhere near here where we can get something hot and then you'll feel a lot better and I don't mind saying that I will too. Come on, I know the way, and I'll walk on the windy side of you like this and—why, it's going fine, we'll be there in no time."

With courage and interest and even happiness surging back into her heart now that this big handsome boy was striding along by her side and cheering her with laughing remarks that ignored the wild storm about them, Peggy found snow-shoeing exhilarating once more, and they made good time, and were soon stamping in to the little tea house.

In the neighborhood of Andrews were a number of tea rooms and dainty restaurants, for it was a rich school, and a good share of the girls' pocket-money went for good things to eat. Peggy was familiar with many of them, but she had never happened to come here before. So she knew that they must be a greater distance from the school than she had supposed. Also, most of the people seated around the adorable little tables were boys instead of girls, and they all looked

up with interest at the entrance of the snowy pair.

"Why, hello, Jim," one of the boys called out to Peggy's companion. "Playing Santa Claus?"

Jim merely smiled and bowed, and guided Peggy to a table by a roaring open fire. Then he took her sweater and cap and flung them across a chair to dry.

"Where do all these boys come from?" inquired Peggy. "It looks like a perfect wilderness around here."

"We are near Anderwood, the boys' prep school," explained her companion. "I used to go there—just last year, in fact—and I was over visiting some of my friends to-day. Most of the fellows are having exams right now, you know, and there were two hours this afternoon when every fellow I knew was booked for something, so I borrowed a pair of snow-shoes and a dog and—took a stroll."

"And you strolled right over to a girls' school," laughed Peggy.

"As fast as I could go," the young man answered without embarrassment. "I'll tell you just what I was going to do, too. I don't know a soul at Andrews—or didn't until I almost ran over you in the storm. But I was just going to look at a certain window. Now, I bet you'd hate to tell me what you think of me."

"A certain window," mused Peggy. "Are you a carpenter and did you want to see how it was made?"

Her mischievous taunt brought an explanation.

"I'm an Amherst man," he began, and Peggy leaned her elbows on the table, forgetful of the steaming soup that had just been set before her. "And I had finished my exams, so I took a vacation to this part of the country, where I used to go to school. The last time I was around here I came up for the game, early in the fall. And—well, you know how it is with glee club fellows, they sing their heads off when their team has won, and I guess we serenaded every corner of the Andrews dorms until midnight. Do you remember—did you happen to be awake and hear us?"

"Oh, yes," breathed Peggy ecstatically, and then a furious flush went over her face. Was her awful adventure of that evening to be recalled now—would he guess that she—*she*, whom he had saved from the storm was the very one who had toppled the terrible rose-tree in its heavy jardinière down onto his head as if she were firing on him from a Zeppelin? So he was one of the young men she had nearly killed! What a mercy that he had not died, after all. With a crushing wave of memory, the whole moonlit scene flashed back to her, and once more the ache of uncertainty and remorse were poignant in her heart. She recalled Katherine's joyous shout that they were unharmed, and then—and then her own rush back to the window and the song they had sung just for her!

"You heard?" he was asking in pleasant interest. "Which house are you in?"

"Oh," cried Peggy in consternation. "The other one."

And then she realized by his puzzled expression and his mouth twitching into a laugh that her reply didn't make sense. "I mean I didn't hear it," she rushed headlong into the fib in her distress. "I didn't and my rose-tree is still all safe in its jardinière in my room, and—and—anyway you must realize that it was an accident!" she finished desperately.

The boy's hand went swiftly into an inner pocket and drew out of a small envelope a tiny withered rose bud, quite browned and crumply. He held it silently over to her across the table, his eyes shining with delight.

She looked at it with an attempt at impersonal curiosity, and then the corners of her mouth crinkled up, and that flickering dimple came into play and she met his eyes with enjoyment as keen as his own.

"And you all sang to me," she reminded, "and I never was so excited before."

"Every one of us kept one of the flowers," he told her. "We didn't know who dropped them to us, we could only see just the fluff of your light hair—but we carry them just for luck. They are sort of insignia of adventure—"

"I was so afraid I'd killed you," Peggy confessed, "and I thought the only thing I could do to atone would be to go and be a Red Cross nurse, and help those that other people tried to kill."

The young man threw back his head and laughed until the boys at the other tables looked over and grinned in sympathy.

Peggy hastily turned her attention to her soup and ate in silence.

When they had finished their hot chocolate, too, she glanced out at the uninviting storm and sighed.

"It must be miles back to Andrews," she said. "I suppose we'd better start. The storm makes it awfully dark, doesn't it?"

The lights had been turned on in the little tea house and in contrast to their radiant cheer and that of the dancing flames in the fireplace, the outside world with its deep gray swirl of snow flakes looked very black and chill.

"It's not so much the storm—or not that only,—it must be five o'clock, anyway, you know."

Peggy jumped. "Oh, no, how *could* it be? We won't get home in time, then."

"In time?"

"Yes, every girl has to be in her room at five-thirty so as to have plenty of time to dress for dinner at six. And the rule is partly to make it certain that we'll be in before it's very dark, too, I suppose."

"Well, we'll make a dive for it," he said. He drew out his watch, and then his face grew red with that same brilliant over-color that it had worn when she first saw him out there in the whipping winds. This time it was not the wind that had sent that flame over his forehead, chin and cheeks,—it was shame that his

sense of responsibility should not have warned him of the passing time.

"It's—half-past five *now*," he was obliged to tell her.

Peggy looked into his poor, miserable face, full of self-accusation, and with an effort of will she drew her own lips into their best smile.

"Oh, well," she said, "we've had a gorgeous time, and a few short hours ago I didn't expect ever to see another half-past five in all this world. I guess having one's life saved will be sufficient cause for delay to appease Mrs. Forest. I imagine even *she* can get the importance of that."

But in her heart she knew just about how easy it was to explain things to Mrs. Forest—about as easy as moving a mountain. Once the principal decided in favor of punishment, not all the king's horses or all the king's men could change her mind. And, oddly enough, it was the small faults that she scored most heavily. Peggy sometimes felt that a girl might steal something and yet not arouse Mrs. Forest's wrath as thoroughly as one who was late to dinner.

"You are to be trained in *manners* in my school," she often said, and it was true that with her these seemed to come before everything else. She was not so strict in regard to chaperonage and all that as the New York finishing schools; she had no need to be. The school was situated in a small and desirable town, and among her pupils were none of the vapid little Miss Foolishnesses sometimes sent away to school because their parents or guardians can't manage them at home. All her students were bright, eager, typical American girls like Peggy and Katherine and Florence, most of whom had a definite idea and plan for their lives after graduation, the majority trending collegeward. So, although Peggy was the youngest girl who would receive a diploma next June, it would not be on the score of lack of chaperonage in going to tea with a young Amherst friend that she would meet with Mrs. Forest's objection, but merely on the technical ground of not returning at the exactly appointed time.

Hastily he shook out her sweater and held it for her, then flung into his own, and jammed his cap on his head, and catching up the puppy that all this while had been lying comfortably before the fire he held the door open for her. The storm blew in to meet them as they stood there, and with a shiver of determination they strapped on their snow-shoes and struck out. "We'll just go over to the next corner, where we can get a street car—we're only a little way from Andrews by car line," the boy told her.

They were fortunate enough to catch a car at once, and all unconscious of the friendly stares of the passengers they congratulated each other on having left the tea room at exactly the right moment.

The car stopped directly in front of the Andrews gate. Their cheeks were aglow and their minds full of the afternoon's adventures rather than with their consequences. On the wide porch Peggy turned to her friend and said, "You must

go, now, and be introduced to Mrs. Forest at some other time. They're at dinner now, and she'd kill me with her own hands if I call her away. So I'll let you go and just say, 'Thank you, and I've had a nice time'—"

She smiled up at him bravely, for presentiments of her meeting with the Forest were already beginning to creep into her heart.

"Good-by," he said, and in a moment more he was swinging down the walk and Peggy softly opened the door and scurried upstairs to her room. As always happens at a time like that, the gay roar of voices in the dining-room died down as she came in, and to everyone and certainly to Mrs. Forest the slight sound of her moccasined feet on the stairs was plainly audible.

When she came down a few minutes later, glowing in a pink evening dress, Mrs. Forest's stare was like a cluster of icicles.

"No supper for Miss Parsons," she sent word by the maid, and after Peggy, mighty glad that she had just had plenty of hot soup and chocolate, had gone back to her room amid the sympathetic glances of the dining-room full of girls, the principal called that dread and clammily unpleasant thing known to boarding schools as a "house-meeting."

She herself presided, and the meeting was seldom called for any good, you may believe. Its object was rather the punishment of someone with all the sickening stages of a public investigation into her conduct first. Mrs. Forest had a way of making the girls cry in a homesick fashion at these affairs and perhaps it is hardly doing her an injustice to say that she enjoyed it. At least the girls were all perfectly convinced that it was her sport in life, and they resented particularly that their idol, Peggy, should be the subject of this one.

A deputation of girls went clattering up after the victim and brought her down, showing no further marks of perturbation than a tiny little line of uncertainty in her forehead.

"Sit here, Miss Parsons," commanded Mrs. Forest as soon as all the girls had gathered.

Peggy sank gracefully into a chair and thrust out her pink satin slippers daintily. Mrs. Forest could not know how those tired little feet ached inside those bright slippers.

"Young ladies, I have called this meeting in order that I may have it understood that in my school the rules are to be obeyed. Now I want to ask each one of you what you think the rules are for? Do you think they were made with the idea of having them obeyed? Miss Thomas, will you answer first?"

Florence felt like the most complete traitor to Peggy that she should even be questioned on such a subject when she knew the whole proceeding was aimed at her friend.

"I—don't—know—" she said miserably.

"Don't know," Mrs. Forest smiled disagreeably, "I will ask Miss Parsons what she thinks."

Peggy looked up from her contemplation of the carpet and gave a little gasp.

"Oh, I'm not in a frame of mind to think they're very important one way or another," she replied, with an entirely maddening smile of deprecation. Her dimple flashed in and out of her cheek and she met Mrs. Forest's gaze with an unperturbed calm.

"Your penalty for feeling that way—and acting as you feel is that you shall not be taken to Annapolis in the spring when all the other girls are going!" Mrs. Forest exclaimed with heat. "Does that make a difference in your attitude?"

"No," said Peggy, "for most of this afternoon I never expected to go to Annapolis anyway—or anywhere else in the world again."

The girls caught the under note of earnestness in her voice and leaned forward interestedly, excitement beginning to shine in their questioning eyes.

"I was paralyzed back there in the snow when the storm came up," she went on, a bit of the weariness that was in every limb showing forth in her voice, "I gave up expecting to come back. And then a man saved me. Never mind about Annapolis. I'm more than satisfied just as it is."

"Were you in danger from the storm, Peggy?" asked Katherine. "I was scared to pieces when I saw it coming up, but I didn't want to start a search party—and someway I thought you couldn't really get lost—we know all the places around here so well."

"But I couldn't see them," said Peggy, "and I got blown away every time I tried to turn in a new direction. A man saved me and—got me some hot chocolate, and—and I've been late to dinner before and all this fuss wasn't made over it."

"That's just the point," snapped Mrs. Forest, "you have been treated with too great lenience. If you had thought more of getting home on time you wouldn't have stopped for the hot chocolate. At least that part wasn't necessary."

"Oh, but it rather was," Peggy began, but looking at Mrs. Forest she wondered how she could be expected to understand. Could she ever have been a girl on snow-shoes, and have known the cold that gleamed in the frosty air and the hunger that comes after great exertion? No, what was the use of looking for understanding there? Peggy lightly tapped the floor with her foot.

"You may go," Mrs. Forest graciously permitted at this point, "I'm sorry, Miss Parsons," she so far unbent as to say at parting, "that you thought you were lost and had a fright, but discipline above all things—discipline, my dear. Perhaps after this we shan't have to combat your continual tardiness."

In their own room a while later Peggy threw her arms around her roommate's neck and danced her this way and that, in a manner quite out of keeping

with the tiredness that she felt.

"The greatest adventures, Katherinekins," she shouted. "Oh, listen, listen, I can hardly wait to tell you."

On releasing her friend, she proceeded to prepare for bed, saying she was too exhausted to sit up another minute. But she talked as she slipped on her kimono and folded back the couch cover from the cot bed on her side of the room.

"And, Katherine," she came to the wonderful part at last, "who do you suppose he was? One of the people we tried to kill with our rose-tree—yes, he had our rose—"

"Rose-tree?" cried Katherine, and then her face, growing whiter and whiter in its excitement, she clasped her hands together and screamed out: "The fortune teller, the fortune teller! She spoke of that—quick, Peggy, hurry, what's his name—is one of his initials H? Peggy, don't keep me in suspense a minute longer—what is his name?"

Peggy was sitting up in bed with a queer expression in her face. As Katherine finished she looked across at her with a blank expression.

"Why, I don't know his name!" she cried.

CHAPTER XI—THE INITIAL H

"Why, do you suppose I dreamed all night of mandolins?" questioned Peggy, sitting up in bed with a blanket hugged around her shoulders next morning.

"Why, because," said Katharine, "the clairvoyant woman said that she saw a young man in a college room playing a mandolin,—you remember? And he answers all the rest of her requirements, the walking in the cold, the meeting the girl—you, and the rose-tree incident. Now, Peg, did you think to ask him if he played the mandolin?"

"No," said Peggy contritely, gingerly testing the cold floor with her bare feet, "no,—and how are we going to find out now?"

"You're a fine Sherlock," cried Katherine, "but, then, it's always the Watsons of this world that do the real work while the Sherlocks get the credit."

"I have just one clue," sighed Peggy humbly.

"Well?"

"The boys at the tea house called him Jim."

"*Jim!*" repeated Katherine in keen disappointment and disgust. "Not an H in it!"

"No," Peggy agreed, "and there are so many Jims."

"M.—Jim, Amherst—fine lot of information," murmured Katherine.

There really didn't seem to be much that could be done, so the girls went to recitations as on other days. But they could not help the feeling that they had really stumbled upon the very person they had made it the business of their year to find, and so their answers to the professors' questions were often somewhat vague and wandering, and once when the mathematics teacher asked Peggy to draw a right angle triangle, she said she hadn't studied her mandolins to-day, and sat blushing furiously throughout the rest of the lesson.

It was late in the afternoon when one of the maids called Peggy to the telephone. She ran down the stairs with a wild and unaccountable hope in her heart—if she should only have the opportunity to find out everything so that Katherine wouldn't have so much cause to be ashamed of her—if she could only ask him if he *did* have a mandolin—

"Hello," she was saying breathlessly into the mouth-piece. "Hello—?"

"Miss Parsons—" a laughing voice came over the wire and Peggy instantly framed her lips to her question. It should not get away from her this time—all this news that she must have.

"I called up Mrs. Forest and asked if the young lady I rescued from the storm was all right after her chill. I told her I was the one who had been fortunate enough to be there, and she said, quite politely, that Miss Parsons wasn't hurt in the least by the experience. That's how I got your name."

But all this while Peggy was interpolating wildly: "Do you play the mandolin? Do you play the mandolin?"

And now that the voice was pausing for her answer, her words came clear and distinct, "Do you play the mandolin?"

"Do I *what*?" in astonishment.

"Do you play the mandolin?" monotonously.

"Why, why—how funny your first remarks always are. Yesterday in the storm when I nearly ran you down you cried out 'Friday'—it didn't seem to have a bit of sense to it,—and now right while I'm trying to tell you something you ask me in a parlor conversational tone if I—if I——"

"Well, *do* you?" she insisted desperately.

"Yes, but—"

"Oh, goody, goody, then you're the one!" "What one?" mightily puzzled—and a trifle impatient.

"I can't tell you yet—I don't even know your name."

"Why, of course, I want you to know my name, that was partly why I called up," in an injured voice. "It's Jim Smith."

"Only that?" her disappointment was keen.

"James H. Smith, if you must have it all," somewhat surlily.

"O—oh," there went singing across the wires the breath of Peggy's rapture. "Isn't that lovely."

"No one ever thought it was particularly so before," the young man answered. "I'm glad you like it. Now, what is all of your name?"

"Peggy is the part you don't already know," she confessed, "and I like it better than the last part."

"I do, too," he chimed in heartily, "I won't need to say the last part at all any more, will I?"

"N-no," Peggy laughed. "Considering who you are. Only of course you don't know yet, do you?"

"Don't know who I am? Well, now, I always had a faint suspicion every time I looked in the glass that I was myself."

"I've said everything wrong," apologized Peggy sadly. "But you'll understand after I've seen you sometime again and told you about everything."

"Anything you say is all right with me, anyway," the voice answered quickly. "I wouldn't have you think for a minute that it wasn't. After the game way you almost went through death by paralysis—"

Here they both laughed, until the wires sang again and again.

"May I come over to-morrow afternoon and—meet the ogre and get her approval of me, and all that?" the man's voice asked at length.

"Yes, and you can meet somebody nicer than the ogre, too," generously promised Peggy, "my dearest-in-the-world room-mate, Katherine Foster. Oh, she is the splendidest girl! And the prettiest! And the smartest, too."

"To-morrow afternoon, then? Awfully glad that you're all recovered from yesterday—good-by."

Peggy murmured her good-by and flew back upstairs to tell the wonderful news to Katherine—that he was, that he *was*, that he WAS!

"I can hardly wait to tell Mr. Huntington," cried Katherine, "can you?"

"Oh," said Peggy doubtfully, "I don't think we have quite enough to go on yet to tell him about it, do you? *We* think it is true but, after all, we have only the word of that crazy black velvet fortune teller. His middle name begins with H, but that doesn't tell us what it is, it might not be—be—*that*, you know, after all."

"Huntington," smiled Katherine. "You are afraid to say Huntington."

"I'm not. Huntington, Huntington, Huntington!"

And then as if it had been the magic signal for calling up the real Mr. Hunt-

ington on the spot, one of the maids brought up his card at the moment and said that he was awaiting the young ladies in the drawing-room.

"It will be hard not to tell him," sighed Peggy longingly. "I'd like to have him know that there was just a gleam of hope, anyway, you know, of finding—"

"Let's be careful, because there'd just be somebody else disappointed besides us if it didn't come out right. Peggy, sure as I am that we're on the right—what do you call it—scent—nevertheless, we must remember that almost every man in college plays a mandolin—at least half do,—and H. stands for so many names: Hill, and Hough, and Hail, and, oh, dozens and hundreds and for all I know thousands. No, it isn't a clear case yet, so don't raise that poor old man's hopes."

Down the stairs they went sedately, arm in arm. Mr. Huntington had visited them at the school several times since their return from Katherine's home. Sometimes he called upon as many of the entire sixty girls as were about, but more often he asked simply for Peggy and Katherine.

"I'm awfully glad to see you, Mr. Huntington," Peggy cried, running impulsively forward, "especially to-day."

"Peggy," warned Katherine.

"I mean after yesterday, you goosey," she frowned at her room-mate, and then in a very audible aside, "did you think I would give it all away like that?" She turned to their guest. "You see I was nearly lost in the snow yesterday, and from thinking I'd never see any of my friends again to—to seeing them, you know, is a very pleasant jump."

"Well, I heard about it from one of the girls who was passing my house and stopped in to tell me about your adventure and I hurried over to see if you're surely feeling all right and how you'd like a little dinner party at the Holland Hotel in celebration of your escape?—you and seven or eight classmates?"

"Oh, wouldn't we?" cried Peggy. "I was wondering how I was going to stand dinner in this place to-night. You know they wouldn't let me have any last night and if your gr—I mean if the young man that rescued me hadn't given me some soup before that I'd have starved."

Katherine's foot reached for Peggy's to administer rebuke for what she had so nearly said. "It will be lovely for us to have the dinner party, Mr. Huntington," she put in hastily to cover the mistake her room-mate had made. "Sometimes, just eating here, we do get awfully hungry."

"I never saw you girls when you *weren't* hungry," laughed their friend. "It was your continually thinking about something to eat that first led to our acquaintance, wasn't it?"

The dinner party that evening was a great success. The girls loved nothing better than to dress up in state and go in a crowd to the hotel for dinner, but it

was an event that came seldom in their lives. They talked so much about the wonderful lobster and the crisp French fried potatoes and all the bewildering array of little extras that the great subject in the minds of the two principal guests was forgotten for the time, and whether H. stood for Holt or Hamilton became a matter of no great moment.

When, however, the card of Mr. James H. Smith was brought to the girls the following afternoon interest quickly revived and they went downstairs with their best detective manners.

"This is the man whose dog I saved in the storm and who, to show his appreciation, saved me," laughed Peggy by way of introduction. "And this,"—presenting her room-mate, "is the nicest girl in the world—whom I chance to room with."

"My only claim to distinction is rooming with Peggy," smiled Katherine, offering her hand. "We're glad to see you over here, Mr. Smith—and are you going to show me the withered rose, too? Because the rose-tree was mine as much as Peggy's—"

Peggy left Katherine laughing over the brown petals with Jim, while she went to ask Mrs. Forest to come in and meet their friend. "I think he's a relative of Mr. Huntington's," Peggy whispered just as Mrs. Forest rose to accompany her, in order to assure her friend of a hearty welcome, "but I'm not sure."

"Oh," said Mrs. Forest. "I shall be very glad indeed to make the acquaintance of any relative of Mr. Huntington's—and you didn't tell me that before, Peggy—"

"I didn't think of it before," admitted truthful Peggy.

Mrs. Forest sailed into the room, very impressive and rustling in her afternoon silks, and greeted the young student with unusual cordiality.

"I don't see anything so clammy about her," he thought to himself; she almost seemed to retain his hand in extra friendliness, as if he were some favorite nephew.

"Well, well," she was saying, "there is a resemblance, too, now I look at you. Yes, I think I should have known you anywhere. You have a relative to be proud of in Mr. Huntington," she continued, "you are a relative of his, I believe?"

Peggy clapped her hand over her mouth to choke back the exclamation of dismay that rose from her heart, and two slow tears of mortification gathered in Katherine's gentle eyes and rolled brightly down her cheeks at the awful precipitation of events Mrs. Forest had caused.

But the boy was answering and the girls could hardly believe their ears as they heard him say "Huntington? Why, no, I am afraid you have confused me with someone else. I am not sure that I have ever heard the name. I am not related to any one owning it, in any case."

Oh, tumbling air castles! oh, crashing dreams of happy endings! oh, sick and weak and trembling disappointment, and blank, meaningless future!

Peggy clasped her hands in her lap and leaned forward and stared at the boy with saddest reproach. He had certainly led them to believe he was the missing Huntington heir; he had been on their campus when the rose-tree fell, he had admitted playing the mandolin, he had an initial H., all just as the fortune teller had said, and yet he was no more Mr. Huntington's grandson than she was!

The tears were falling so rapidly now on Katharine's cheeks that she could no longer keep from being generally observed. She sprang up, and with her handkerchief to her eyes groped her way from the room, and they heard her a moment later stumbling up the stairs.

Jim looked in bewilderment to the door through which she had gone and then back to the stricken Peggy with an expression of "What have I done?" for he thought surely the girls must have given some impression of him to their principal for a reason of their own and now he had ruthlessly destroyed the fabric of their tale.

Mrs. Forest herself looked vague and uncomfortable, and after a few banal remarks, excused herself on the ground that some of the teachers were expected for tea and she must be in her room to receive them. After she had swished out Peggy drew a long breath.

"Then you aren't—?" she questioned heartbrokenly, "then you aren't, at all?"

"Let me into the secret," pleaded the miserable boy. "I always knew girls were mysterious persons, and that they lived in all sorts of unreal adventures. Am I scheduled to pass for an incognito villain of some sort—or—or prince—or anything? Because I tell you frankly, I ought to have been coached for my part beforehand if that's the case. I can't be expected to know all these things by intuition. Now I've made that pretty Katherine cry, and I angered you, and disgusted Mrs. Forest and yet, cross my heart, and as I live, I've been behaving just as nicely as I know how. Please, Peggy, clear up the mystery. I've been working so hard at trig just before exams that I'm in no state to go on solving problems."

"You see," said Peggy, her mouth going into a smile, and the absurdity of it all beginning to send a sparkle of fun to her eyes, "it isn't your fault. We thought you were the missing grandson of our friend Mr. Huntington, and we've been Sherlocking since last Thanksgiving day to find him. So when you tallied up with what the fortune teller told us—"

"Fortune teller—Oh, I see!" laughed the young man.

"And then, when your middle initial proved to be H.—why, of *course*, we thought that stood for Huntington, and I'm disappointed to death that it doesn't.

By the way, what *does* it stand for?" she asked curiously, pausing abruptly in her explanation.

She could not have been prepared for the curious expression that came into Jim's face at this point. His head drooped and three distinct series of flushes and palings swept his good-looking countenance.

"I don't—know," he said after a time, in a low voice.

"Don't—know?" screamed Peggy with a rising inflection and returning hope. "Why don't you know? Please forgive my awful rudeness, but if you only should prove to be the right one, after all, you know, think what it would mean to Mr. Huntington."

"My mother died a long time ago," the young man said. "I was just a small boy. I was to be brought up and educated for one purpose—that of making a great deal of money to—to—well, I might as well tell you, Peggy, I can trust your understanding,—to pay back a debt to my mother's father—"

He noticed that Peggy's look of reproach and pain and anxiety had all faded away and in its place was beaming unmitigated delight. It was an expression which seemed to him strangely out of accord with the story he was telling, but, nevertheless, if he could give pleasure to this odd little flyaway creature by the recital of his life's tragedies, he was willing to do so.

"When I should have amassed a great fortune I was to be told to whom to take it, but until an amount she specified had been gotten together in toto, I wasn't to know my grandfather's address for fear I'd want to send him the money we owed bit by bit. And, indeed, I should have wanted that, but for some reason she was unwilling to have anything but the entire huge sum of the debt turned over to him. No part payments in her plan. My father had borrowed the money for some oil ventures out west, and after a good many years those lands have turned out as good as father's wildest dreams, and I have the money to return to my grandfather—every cent of it—but, listen, Peggy, even you sitting there laughing, with your eyes shining, can understand the tragedy and irony of this—my mother died without ever telling me my grandfather's name!"

"O—oh," said Peggy, the smile leaving her face as if it had been suddenly washed away. "That must have bothered you many times."

Then she looked straight ahead of her thoughtfully for a minute. "It's strange that the oil wells turned out all right, after all," she murmured absently. "I'm sure Mr. Huntington never dreamed they would."

But the boy, swept back into the past by his own story, was raptly gazing into the fireplace and paid no attention to her remark whatever.

"I don't think it as romantic, your turning out to be rich," Peggy continued, "as if you had turned out to be poor, the way I thought you would, and then Mr. Huntington would have taken you right in and said the debt was nothing, and he

would see that you had everything you wanted. Yes, that would have been the ideal way."

The boy glanced up at her and smiled whimsically.

"Always that Mr. Huntington," he said, "who is he?"

"Why, your gr—I mean a friend of mine and Katherine's," finished she lamely.

"And some oil wells figured in his history, too?" the boy wanted to know. "You seem to be in everybody's confidence, Peggy, though I must say I don't myself see what there is about you to make people suppose you'd sympathize with them—when you sit there and beam as happily through their tragedies as if they were telling you about a picnic."

"I'm sorry—" breathed Peggy, and a real hurt crept into her voice.

Just at this minute Katherine came into the room again, her tears dried and the lines of unhappiness smoothed out of her forehead. She sat down gracefully and tried to appear at ease, as if nothing had happened. Both Peggy and Jim wondered at the self-control she displayed in making a reappearance after her grief-stricken exit, but they could not know that Mrs. Forest had tiptoed up to her room and compelled the poor child to come down again, saying that it was a terrible and foolish breach of manners for her to have left in any such silly way, and that the only way she could atone for it was to go down and think how much better it would have been if she had behaved sensibly in the first place.

So Katherine made a few polite remarks, all the time wondering what Peggy's happy air meant, and thinking her very shallow indeed to be able to recover so quickly from so bitter a disappointment as they had just been through.

"I wonder?" she heard Peggy say, to her increasing astonishment, "would you think it very queer if I asked you to come right over to Mr. Huntington's with us for a few minutes? Your story and his are certainly an awfully unusual coincidence, if they aren't something more. By that I mean, if they aren't one and the same story. And since you said your middle initial didn't stand for anything that you were aware of, mightn't it stand for Huntington?"

"My mother gave my name in at school as James H. Smith, that's all I know about that part. I usually sign it Holliday, because I like that name. It might be Huntington. Of course I'll go and see this old man with you, if that's the way you'd rather spend the afternoon."

CHAPTER XII—THE MEETING

They could see Mr. Huntington sitting in the library, reading, as they came up the snowy walk. The room looked warm and peaceful and there was a contented expression on his face as his white head bowed over the book.

The wind was howling around them and it slapped the tattered remnants of vines against the porch as it had done on that first day Peggy worked her daring heart into a state courageous enough to carry her to the very door of Gloomy House. Inside, in contrast to the bluster without, the library looked as cozy and homelike as a room could well be when only one person lives in it.

"Peggy," said Katherine, "we may be going to disturb his peace for nothing."

"Pshaw," said Peggy, the light of high adventure shining in her eyes, "I'd rather have all sorts of surprises and disappointments and hurts and aches and shocks in my life than just have it all a kind of dull monotony, and I always give other people credit for feeling the same way. I guess Mr. Huntington would rather have a *chance* of everything's coming out right than never know about it at all."

"I agree with Peggy, whatever her wise little meaning is," laughed Jim. "I think he would, too."

They were on the porch by this time, and Peggy saw Mr. Huntington's head lifted inquiringly as the sound of their footsteps reached his ears. Then as the old bell jangled through the house he rose hastily and laying his book face downward on the table came slowly to the door.

For some seconds he fumbled with the lock and then threw back the door, while a sudden look of glad surprise went across his face at the sight of Peggy and Katherine. At first he did not notice their companion. The three entered the hall and then Peggy said, "Mr. Huntington, this is Mr. Smith, and I wanted you to meet him for a very special reason."

"Yes?" the old man said, shaking the other's hand, "I'm very glad, I'm sure. Come into the library, all of you, and tell me all about it. Now, what can I do for the young man?"

For Mr. Huntington had no thought in his head but that here was some young football player who needed funds, or the representative of some charitable organization that wanted a contribution. And, since Peggy brought him, he should have it.

"Oh," said Peggy, with a little pout. "You're always thinking that. And I don't blame you, for I suppose lots of people do want things and come and ask you for them. But Jim is awfully rich, and—and—" she broke off helplessly and glanced beseechingly at Katherine for help as to how to go on.

For the last few minutes Mr. Huntington had been studying Jim with a curious intentness, and a startled expression had even begun to creep into his face. With a vague gesture, as of one who is trying to recall some long gone

memory, he drew his hand back and forth across his forehead. There had been ghosts of a kind in Huntington House right up to the time when Peggy and her fifty-nine little friends had driven them out forever. But there had never been a visible one before, never more than a haunting and accusing thought, not a red-cheeked, fresh-faced young man that somehow did not make Mr. Huntington think of a young man at all, as he sat watching him, but rather made him recall a woman, who had defied him in a moment of pride and gone away from him and out of his life, leaving no trace.

There was something about the finely drawn young mouth. Something about the blueness of the eyes—Mr. Huntington started and addressed the boy in a sharp voice.

"You remind me very much of—of a relative of mine," he said abruptly, "you said your name was Smith?—or Peggy said so—Of course, there are a thousand Smiths about here, but Peggy said she had brought you here for a very special reason. I must beg you to tell me what it is at once. This relative of mine married a man named Smith. I don't think I mentioned his name to you, Peggy?"

"No," said Peggy, shaking her golden head. "If you had I'd have found him lots sooner!"

The old man looked quickly from one to another of the little group, and in a breathless rush of words Peggy told him all the similarities between his history and that of the young man.

"And if it doesn't all *match*," she cried, "then I'll eat my Greek books!"

Mr. Huntington walked over to his desk,—a big, ancient affair with a dozen little curious drawers that pulled out by means of bright glass knobs. From the smallest of these he drew forth tremblingly all that it contained, a single photograph, and approaching the boy, held it out to him.

"Have you ever seen that face?" he asked tensely.

With a troubled air the young man took it and gazed straight into its pictured eyes, his face tightening as he did so.

"It's—my mother," he said simply, after a pause. "And I have a picture just like this one. Is it true, then, sir, all this romance these girls have given me a part in—and are you indeed my grandfather?"

There was a note of awe in his voice as he rose before the old man, holding out his hand.

The realization that a life-old dream, long since given up and buried in his mind with the things that were not to be, was actually coming true, that the very picture the library fire had conjured up for him evening after evening as he sat alone and lonely, gazing into its depths,—this, with its sudden rush of emotion, brought a kind of illumination to the figure of the old man as he stood there, and seemed to shed for a moment the passing glory of youth once more over his face.

Swiftly and silently Peggy went to Katherine and took her hand and, with their fingers on their lips, the two stole to the library door and thence, unnoticed, from the room. A few minutes later they were running down the frosty walk, their eyes happy and their cheeks aglow, and their hearts kept time to their running feet.

"If our mathematics only solved as nicely as that," Peggy murmured longingly. And Katherine pressed her hand, and they danced along on the sidewalk until the people passing turned wistfully to gaze after them, wondering how it would seem to have such an overflow of spirits that one must run and skip and laugh out loud to express them.

"Let's have all the girls we can pack into the room in for a midnight celebration," suggested Katherine as soon as they had flung off their coats in their own room.

"Good girl," chirruped Peggy. "About ten people—our most special own crowd. Hurry up and be ready for dinner—and is there any butter out on the window ledge?"

Katherine craned her eager head out of the window into the cold. "Not a bit," she said. "We have a can of condensed milk left, though."

"Fine," cried Peggy, counting off on her fingers the butter, the sugar, and the alcohol, the butter, the sugar, and the alcohol—"for I don't suppose there is any alcohol, is there, friend infant?"

"'Fraid not," sighed Katherine.

From this an outsider might suppose that the girls were planning to concoct some sort of intoxicating beverage for their innocent little midnight party. But it was only the preliminary preparation for the inevitable fudge. And the alcohol was to *run* the chafing-dish, and not to go *into* it.

Just before dinner, Peggy, asparkle in her golden satin, so nearly the color of her lovely hair, went shouting through the corridor, "Alcohol! Al—co—hol!"

And behind the closed doors every girl knew that somewhere there was to be a party and, recognizing the voice, ten of them guessed that they would be invited. It was not until her second trip, however, that her call brought results in the form of an opening door and a nice, full bottle of denatured alcohol generously thrust into her hand by one of the hopeful ten.

"You know me, Peggy," hinted the owner of the contribution. "I'm fudge hungry, too. What time is the happiness?"

"When you're invited you'll find out," retorted Peggy, hurrying off with the alcohol and humming a little tune.

When the girls went in to dinner a mysterious whisper went round. It was "Save your butter, and ask for two helps."

The butter balls remained untouched on each of ten plates as a result, and

were finally gathered together very surreptitiously onto one plate just before the dishes were cleared for dessert. Under the auspices of Peggy this one dish was covered with a saucer and sneaked down into the folds of her napkin.

When the sauce that they invariably had for dinner on this night of the week was set before them with a general dish of granulated sugar to make it sweet enough, she pointed toward the sugar bowl and several of the girls looked miserable, because sugar is an awfully hard thing to take away unobserved.

But tea was served, and three of the girls asked for just cups and saucers because they liked to fix theirs up themselves, they would put in the sugar and cream and would then pass them for the tea to be poured in. But the empty cups safe in their possession, they each asked earnestly for the sugar, and slowly and painstakingly, talking all the time so as to divert attention, they shoveled in spoonful after spoonful until the cup was full. Then with a sigh of relief at a difficult duty well done, they sank limply back in their chairs, only being sure to remember to be passing something when any of the waitresses approached, so that their hands would cover the too-sweet tea-cups with nothing in but sugar.

"Won't you have some wafers?" Florence Thomas would ask Helen Remington in a worried voice every now and then, lifting the plate and offering it to her solicitously. Of course, the girls weren't sitting at Mrs. Forest's table this week, or it never could have been managed and they would not have thought of trying. But just by themselves it wasn't impossible. When dinner was over and their principal and the teachers had moved toward the drawing room, they, with wild sidelong looks and terrified glances this way and that, sniggering conversation that didn't mean anything, gathered up their trophies, hugging them as close as might be, and covering them with folds of satin gown and little nervous hands. Then, following, wherever possible, some girl who was going uprightly forth with nothing that she shouldn't have, the little guilty procession filed out and rushed for the stairs, stumbling and laughing in their haste and leaving, all unnoticed by them, a tiny tell-tale trail of sugar up the broad varnished stairs.

All these savings were taken to the room where Peggy and Katherine lived, and then the girls went their separate ways serenely, some to study and some to bed, each knowing that she would be summoned at the proper time to partake of the fruit of her spoils.

"What shall we do, are we sleepy or do we want to sit up a while and talk?" Peggy and Katherine, the hostesses-to-be, consulted each other. It was characteristic that they used the plural, for it always happened that they were either both sleepy or both wide awake.

"Well," Katherine suggested, after a few moments of deliberation, "I say that we tuck all up with nice soft quilts and talk. We can talk about the Huntingtons and how mean Mrs. Forest is sometimes, and—and everything, until it's time

to start the chafing-dish and call the girls." "Midnight" didn't mean the stroke of twelve to them at all. It was any time in the late, late hours, along about half-past ten or eleven, say.

In their pink and blue quilts they talked and talked in the darkness, for, of course, Mrs. Forest and the teachers mustn't see any light gleaming under their doors after ten o'clock. Soon their eyes grew heavy and the thoughts of fudge began to mix themselves up curiously with dreams.

They were two little tumbled over figures, fast asleep, Peggy on her couch and Katherine on hers, when the indignant guests, wondering why they had not been summoned to the party and deciding to come without waiting for the formal bidding, strode in upon them, with much flutter of silk and crepe kimono, and patter, patter of slippered feet.

"Well, did you ever!" cried Florence Thomas. "Light the candles somebody; Doris start the chafing-dish, and Helen measure out that butter,—"

"Is—it—time—to—get—up?" came in muffled accents from Katherine's couch, and a moment later a candle gleam flickered into her drowsy eyes. "Oh, my stars, girls!" she cried, sitting up at once and staring around wildly, "do you think this is a nice way to come to a party?"

Peggy was breathing evenly, and she turned fretfully to the wall when Florence shook her. "Oh, very well, Miss Fudge Party," Florence murmured, "we'll see if you won't wake up,—" and she went over to the wash pitcher behind the screen and dipped a wash-cloth in its cold contents.

"Ha ha," she laughed, in imitation of a stage villain. Wringing out her weapon she approached the couch of the unconscious sleeper, full of delighted anticipation.

Just as the terrible and efficient awakener was about to slap down on its victim's placid face the victim opened her eyes and looked up at the plotter reproachfully.

"Oh, I heard your fiendish plot—I heard the water sousing around," she said, "but I thought there was no use waking up till the last minute,—I was in the middle of such a delicious dream."

"Well," sighed Florence, much wounded, because, of course, you can't put a wet wash-cloth on a waking person's face. "All that energy wasted. Girls, do hurry up the fudge, so that I can comfort myself for having been 'foiled again.'"

The room, with the little whispering group of girls in it, some on the couches and some on the floor, garbed in all the delicate shades of boudoir attire, pale blue, pink, and rose, saffron yellow, lavender and dainty green; with the tiny spurts of golden candle flame dotted here and there on table and mantlepiece; with the hot, chocolate-smelling fudge bubbling away in the chafing-dish, looked like some fairy meeting place, with all the adorable fairies assembled.

When the fudge was done they put the pan out of the window and hoped that it wouldn't fall down and all be lost. It didn't, and, before it had fairly cooled, they cut it and lifted the squares in their eager fingers,—great, rich, soft, wonderful squares of delight,—and ate them with greedy pleasure, down to the last, last crumb.

CHAPTER XIII—SPRING AND ANNAPOLIS

In the days that followed after the winter snow's melting it seemed to Peggy that she was seeing the world by sunlight for the first time. The wonderful new lights that fell on everything, making even a roof or a clay bank a beautiful thing to behold, the subtle perfume that came drifting out on the breeze over orchard and woodland, the pink blossoms on the apple trees, all these things sent her about with her head in the clouds and a happiness at her heart that was just the joy of living.

The girls sauntered now on their way to classes, instead of hurrying and scurrying to escape the cold. They sang on their way to chapel, they lingered on the porch steps after luncheon, every Saturday they planned some kind of tramp or picnic that was different, very, from the gay, romping affairs of the fall. These parties, or "bats," as they always called them, not knowing at all that that word was considered of rather vulgar significance out in the world, were long, lazy, enjoyable affairs, where groups went together with arms twined about each other's shoulders, always singing, singing. They sang Yale songs and Harvard songs and Princeton songs, then each group of girls sang the songs of the college they themselves hoped to attend, and wound up with the Andrews favorites.

"People along here would think us German soldiers, the way we sing as we go," said Peggy. "Oh, isn't it all heavenly, heavenly. Music with us that we make ourselves, and apple blossom petals as sweet as roses dropping down on us from the trees wherever we go, and all the world—ours—"

To her own surprise a sob choked her, and the other girls did not laugh, but looked away with the tolerant dreaminess the spring had given them.

The great topic of every spring at Andrews was Annapolis, and, as soon

as they had thoroughly exhausted the subject, Annapolis all over again. Which girls were to go and which must stay at home?

"Oh, girls, the marine band!" one group would remind another as they met going to and from classes.

"And, oh, that gymnasium floor—" the other group would sing out.

Peggy dreamed of nothing but picturesque white buildings and uniformed young middies drilling, and wonderful girls in wonderful gowns dancing, dancing with wonderful representatives of the navy.

Not for her—oh, not for her, this one desirable thing of all the world that the others were to have! Of course, she had wickedly been saved from a storm—but it seemed to her now very unjust that this should stand in her way, now especially when the snow was all gone and there was nothing left to remind her of how grateful she ought to be for that past favor of fortune. Was getting saved and being served to hot chocolate such a crime, then? Hadn't any other girl ever had the same experience? Well, if she hadn't, Peggy pitied her rather than envied her, she knew that. Oh, Mrs. Forest, what a narrow-minded woman she was. Just as if she had been born a hundred years old as she was now and had never known any girlhood, Peggy mused. Oh, Annapolis, Annapolis! Oh, dear, oh, dear, oh, dear!

Nothing would ever make up—nothing ever or *ever*! If she could only go and look on, even, she would be satisfied. Must she see the others fluffing up their ruffles and pinning on their sashes and starting off with bobbing rose-buds at their waists while she remained behind, her nose pressed flat to the window, to see them off and the tears coursing sadly down her face? It was a heartbreaking picture and Peggy threw herself on the bed and cried over it until the thought came to her that if she kept this up she would go through the grief of it all many times before it actually came to her to bear it, and perhaps for the occasion itself there would be no tears left.

She wiped her eyes and saw that they were not, after all, so very red, and no permanent wrinkles had been made in her face from screwing it up so hard. She decided that she'd just pretend she was going instead of continually dwelling on the fact that she wasn't. She got out her lovely little frock her aunt had recently sent her to be her best through the spring term. It was a deep, sweet pink—Peggy called it her candy dress—and tenderly she smoothed the dainty chiffon tunic over the crisp taffeta slip. There is a balm just in the touch of pretty clothes to dry the tears of any girl or woman unless her grief is very deep. Peggy felt the color stealing back into her cheeks, and her eyes were a-shine with admiration. The very way the dress fell, all fairy-like and light, from her fingers when she lifted away her hand, the glow that the silk gave back, the cool feeling of the silver bead fringe that went around the sleeves,—Peggy would have had to be far

less susceptible to the lure of feminine finery than she was if she had not caught her breath with pure joy in the possession of such a gown.

There are pinks and pinks, some beautiful shades and others not so lovely. But silk stockings will often take the loveliest pink of all, and Peggy's were delicately tinted and gleamy and did justice to the dress with which they were to be worn. Her little slippers had high heels, and how she reveled in them! After the flat heels they were obliged to wear every day at Andrews the dignified height and the curving grace of these were a rest and a delight to the eye. They were all of pink satin, just a shade deeper than the stockings, and were decorated with tiny handwrought gold buckles that glinted and flashed in the light like a cluster of yellow diamonds.

"Oh, tra, la," sang Peggy, handling them, "oh, tra, la."

And her pleasure in living rushed back full force, for, after all, these things were hers and even if there was to be no Annapolis, she would have the satisfaction of knowing how she *might* have looked if she could have gone.

That night, when the girls discussed every detail of the trip, even to the train they were to take and what they were to wear as traveling suits, Peggy found that she was able to join in without tears and without bitterness and help them make their plans perfect. The girls were overwhelmed by the generosity of her attitude, and marveled at her cheerful spirit.

"There's one thing, Peggy," said Helen Remington across the table, "if you were going there wouldn't be a chance for the rest of us. There'd just be a general stampede in your direction and *we'd* look on alone and unnoticed."

The other girls nodded. Peggy thought of the dear pink dress and those wondrous slippers, and in the egotism of her youth she thought it might be so, after all.

It was one day off, at last. Even Mrs. Forest was practicing a peaches-and-cream, prunes-and-prisms, butter-wouldn't-melt-in-her-mouth manner for the occasion. She was very kind to all the girls, and was careful not to hurt the feelings of the few culprits who had to stay at home, by references in their presence to the good times the others expected.

"If I *were* going, I'd wear this brown taffeta suit down there on the train," mused Peggy, "and these bronze shoes. My, I think it would be fine going down there on the train—oh, dear, oh dear, I'm afraid I'm going to cry again over it, and it isn't time yet. Time enough when I hear the taxis whirring off with them inside. How can Katherine be so happy in going when I have to stay behind? I'd never go a step if she were in my place. Never in the whole world! Oh,—de—ar!"

If Katherine had been taking pleasure in the contemplation of a good time that did not include Peggy it would have been very unlike her indeed. But, while Peggy had been sentimentally weeping before the pink gown in their room at

Andrews, she had been as busy as might be with plans to make everything come out all right. And it was perfectly true that if she had been unable to bring about the desired result, she would not have gone herself, but would have developed a headache at the last minute that would have compelled her to remain at home with her injured room-mate.

Several times she had run in lonely haste up the walk of Huntington House to hold conference with the owner and his grandson. For, as she put it, nobody could hope to do anything with Forest unless they had a "pull," and Mr. Huntington was the only person she knew who had one and might be expected to exercise it in a case like this.

"Threaten her with the gymnasium," begged Katherine. "Tell her Peggy has changed her mind about giving up the money for a gymnasium for such a mean horrid school as she is making of our dear old Andrews. Tell her that you'll write to the boys at Annapolis and tell them that Forest keeps her prettiest girls at home and thinks just the ordinary ones are good enough for them. And then let her see how quickly the yearly invitation to bring down some of the girls will be renewed. Why, they'll never consent to hear Andrews mentioned in their presence again." She was becoming vindictive in the extreme, and Mr. Huntington sat back and laughed at her.

But, laughing or not, he promised to try his hand at appeasing Mrs. Forest, and this was just what Katherine had wanted, so she forgave him his mirth at her expense.

Mr. Huntington was seen to come up on the porch at Andrews a few hours later, and the girls wondered how many of them he would ask for. Imagine their surprise, therefore, when he did not even send up word to Katherine and Peggy, but remained in solitary consultation with their principal, and finally walked off without a backward and upward glance at the window full of friendly figures waiting to wave at him.

He left Mrs. Forest in a sad state of mind. But there was only one way out of it—and that was to trudge up the broad staircase and fill Peggy's heart with wild delight by the remission of her sentence.

This she did with what grace she could muster, and it must be admitted there was a guilty feeling of not deserving it when Peggy, impelled by the sudden rise in her emotional temperature, flung herself upon her quondam enemy and kissed her on the lips.

"There, there, child," murmured the much-softened principal. "I'm sure you'll be a credit to the school, and now I want you to forget everything but the good time. What dress shall you wear, dear? What, that? Oh, it is beautiful. Your aunt is a very charming woman, my dear, and possesses excellent taste. I hope it will be very becoming to you."

"Hope!" cried Peggy to Katherine as soon as she had gone, "she hopes. Why, Katherine, any living person with eyes in their head could see that it *will* be!"

So it happened that when the rest of the girls were packing their suit-cases with joyous exclamations over everything they put in, Peggy, too, was packing hers. And when the happy party stepped into its several cabs, she was at, last triumphantly wearing the very brown taffeta that she thought ideal for the train, and her face was as beaming as the spring morning. What chattering went on inside those jolting cabs, what hopes, what surmises, what anticipations filled those youthful hearts!

When they stepped out at the station, a breathless boy from the florist's ran up to the group panting out, "Miss Parsons, where is Miss Parsons, please? I ran over to the school but I got there just too late."

And when Peggy, her face flushing with surprise and pleasure, admitted that she was the one sought, he eagerly handed her, not one box, but two, and amid the excitement of the crowding girls, Peggy unwrapped them then and there. One was fragrant with the most generous bunch of violets she had ever seen, tied with the daintiest lavender ribbon and thrust through with a violet pin so that she might transfer the glowing beauty of them from the box and tissue wrappings to her coat at once. The other box was white with lilies of the valley, and Peggy buried her bright face in their sweetness ecstatically. Then she bethought her to look for cards.

"Because, of course, magical as it seems, getting here like this just as I am about to start, and not knowing a single person I'd dream would send me any flowers, still, I suppose somebody *did* like me enough to do it. So I'll—just—see—"

Her inquiring fingers slid inside the envelope that came with the lilies of the valley.

"Mr. Huntington," she read. Then with increasing excitement she opened the other little envelope and her eyes danced as she read that card.

"James Huntington Smith."

"Oh, how lovely of them, how lovely," she cried. And then and there with hasty fingers, she mingled the lilies of the valley in with the violets, and gleefully pinned on the whole gorgeous if somewhat too conspicuous bunch. In stories, the girls who receive flowers divide them up among their friends. But in life, how seldom, how seldom! With a finer appreciation of the intentions of those who sent them, they are quite delightedly selfish with them, and almost any real live girl would have combined two bunches, if they were flowers that went well together, as Peggy did, and would have worn them that way, and been proud to do it, too.

There is something about the wearing of flowers sent by a really interesting person that just tips the whole day with a kind of satisfied glory. Peggy's manner instantly took on a lovely graciousness and sweetness, for she was wearing the evidence that two people liked her and wanted her to have a good time, and it behooved her to live up to the added beauty the flowers lent her.

It was a very long ride down to their destination, and Peggy had time to conjure up in her mind all the pictures she had ever seen of men in the navy, and battleships, and cannons, and such warlike objects. She thrilled to the thought of such a life, with its roving over the whole world after school was done, in those great gray floating forts of cruisers with their long sinister guns always ready for whatever might deserve their cruel attention. Even when women vote, she thought, there would be no such glory of open sea for them. There would still be heights on which men would dwell where women could never expect to climb. Well, came the comforting thought, but the women could go and dance with these wonders that were afraid of nothing! They could be waited on by them, too, and served to ices! My, my! Well, it wasn't so bad after all. Peggy began to feel that everything in the world was pretty well balanced after all. And she was glad that she lived in so fine a place, and that she was young and nice looking, and that she had a pink dress in her suit-case.

When they came to Annapolis at last and the party descended, all excitement, Peggy could hardly wait to appear at the scene of the coming festivities. But they were taken first to their rooms at the inn and there they left their baggage and powdered their noses, and fluffed their hair and then sallied forth once more, this time to go through the archway right into the Annapolis grounds, with the white buildings just as Peggy had dreamed, and the midshipmen and girls strolling and laughing together along the walks. They went to the reception room while Mrs. Forest sent up their cards. It had been arranged that certain of the young men were to come down and take charge of the party for the afternoon and evening. And while they were waiting Peggy looked at the other occupants of the reception room. Did the hearts of any go bounding along as much as those of the Andrews girls? Peggy, seeing no one but several middle-aged women, thought it was not likely. But perhaps she was wrong, for these were mothers, and they had not seen their sons since the beginning of the term. Would they be changed? Would they be glad to see them there for the games, and pilot them around as loyally as if they had been slight, laughing, dimpled young girls like that charming group yonder? Perhaps there was even more excitement in it for them than for the Andrews girls, but Peggy couldn't know.

When at last the group arrived who were to pilot the girls about for the afternoon, Peggy was conscious of being introduced to one pleasant-faced young man after another, each in uniform, and each with a certain indescribable quality

of self-possession and the ability to do just the right thing that characterizes the boys who are trained in our naval Academy. Would the girls rather go out on the water and see the boat races, or would they go over to the baseball game? It was a sort of a three-ringed circus day at the Academy.

Some girls wanted to go out in the launches, others thought the glare of sun on the baseball field would not burn their noses so badly. Peggy just couldn't make up her mind to give up either of them.

"Oh, couldn't I, *couldn't* I see a little bit of both?" she cried pleadingly to the boy who had consulted her. "It's just one day out of the whole world you know, and I want to get everything I can in it!"

Whatever slight restraint there might have been in first meeting fell away at her frank eagerness, and the boy's expression assumed at once an alert interest in giving her as good a time as could be crammed into the hours before them. Out in the little rocking boat they went dancing over the water with the full blazing glare of the afternoon sun across it and in their eyes. She saw the race and cheered with the rest, though, unless she had been told every little while, she would not have known which boat was which. Every few minutes she turned to laugh her supreme delight into the equally radiant face of her companion, and the two were as good friends at once as if they had known each other for years.

Long before the sport on the water was over, however, Harold Wilbering, her new friend, insisted that they must leave if they really wanted to see anything of the game. She said reluctantly that she still wanted to, so they went bounding and leaping back over the waves and hurriedly made their laughing way toward the ball grounds. As they passed one of the buildings, Peggy heard a strange tick-ticking sound that was someway very interesting and compelling. She felt that it meant something, and was vaguely troubled by its persistence.

"What is that sound?" she found courage to ask at last.

"Oh, the wireless," her companion answered indifferently.

The wireless! Right down that curious looking instrument, the thing sputtered and ticked! Oh, how queer it was to be where all the mysteries of the great sea were everyday commonplaces, as the wireless evidently was to the midshipmen. Perhaps some great ship was calling its distress, or signaling. Perhaps those very little sputters were the messages of a British war ship on its way to battle with the German cruisers! It did not take long for Peggy to picture herself as listening at the moment to one of the most stirring sea-messages of history—more important than the famous, "We have met the enemy and they are ours," that she had once learned about in school, back in her grammar days. She forgot to talk to her young companion for fully five minutes under the stimulus of this beautiful idea!

When they came to the ball grounds and climbed into the bleacher seats,

which were the only kind there were, the sun pouring generously down on them all the while, Peggy thought more of the crowd than of the game. She looked along the rows of backs ahead of them, and envied some of the girls for their very self-possessed, experienced appearance, and was glad she was not others with their too fancy clothes and their excess of furbelows, of tulle bows, and earrings and coat chains.

Some of the Andrews girls, with Mrs. Forest and Miss Carrol, were sitting near, and Peggy noticed that they all leaned forward to look at her with a strangely intent expression in spite of their interest in the game. Something was wrong? Or was it that she looked so nice? Peggy hoped devoutly that this was the cause of their unanimous attention.

So she went right ahead and had as good a time here watching the game as she had just enjoyed on the water. Her face was in the sunlight most of the time, for her hat did not shade it as most of the girls' hats did theirs. But Peggy had never minded sunlight and she didn't see why she should begin now, so she leaned out confidently while the hot blaze came full on cheek and nose. The dazzle from the water had already had the best of it, however, and her face was really beyond a much deeper dye of red than it had already assumed.

She discovered this later, when the girls, after a light supper, were all in their rooms at the Inn, excitedly pulling out their pretty dresses for the evening and wiping their faces with all manner of soft creams and lotions after they had scrubbed them to a healthy glow. Poor Peggy gave one look in the glass and sank helplessly down on the bed and buried her small burned face in the pillow.

"It's no use, it's no use," she sighed. "Katherine and Florence, did you ever hear of such a tragedy? And my dress is pink! Oh, dear, oh, me, oh, my!"

But the drifting pictures of the afternoon's happiness were going through her mind, and she was sure nobody would like her when there were so many girls who had remembered that they would need their complexions for the evening! Still, here she was, and she had wanted to come at any cost, and it was probably going to be one of the spectacles of her young life. She would go and have as good a time as she could, and not mind too much that she was a different kind of spectacle all by herself, a sort of little geranium-face in the midst of lilies.

She bathed her face and applied a bit of every kind of lotion, for each of her friends generously thrust theirs upon her in a well-meaning endeavor to discount the too marked effect of the sun.

"I'll be just sticky when I'm through," she sighed, complying humbly with all their well-meant suggestions. Her face shone a triumphant crimson through the results of all their ministrations, however, and she realized that not even powder would do much to mitigate a color as flamboyant as that. To make it worse, it was beginning to peel in funny little rough wrinkles, as a sensitive

skin will after such an exposure to sun as she had given hers. So the powder just looked crumbly when it was applied and she turned her eyes away from the mirror with a cowardly determination not to glance that way again. But how can one do one's hair in a brand new style and twine a tiny wreath therein without looking, not once, but many times at one's reflection? But each time the sight that met her disillusioned eyes was a reproach.

She was doing her beautiful gold-tinted hair into a twist instead of leaving it as she usually wore it in curls. Most of the Andrews girls had done their hair after this new fashion throughout the winter and early spring, but Peggy was younger than most of them and she had worn hers down her back until to-night.

"Of course," she mused aloud, "there isn't so very much use my taking any pains with it at all, since I'm to imitate a scarecrow throughout the evening. But then, I had decided to do my hair this way before I knew the awful destiny that was in store for me, and I have already paid two good dollars for the little wreath to go in it, so I guess I'd better fight it out on this line if it takes all summer. Florence, will you please stick a hair pin in here for me? I seem to need three hands right now and I have only two clumsy ones. Do you think I'll do? Oh, I know my face isn't possible, but otherwise I'm all right, am I?"

And she burst out laughing at the idea of a girl who was all right but her face thinking of going to a party at all and having a good time.

"But I must remember," she told herself, "that I had a good time getting that sunburn, and it isn't as if I hadn't already been paid by happiness for its awfulness."

The pink dress didn't look as pretty as it had when she had tried it on before her mirror at Andrews, because pink never did go so very well with that odd shade of flaming red that Peggy's face showed. There was a bright and distinct line, too, around her neck, all red above the line and all white below, where her collar had protected the skin. She tied a strip of black velvet around this tell-tale mark, humming the while, for it seemed that she might as well be cheerful over this, one of the worst disasters that had ever happened to her.

"They'll see this black ribbon and just think I've tied it too tight," she explained to her friends hopefully, "and that it's choking me, making my face so red."

Katherine and Florence failed to see the advantage of having them think this, but they kind-heartedly refrained from saying so, and let Peggy take what comfort she could out of so plausible a belief.

In her heart of hearts, perhaps, Peggy was remembering the occasion when she had dressed so carefully for the matinée that she didn't get to the matinée at all, and was deciding that being on hand was really more important than making a good appearance.

She went to the hop, her spirits as light as her dancing feet, and when Harold Wilbering came eagerly over to her, she and he laughed at what had happened to her face, but he discovered what Peggy had not the least idea of for herself, that the sunburn effect was really rather becoming. It made her so vivid and so alive. It looked merely as if she were blushing all the time, and Harold liked it. And who could help enjoying himself in talking to Peggy that evening, as she became more and more forgetful of her tragedy, and more and more able to give her whole attention to just having a good time? It was rare that so appreciative a young lady came to one of their early hops. The boys were quite accustomed to girls who had been to a great many more dances than they had, and who sometimes made them feel just a little young. But Peggy so doted on it all, was so carried away by the Marine band, so ready to laugh at their simplest and most time-worn jokes, so wonderingly surprised and naïvely gratified at their own open admiration of her, that she took like wildfire, and half the academy was talking about that little Parsons girl for a week thereafter.

Peggy went back with the girls to their rooms, her laughter just bubbling at her lips and her sense of satisfaction perfect.

She took down her hair chattering all the time, and when at last the three turned out the light and crept into bed,—for Katherine and she and Florence shared one room, Florence sleeping on the couch and Peggy and Katherine in the big bed, she whispered blissfully into the darkness, "Oh, hasn't this been a most *dazzling* day! I don't know when I've had such a lovely, lovely time. I don't someway think it's just little Peggy Parsons with a red face that went through all that beautifulness, but instead I feel as if I'd been a fairy princess—the change that Cinderella experienced and all that—and, oh, how I do hate to wake up in the morning and realize that my coach and four has turned into pumpkin!"

"You looked nice in spite of your face, Peggy," said Florence. "And, someway, everybody did seem to take an awful shine to you."

And then Florence's talk drifted off to the partners she had had, and what each one had looked like and what they said. And whenever she paused for breath Katherine interrupted with the story of her adventures and in the midst of their dialogue the fairy princess and Cinderella and little tired red-faced Peggy Parsons, all rolled into one, went off to sleep and dreamed the enchanted dreams of youth.

CHAPTER

XIV—WATER-SPRITES

There is something about the first days of spring that stirs that most primitive instinct in every human being—the desire to move on, the nomadic impulse, the explorer sense.

Even the girls at Andrews, with heads full of friendships, coming examinations and summer plans, felt this world-old impulse. School was too small. The roads and fields that they knew so well, sweet with apple blossoms as they were, were all too tame and familiar to satisfy this longing that had made itself apparent by the time the engrossing subject of Annapolis was out of the way.

The girls yawned rudely in classes, no matter what sharp words were spoken to correct them. They even stretched their young arms out side-ways and rested them on the next chairs. They turned wistful eyes away from their books out toward the sunlight-sprinkled world and wondered what was in it beyond those immediate roofs and trees that they could see.

Finally Peggy could stand it no longer. "Well, girls," she announced one bright Saturday afternoon when there was no more school work to consider for the day, "we're all going hunting for the source of something—we're going exploring. Anybody know a nice, twisty river that we can take for the work? One without too many crabs in it, because, of course, we may want to wade."

The girls were full of enthusiasm at once. Their first thought, as usual, was what they were to take to eat. Several voted for fudge, but Peggy scornfully reminded them that this was an unheard of diet for explorers, and besides she expected to be ravenous by the time they'd walked a few miles. So a more comprehensive luncheon was planned, without the bacon this time, for they did not want to build fires, and a small, bright, quickly-running stream was decided upon for the object of their exploration. To reach this it was necessary that they take a suburban car and ride quite a distance into unfamiliar country, which was just what they had wished. Not those same old roads that they had walked to powder, not those same old rivers on the side of which every class had made its fires since the opening of the school, but a brand new part of the country where foot of Andrews girl had never trod before, to their knowledge,—this was ideal, and it added considerably to their delight that Mrs. Forest had given permission for their class to go without taking a teacher along.

They all wore white shirtwaists, white skirts, white shoes, and white linen tennis hats. They looked rather like a party of sunny angels as they boarded their car. They realized that they made a good appearance, but they were not

prepared for the effect they had upon a certain motherly-looking woman who watched them file in and take their seats. She gazed at them very hard and her mouth curved into the most wistful smile the girls had ever seen, and tears came suddenly to her eyes as she glanced hastily away. The other people in the car breathed deep in sympathy. But the girls could no more have understood the vivid impression of youth and loveliness they had given than they could have deciphered the Rosetta stone. In their hearts were only the most prosaic thoughts of dainty little sandwiches and stuffed olives, with an undernote of healthy happiness and rampageous good spirits.

"What can be more beautiful than a group of young girls?" a woman was saying to her neighbor. "Aren't they just ideal, all in white that way—those pretty girlish dresses and those white shoes and stockings—"

If she had known the girls' most eager thought in connection with those white shoes and stockings was to throw them as far away as possible onto a rock in the river they had set out to explore, and in regard to those white dresses, their dearest wish was to fasten them up about their knees while, with all manner of joyous shouts and yells they should go wading below a waterfall.

As they approached the suburban stop where they had been advised to get off, as being near the river they were going to, they gathered up their boxes of luncheon and crowded to the door of the car, humming very softly one of their favorite school songs.

And when the car stopped and let them off in a beautiful strip of country woodland, their voices came out louder and they went swinging along in the direction of the stream whose cool rippling music they were so eager to hear. They had to climb several fences, but they had been told that these woods were always open to school and college girls, for there was a larger college nearer than Andrews, and the girls haunted the place. There was nobody in sight today, however, and they scrambled to the top of gateways and then jumped down into each other's arms, knocking each other down and laughing and shouting until the woods echoed with their noise.

The stream was broad and rather shallow and was rushing along over its little shining stones at a great rate. Now and then there was the silver flash of minnows or the sluggish shadow of swimming tadpoles. But, look as they would, they could not see the dreaded green-brown menace of a crab, so their happiness was complete.

There were smooth gleaming rocks rising high out of the water everywhere. Once this stream had been a powerful river and it had perhaps tumbled these rocks here and then worn them down to the delightful shininess they showed now. Fascinatingly enough they could walk out on them, stepping with care from one to another until they were in the middle of the stream, and then

they could pursue their way upstream in the same exciting way for quite a distance. The girls were in all attitudes, wildly trying to keep their balance and make this fascinating journey at the same time, when there was a splash, a shout, and then a dripping figure emerged between two large rocks and held up its wet hands pitifully for help.

Under her wet hair and through the water streaming down her face, the girls recognized Peggy, much more slimpsy in her white dress than she had been a minute ago.

"First one in!" they greeted her catastrophe uproariously, and in delighted unanimity they sat down on the rocks wherever they happened to be and pulled off their shoes and stockings and turned up their skirts, and then sliding gracefully down, wriggled their contented toes in the water and shrieked as it encroached coldly on their ankles.

In a minute more they were all in, splashing and stamping, the stones smooth under their eager feet as they took each step.

They went on together up the stream farther and farther, following its twisted way until they came to a place they could not hope to climb—where the stream made a sheer leap downwards for a distance that was much greater than their height, and came plashing down toward them in a thousand rainbow lights by means of a spreading waterfall.

"I might as well stand under that," chortled Peggy, "I am as shipwrecked as I can be already. I fell flat when I tumbled off the rock back there."

"OH—O-OH," she cried as she sidled up to the water and finally made her plunge into it. Pounding down and stinging like a hundred little sharp needles of cold, she had never felt such breathlessness nor such elation. Over her, and shrouding her in a gleaming mist, the water came, and the girls stood speechless watching her as she stood there like some Indian princess observing the rites of the waterfall.

This was the tableau she made when there came another group of shouts and laughing voices from over the bank of the river, and there all of a sudden looking down were a crowd of older girls, carrying luncheon boxes too, and at the moment opening their mouths and eyes wide in astonishment. At first the rest of the Andrews girls were so far back toward the bank that the newcomers did not see them, and all their gaze focused on Peggy and from their faces it was apparent that they scarcely thought her real. Her arms were upstretched toward the descending water and her face, mist-covered, was lifted. Her slim bare feet shone in the sunlight and sparkled through the water like the feet of some very young Diana, resting from the hunt.

Her dress had lost its starchy lines long since and now resembled a Greek costume as much as anything—at least it would be hard to decide that it wasn't.

"I *never* in my life—" murmured one of the girls, and her voice broke the spell and the others began to descend the steep bank, becoming aware of the rest of Peggy's party as they did so. Peggy herself was still oblivious. The noise of the waterfall obscured all else, and her efforts to breathe in spite of the water that filled her eyes and nostrils and mouth took all her attention.

"That's the dandiest looking girl I ever saw," said the tallest of the newcomers, heartily. "I wonder if she could be at Hampton and I not have seen her. If she's not there she ought to be, and I'm going to try to get her to change her college and come to us."

"Are you Hampton girls?" Katherine came forward and asked, with the frank and friendly directness that is permissible between girls all of an age and all in school. "Because I'm going to Hampton next year. We are Andrews girls now."

She thought she noticed a stir among the Hampton people as she said this, and their gaze traveled eagerly over the entire group from the prep school. For these girls would be among the most important entering Hampton next fall—the Andrews girls always coming in for a large share of the freshman honors, carrying off the class offices and writing the class songs and shining in all the more pleasant and social branches of college life. Then the tall girl looked back toward Peggy. Peggy at the same minute saw her audience and came forth, shamefacedly, like a little drowned rat, Katherine said, while she smoothed the pasty wet folds of her skirt and tried to shake some of the water from her curly hair.

"Is *she* going?" the tall girl demanded with interest, pointing to this dripping apparition.

"I—don't—think she's planning to go to college at all," said Katherine hesitatingly. "I never heard her say that she was going. I'm her room-mate, and she's the nicest girl in all the world, and Hampton will never know what it loses by not getting her."

"She's just the kind we want," sighed the tall girl. "Well, glad we met you—" Her party started off downstream, but she turned and called back over her shoulder, "When you come up next fall come over and see me,—I'm Ditto Armandale—in Macefield House."

"Thanks, I'm Katharine Foster," Peggy's room-mate called after her. "Goodbye—and I'm really coming."

With a friendly wave the college girls disappeared around the first bend in the little river, and Katherine turned to the perturbed Peggy, expecting her to make some remark about the ridiculous way the others had found her.

But her eyes had a faraway expression in spite of their slightly worried look, and the remark Peggy made was, "Oh, Katherine, Katherine, I wish I were going to Hampton."

Katherine started to speak, but could not, and turned her head hastily away because the thought of four years without Peggy, even four years among hundreds of attractive girls like Ditto Armandale, seemed to her at the minute but a bleak expanse unlit by a single gleam of comfort.

"Peggy, won't you write to your aunt and tell her you *must* come?" she begged suddenly. "Don't you think she'd let you if she knew that Florence and I and most of the girls are going?"

Peggy rubbed her moist forehead thoughtfully. "Don't think so," she said, "but I might write and—*hint* that I want to go."

Their momentary depression passed, though, when they sat down to eat the good things they had brought in their boxes. Peggy kept in the sun as much as possible, hoping to dry off before it was time to go home. This phase came to her more poignantly later, however, when the other girls had put on their shoes and stockings again and were making ready to go home.

"But mine are all wet and they won't go on," mourned Peggy, "and my dress is a disgrace and my hair isn't very dry yet either, and when I put my hat on little rivulets run down my face like so many horrid young Niagaras. Oh, there *that* shoe is on, but I can't say there's any special advantage in it. Just hear the water sloshing about when I walk! It's a wonder I won't take cold out of this, but I won't—I never do when I've had a good time. Girls, keep close to me because I'm the most awful object that ever got on a street car and I'd much rather walk only I wouldn't get home for two or three days, I guess, and these wet shoes would have dissolved like paper long before that."

They climbed the fences with less agility than they had displayed in getting over them in the first place, and they were a tired lot of girls when they reached the car track and threw themselves on the grass beside it.

"I hear a singing on the rails," sighed Peggy, "but I'm too stiff to get up. Somebody wave to the car. Mercy, here it is already coming around the corner. There, keep close to me, somebody on each side,—oh, what will the people on there think of Andrews?"

When they clambered into the car and the whole bedraggled crowd of recent water-sprites sank into their seats, a motherly woman from across the aisle looked up and stared at them in a kind of fascinated horror. Her appraising glance missed nothing from their mud bordered skirts and soppy shoes to their flying, tangled hair.

She turned in some disgust to a woman who sat beside her. "Isn't it terrible how hoydenish some girls are?" she asked audibly. "Now those poor little spectacles across the aisle—somebody ought to keep watch of them. I wish you might have seen the lovely group of girls that rode on my car a few hours ago when I was coming out this way. Quite different from this messy little party.

They were all in white, as sweet as dolls and so adorably radiant and clean and spiritual looking. They made me think of angels. Dear, dear, I shall never forget the picture they made! You would not know that those little tomboys opposite belonged to the same species even!"

And the motherly looking woman wondered why the tomboys all burst into a fit of uncontrollable giggling.

CHAPTER XV—PARSONS COURT

"Peggy, hurry up and come to bed, the light just shines in my eyes, and *shines* in my eyes," complained Katherine that night from her side of the room, "and it's so unlike you to study so late—or aren't you studying?"

"Nope," answered Peggy laconically, and the hint of tears in her voice brought Katherine to a sitting posture, a wealth of surprised sympathy in her face. "What's the matter, honey?" she asked coaxingly, "have I unknowingly used one of your themes for scrap paper? Or has Forest been mean again?"

Peggy looked across at her and folded a sheet of paper as she did so. "It isn't anything," she insisted.

But Katherine guessed. "You are writing to your aunt!" she exclaimed.

Slowly Peggy nodded. "I want everything," she said. "Oh, Katherine, I don't know how it is that when a person has so much, they can just go on wanting and wanting and not be content without it *all.* I know I've had this lovely year with all of you and ever so many girls can't go away to school at all, but, Katherine, I'm—I'm such a pig—I—I—want college, too!"

And then the tears that would not be restrained any longer coursed down her cheeks and fell unheeded on her blue kimono, while she clasped her hands and rocked them in self-accusation and despair.

"I wish you were going—I don't know what it will be worth without you," moaned Katherine, in sympathy. "But, listen, Peggy, dear, there are lots of girls who have good times staying at home or traveling or—even doing something that's lots of fun to earn money. Peggy, you aren't a girl who can be unhappy long, by nature. Honestly, after you've once gotten over this you—you won't

care—"

But Katherine's voice failed her along with her attempts at comfort.

"I can't seem to—face it," wept Peggy. "I don't know what's the matter with me that all of a sudden I want, want, *want* this and nothing else in the world has any effect to comfort me. Oh, Katherine, Katherine, since I was a little girl I've kind of thought way back in my mind that I'd get to go to college. And all this wonderful year has drifted away just like perfume, or something nice like that,—I don't mean to be poetical—and here it's gone and I haven't any plans. It's terrible to grow up, Katherine, and to have to work out something definite for yourself to do. I don't want to be grown up, Katherine, I want to be a girl for four years more. I know I'm a pig, honey, and if there were bigger things left to want I suppose I'd want them, too. And even when I graduated from college, if I did go, I guess I'd not be content, but I'd want to be an actress and star in something, so as to seem to be having it all. I wish you'd been asleep instead of questioning me, because I'll feel awfully in the morning to think I've told you all this. I—I feel badly enough right now."

And the goldy head went down on the folded paper and the writing on it was soon blotted and blurred with tears. Katherine slipped out of bed and, running over to her room-mate, threw her arms around her neck.

"It isn't anything unusual to want everything that way, honey," she said, "I won't have you think that it is. Everybody in the whole world wants it all, dear. Only *all* to some people means different things from what it does to us. You aren't piggish, either, I've known you a whole year and you and I have never quarreled over anything in all that time, and that's a record for room-mates even at Andrews. And my folks never flattered me by thinking me unselfish, so it isn't my fault things ran so smoothly—it was your generous, happy spirit, ready to share everything, wanting to help everybody, eager for good times, and able to take all the other girls into them with you. Oh, Peggy, dear, it's the most natural thing in the world to want things—and I think there's a cog loose somewhere in the way things are run if you don't get your wish, that's all. You are the very one that ought to have college. Please don't cry. You look so different from my Peggy when you cry. I'm so much more used to you laughing."

Putting aside the friendly arms of her room-mate, Peggy wiped her eyes and snapped out the light. With a final little gasp of a sob she crept into bed and covered her forlorn young face with the bed clothes. She expected that she would be awake all night, thinking heartbrokenly of her troubles, but instead she had no more than gotten snuggled down into the couch's warmth than she was sound asleep and not in any of her dreams did any trouble whatsoever make its appearance.

Katherine, on the other hand, lay awake nearly ten minutes and told Peggy

in the morning, believing it was true, of course, that she had not slept one wink.

In due time a letter came to Peggy from her aunt in answer to the one she had written with so many tears that night.

> "Dear Peggy, Your letter made me think matters over very carefully, little girl, and I have gone over our resources with the disheartening result that I must tell you I do not see how I am to let you go to college this year. Now, Peggy, you are young and even after several years outside of school, it will not be too late for you to go to college if financial affairs turn out better. But just at this time, when everything is so uncertain, and prices are so high and so few stocks are paying dividends, I do not see how I can possibly spare enough for you to go to Hampton. There are a great many nice girls here, Peggy, about your age, who are not going to school any more, and never even thought of such a thing. I'm sure you can make quite a little social set with them, and I shall take you around to call on all of my friends, and finally give you a small coming out party, for every well-bred girl ought to care for society and desire to please by what she has already learned. I think that after a year of what quiet but agreeable society life you can have here at home, you will not want to go to college. And to tell the truth, Peggy, I have never thought much of college for girls. It seems to me woman's place is in the home and in her own little social sphere. I know this letter will be a disappointment to you, but you are a sweet, brave girl, if a bit inclined to be rompish, and I'm sure you'll agree with me in time when you've had a chance to think things over. Regretting that I cannot let you have your wish, though, whether I approve or not, I am,
>
> Very lovingly yours,
>
> —— Aunt Mattie."

Peggy's mouth twitched into her characteristic smile, dimple and all, and she gazed somewhat ruefully back over the closely written sheet.

"Fancy me a society lady," she said to herself. "Oh, I never imagined even in my wildest dreams that I should get to be that—nor ever wanted it, either, if I tell the truth. I love parties and I adore people and hope always to have lots of them around me, men and women and children and everybody. But just to make a sort of career out of visiting and dancing—oh, I want college."

All the indefinite longing that the spring brings with it took the shape in Peggy's mind of this one paramount desire. If she could go to college she would

be happy. If she could not, she must be miserable. Ashamed of herself for her attitude she might be, but crush the wish she could not. Katherine had had her application in at Hampton for three years now and had so been assigned a room on campus with another girl named Gloria Hazeltine. Peggy felt that already she was dropping out of her room-mate's life. The other girls were all planning their next year, at table, outside the class-rooms, on their way to Vespers on Sundays. But she had nothing to plan. And the idea began to form in her mind that if she had some definite idea it would be better—even if the idea involved something hard and unheard of like earning her own living. At least there would be excitement in the contemplation of actually doing it.

So one day when all the rest were talking Hampton, Hampton, and nothing but Hampton, and when Daphne Damon turned abruptly to Peggy and said: "Peg, infant, what are you going to do next year?" she answered quickly, "Clerk in a store, I think." And their expressions were mingled astonishment and—yes, she caught it, envy.

"My goodness, Peggy, wouldn't that be lovely," gasped Florence Thomas. "Who would ever think of anything so daring but you? You'll certainly have more to write about in your letters than we will, but will you promise to keep up a correspondence with us, nevertheless, so we can hear how the famous experiment is going?"

Peggy only laughed.

A while later, in their room, Katherine excitedly handed Peggy a letter she had just been reading.

"From your substitute, Peggy," she said, "or, in other words, my room-mate-to-be. The registrar gave her my address, just as she had given me hers, and she was sweet enough to write me a let's-get-acquainted letter. I never thought of doing it. She has a nice name, hasn't she—Gloria Hazeltine."

Mechanically Peggy took the note and read it slowly:

"My dear Miss Foster Who is to be My Room-mate": it began, "Or hadn't I better begin right away by saying Katherine, and then we won't feel so strange when we talk to each other really for the first time—"

Peggy looked wistfully up from the letter to her room-mate's glowing face.

"I won't tell you any of my faults," she read on, "because you'll have a year to find those out, and I think for those things, a year is long enough. The main purpose of this letter is to so mislead you that you will think I haven't any faults and then, when you finally see me, it will take such a long time for readjustment that, before you've really found me out, I shall have made you like me a little for good and keeps. I've never had a room-mate myself, and I hope you haven't, so that it will be equally new to both of us to have to consider someone else's taste and wishes at every turn. What color do you like best? I am beginning to

plan my things, and we might as well get together on a color scheme so that our couch covers won't be too jarringly different, and my flamboyant cushions won't be shamed by some mouse-like ones of yours, and vice-versa.

"I am looking forward to rooming with you because I have you all planned out in my mind. I sit and think slowly 'Katherine Foster' just like that, and then *you* rise before me. Only perhaps it isn't you at all. But I promise not to be disappointed in you whatever you are like, and won't you write back and make me the same promise?

"Good-bye, from your much excited Next-Year's Room-mate,

"Gloria Hazeltine."

Peggy dropped the letter back on the desk and sat down on her couch, her hands clasped over her knees disconsolately, and her eyes unhappily looking into the future. Finally she rose with a mighty sigh and, turning her back on her room-mate, she began to dress for the afternoon with infinite care.

"Where are you going, Peggy?" Katherine asked, "and may I come along?"

"You could," said Peggy after a reluctant pause, "if you wanted to and if I didn't have a date all arranged with somebody who told me to come just by myself."

She realized that her reply sounded ungracious, but the letter from Katherine's next year's room-mate was vivid in her mind, and she felt that after all she wasn't going to be missed. It meant so much to her not to go to college and yet nothing to anyone else. It is human nature to want to be missed, and Peggy couldn't help her twinge of disappointment in the fact that her absence was going to mean so little.

Mr. Huntington had asked her to spend the afternoon in a walk with him, as he had said he wanted to get her opinion on something he was planning, and as he often did nice things for the townspeople now, Peggy felt sure this was another such venture and that he merely wanted the shining-eyed approval she was always certain to give.

He had said, "Nobody but you, this time, Peggy," and yet, when she went down to the gate to meet him, there stood his grandson also, smiling as broadly as the old man, and both of them seemed to be in some delightful secret that she didn't know about at all. Mr. Huntington directed their walk toward a new part of town that was just being built up.

"It's not generally known that I own all this," he told Peggy, "but I do, and it's I who am building it up. Now look down this tiny street—look hard and tell me what you think of it!"

"Oh!" cried Peggy, staring down the dear little new street with great interest,—great enough to make her forget the thing she couldn't have, for the moment—for there was a double row of adorable little bungalows, just newly

painted, as neat and trim and attractive as any houses ever were in the world, and the street itself seemed to be just a miniature affair, with only six houses on each side and then ending in a vine covered wall. "Oh, it's darling!" cried the irrepressible Peggy, "I just love it! Who could have imagined any such dear, doll-like little street, with twelve such lovely bungalows on it! This street ought to have a wonderful name, Mr. Huntington—don't you think so, Jim? Please, please, Mr. Huntington, if it's not already named, let Jim and me pick out what to call it. I just know that we could find a name that would satisfy everybody who ever took one of those cute houses to live in as long as they stand."

She looked up into the old man's face, the sunlight streaming down into hers, and she clasped her hands in her eagerness, and it was hard to see how he could have had the heart to refuse her. But he did.

"The name is chosen already," he said with a kind of chuckle. And Jim only grinned at the sight of Peggy's helplessly falling hands, and her evident disappointment.

"We—ell," she sighed, "so many things to stand to-day—what is it? I know it isn't as nice as I had in mind, is it, Jim?"

"Nicer," said that traitor Jim.

"Well, what, then?"

"Parsons Court," said the old man, smiling down on her curiously, and then laughing toward his grandson who laughed back appreciatively.

"Parsons—?" her breath came in a little astonished gasp.

"That's it," Mr. Huntington repeated, "and do you know why?"

But Peggy must have been a daring young guesser indeed had she been able to guess correctly why, as the old man's next remark showed.

"It's *yours!*" he told her, pressing a legal looking paper into her hand, "the whole street was built and planned and named for you, and you shall have the rent of these little houses, or you can sell them when you wish. I thought if you just rented them, while you are in college, they'd bring you in a larger income than most of the girls know how to spend."

Peggy threw herself right down on the ground and began sobbing. It was too wonderful—it was simply the wildest magic! Oh, how beautiful it was to have somebody like her so well and want her to be happy! Then as abruptly as she had cast herself down, she sprang up, and laughing and crying at once, she seized Mr. Huntington's hand, and pumped it up and down, and clung to it and tried to talk and could not.

Jim turned his head away before her great joy and smiled quietly all by himself. She was such a flyaway sort of Peggy, tears one minute and laughter the next, and all the past and all the future were as nothing beside the present moment.

He was recalling all that he himself and the old man beside him owed to this same warm-hearted girl, and he felt that the debt was not nearly canceled by Parsons Court.

"Oh, Jim," she was turning to him now, "a few minutes ago I was wicked enough to be almost sorry you saved me from that storm so long ago. But now, oh, Jim, I thank you now all over again for having saved me, so that I can be here now and have this lovely, lovely thing happen to me. How good people are to me! Oh, I must remember to be a regular *angel* to everybody I meet just to pay up for everybody's always being so wonderful to me. Mr. Huntington, I *love* Parsons Court, and every house in it, and I'm so stingy I hate to rent any of them, but just want to come and live in them all myself, one after the other. But renting them means college, so please, Mr. Huntington, get me some tenants just as fast as you can,—and I never was so happy in my life, or didn't ever expect to be!"

The old man's face glowed with pleasure, and it was easy to see that he was as happy as Peggy.

If anyone ever walked on clouds that person was Peggy as she and her two friends made their way back toward Andrews. How brightly the sun shone! She knew it had never looked like that before. How beautiful everybody was—how everybody's face was beaming as she passed, school children, old women, the men on the delivery wagons—all, all lit for her by a subtle glory that was spreading and spreading over the whole world. Her friends just laughed at her raptures, but it was an understanding laugh, and Peggy liked them for it. Was there anything at this minute, or anybody, that she *didn't* like? Her heart was so full of happiness that she wished she might share it and *share* it until it was a little less full, so that it wouldn't bubble over so uncontrollably.

She was only able to look up into Mr. Huntington's face and smile for good-bye when they reached the Andrews gateway, and her glance then swept on to Jim, while the sunlight just poured itself down over the little group as they stood there together.

Then she turned and ran into the house as fast as she could go, running up the stairs to Katherine in the unladylike fashion of two at a time, and if it were possible to slide up banisters as well as down them Peggy would have slid up in order to get there quicker.

"Katherine! Katherine!" she cried, bursting in at the door, "I'm going, I'm going—it's all magic, but it's true and I'm going to Hampton!"

Katherine threw aside her schoolbooks and plunged across the room into her room-mate's arms. "Oh, I'm so glad—Peggy!" she exclaimed joyfully.

And the two girls sat down and planned for another year together as happy as this one at Andrews had been, and all the time through Peggy's mind went rhythmically the refrain of "College, College, College."

Peggy's first year at Hampton will be told about in "Peggy Parsons, a Hampton Freshman."

END

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