

Jane Allen: Junior

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CHAPTER I

THE GET TOGETHER.

The late September day waved back at Summer graceful as a child saying goodbye with a soft dimply hand; and just as fitful were the gleams of warm sunshine that lazed through the stately trees on the broad campus of Wellington College. It was a brave day—Summer defying Nature, swishing her silken skirts of transparent iridescence into the leaves already trembling before the master hand of Autumn, with his brush poised for their fateful stroke of poisoned beauty; every last bud of weed or flower bursting in heroic tribute, and every breeze cheering the pageant in that farewell to Summer.

"If school didn't start just now," commented Norma Travers, "I wonder what we would do? Everything else seems to stop short."

"I never saw shadows come and go so weirdly on any other first day," added Judith Stearns ominously. "I hope it doesn't mean a sign, as Velma Sigbee would put it," and dark eyed Judith waved her arms above her black head to ward off the blow.

"Is it too early to suggest science?" lisped Maud Leslie timidly. "I've been reading about the possible change of climate and its relation to the sun's rays going wild into space. I don't want to start anything, but it might be judicious to buy more furs next Summer. Also it might justify the premonitory fad."

"Don't you dare," warned Ted Guthrie, puffing beneath her prettiest crocheted sweater and rolling down from her chosen mound on the natural steps of the poplar tree slope. "It's bad enough to think of icy days up here, far, far away from the happy laughing world of hot chocolate and warm movie seats," and she rolled one more step nearer the boxwood lined path, "but to tag on science, and insinuate we are to be glazed mummies, ugh!" and the redoubtable Ted groaned a grunt that threatened havoc to the aforesaid handsome sweater.

"There, there, Teddy dear, don't take on so," soothed Maud, rescuing the other's new silver pencil that was rapidly sliding further away from Ted with the pretty open hand bag. "I had entirely forgotten how you despise ice sports. And you so lovely and fat for falling. You should love 'em," insisted the studious Maud.

"Being fat isn't all it's——"

"Cracked up to be," assisted Judith Stearns. "I quote freely. That's one of Tim Jackson's."

"Where have I heard the line before?" mimicked Theodosia Dalton, otherwise Dozia the Fearless. "It has a chummy tone. All of which is as naught to the question. Where is Jane? Never knew her to miss the line up here. And I even tapped at her door. Judy, where is Jane?" demanded Dozia.

"Am I my chum's keeper? Can't Jane attend to her own mortal baggage without incurring the wrath of the multitude?" and Judith sprang up from her spot on the leaf laden lawn. Also she cast a glance of apprehension along the path where Jane Allen should at least now be seen on her way. "Perhaps Jane feels we should forswear this moment of mirth; being juniors and stepping aside from all the others. They call it the Whisper you know; 'count of the whispering poplar above," with a grandiose wave at the innocent tree. "But I would much prefer a chuckle, wouldn't you Ted?"

"There you go again, or rather also," flung back the stout girl. "I must take all the cracks and the chuckles and presently some naive little freshie will amble along and ask me if I happen to be one of the soap bubbles she just blew off her penny pipe," and the pneumatic cheeks puffed out in bubble mockery.

"Now Teddy dear. Don't fret. Everyone is just jealous because you're so lovely and comfy looking," appeased Nettie Brocton, the dimple girl. "But I really do think this 'whisper' is awfully childish. Rather makes the strangers feel we are whispering about them."

"If they only knew!" sighed Ted. "I am the usual back-stop for all frivolity. But if it comes to giving up this lovely loafing hour under our own grandmother poplar, I say girls, go ahead and knock, but spare the whisper. I'd die if I had to go tramping around seeing things and saying hello to that mob," with a sweeping wave of her one free arm, the other was around Janet Clarke's waist.

"You are right, little girl, it is lovely to gather here and let the others do the traipsing. And as for the whisper, anyone within sight may also hear, for this is a shout rather than a whisper. The real point is, we are gathered together while others are scattered apart. But where is Jane Allen? I always look to her to start things, and we can't stay here all day, alluring as is the grandmother poplar. We have 'juties'; girls, 'juties'. "Dozia Dalton had risen to her full height, which measured more feet and inches than her latest kitchen door records verified, and her hair now wound around her head like a big brown braided coffee cake, added a few more inches, in spite of all the flat pinning Dozia took refuge in. It may be attractive to be tall and slender, but somehow old Dame Nature has a way of keeping her pets humble. She loves to exaggerate.

The girls were grouped around the gnarled roots of the big tree. As had been their custom this contingent managed to escape the hum and confusion of the "first day" just long enough to whisper hello and buzz a few unclassified other words. Rooms and corridors were in commotion; the campus was like a bee farm, and it was only over in a remote corner, where a poplar and three hemlock trees formed a protective fortress, that the girls were safe from the first day's excitement.

"I left Jane heading for the office and her head was down," announced Inez Wilson finally. "She didn't see me and her head being down, of course meant——"

"Trouble," finished Katherine Winters. "When Jane Allen goes forward with her red head in advance there is sure to be a collision. What's up? Who knows?"

"Come along and find out," promptly suggested Winifred Ayres. "Can't tell what we're missing. Jane may have lifted the roof when she raised her head."

"Poor old roof," commented Ted Guthrie, dragging Janet Clarke down to earth again in her own attempt at rising. "I suppose we may as well fall in line," she continued good-naturedly. "Janie is still the idol of the mob; anyone can see that, even at this early date," and with a girl tugging on either side the stout one finally heaved ahoy!

"Tain't that," corrected Inez recklessly, "it's just because we are all too lazy to do the things we know Jane will do. I have been reading up on psychology, and you may now expect me to spoil every dream of childhood with a reason why," and Inez threw her head up prophetically.

"Alluring prospects this year," groaned Velma Sigsbee. "What with Maud gone scientific, and Inez turned psychologist and Jane Allen traveling with her head down—well, all I can say is I still take two lumps of sugar in my tea." Velma was just that way, a pretty girl who loved sugar in spite of restrictions, high prices and the written word.

A solitary figure was now outlined against the low cedars curled around Linger Lane. It was Jane at last.

"Here she comes! Here she comes!" announced Nettie Brocton. "And look, girls! she isn't even whistling. Something is wrong with our sunny Jane."

There was no mistake about it, something was wrong, for Jane Allen swung along the path, calling greetings to friends grouped in knots and colonies with an evident half heartedness foreign to her usual buoyant, cheerful personality.

Espying her own contingent on the poplar slope she threw her arms out in a reckless, boyish sort of gesture to give force to the "Hello girls!" she called, but even that was much too mild for Jane.

"We were in despair," began Judith, Jane's particular friend and school-long companion. "Janie dear, why the clouds? What's up? Let us know the worst, do. We are fortified now, whereas in an hour hence we may be weak from interviews with the new proctor. Sit down Jane. We just rose to go in search of you, and by my new watch I see there is still time before the hour to report. There," and the little spot cleared for Jane in the semi-circle was now covered with a pretty plaid skirt, "do tell us. You really look worried,"

"Not really?" contradicted the gray eyed Jane. "Worried, and on our very first lovely day? You surely wrong me!" she tried to get her arms around more girls than even finger tips might touch. "I'm simply bubbling with joy, as I should be. I was detained in the office longer than I wanted to stay, and you all know how mean it is to have to sit on one particular chair facing the desk while a lot of new girls ask a larger lot of foolish questions. Perhaps that made me a little cross, but do forgive me. I wouldn't spoil this initial hour for worlds. Please tell me everything in one breath. I am just dying to hear."

No one answered. Ted Guthrie did gurgle a bit, and Velma Sigsbee threw a handful of leaves in Nettie Brocton's hair, but the pause was a riot. Why should Jane deceive them? Cross from delay in the busy office indeed, as if she would not have bolted out and left the whole room to the nervous new students! The girls looked from one to the other and finally Judith Stearns saved the situation by proposing that the juniors line up to help the seniors show newcomers about the grounds. On this day at least, class lines were forgotten at Wellington.

"We were just waiting for you Janie," she declared adroitly, "and Mildred Manners has been whoo-hooing her lungs out across the campus. Come along girls, and see you don't waylay all the millionaires. I hear every garage in the village is bursting with classy cars, and the livery stable can't take another single boarder. Ted, you take Velma and Maud, and be careful not to divulge any club secrets; Janet, you tag along with Winifred and just gush to death over that timid little blonde who seems to have a whole bag full of hand made handkerchiefs for weeps. Jane, may I have the honor of your company?"

Judith's black eyes looked into Jane's gray orbs that asked and answered so many questions.

"Thanks, Judy," said Jane aside. "You're a dear. Let's go and do the honors."

The next moment Wellington grounds rang with shouts and laughter, and the voice of Jane Allen defied the criticism her pretty face had so lately invited.

"It's perfectly all right," she assured Judith, but the latter stuck her chin out in contradiction.

"Can't fool me, Janie," she whispered between handshakes and greetings. "But I'll wait till the picnic winds up. Did you ever see so many new girls? Has some college burned down since last year?"

"No, love, but our reputation has gone forth. This is a glorious day for Wellington and, Judy Stearns, it is going to be a glorious year for us. We are still juniors!" and Jane trailed off to find her place in the long line that was automatically forming around the great old elm. An extension course in special work kept Jane with her junior friends.

"Wellington, dear Wellington!" rang out the then famous strain in hundreds of silvery voices. The college song was echoed from every hill into every grass lined hollow, and if the new girls doubted the spirit of comradeship they were to be favored with there, the consecration brought it home to them, like strong loving arms stretched out in the sea of school day mysteries.

It was hours later, when the pattering of feet in the long corridors died down to a mere trail of sound, that Jane and Judith managed to pair off for a confidential chat.

"You have got to tell me," demanded Judith.

"As if I wouldn't," replied Jane.

"You can't blame us for being curious, Janey. This afternoon was almost a failure, just because your eyes had a faraway look."

"I'm so sorry, really, Jude. What an abominable temper I must have."

"We all know better than that girlie." Judy might now have been charged with harboring a faraway look herself.

"Just give me a little time," smiled Jane, "and if there's anything on my conscience I'll gladly transfer it to yours."

The look in both gray and brown eyes was suddenly changed to intimacy. It was no longer faraway.

CHAPTER II

A SHADOW IN FORECAST

I thought everyone had been supplied with the anti-tack hammer circular," remarked Jane, falling back where Judith's cushions ought to be. "Just hear that tattoo over in the wing. I'll bet it's Dozia."

"She has a collection of movie queens and I doubt not that is the official coronation. Let us hope the new proctor is deaf on the left, Dozia's room leans that way," replied Judith. Then

she tossed a couple of sweaters at Jane's head. "Put those under your ears dear," she ordered, "my pillows aren't unpacked yet and you may find Neddie's last year tacks in that burlap. There now, you look almost human. But the wistful whimper lingers. Jane, what has happened? You are simply smothered in the soft pedal. Tell your Judy all about it," she cooed.

Feet stretched out straight in front of her and arms ending with finger tips laced over her black head, Judith looked longer than she really needed to measure up or down. Also, she looked too stiff to be comfortable, but the wooden pose was Judith's favorite. She rested that way, defying every known law for relaxation. Jane, au contraire, was curled up like a kitten, with one red sweater balled under her ruffled head and the other blue one tangled about her slim ankles. Both girls were tired—justly so, for the opening day at Wellington was ever a time of joyous activity, and the day just closed had roared and yelled itself into an evening still vibrant with bristling energy, tack hammers and movie pictures smashing rules and regulations, until the night gong sounded its irrevocable warning. Then roommates paired off even as did Jane and Judith.

"Has anything happened to your baggage?" prompted Judith, as her companion failed to confide.

Jane teased one small worsted tassel of Judith's blue sweater free from its tangle with her shoe lace, then she poked her dimpled chin forward saucily.

"Can't ever have a secret, I suppose, Pally dear," she mocked the girl sliding slowly but surely out of her chair. "But I don't mind. Shows how truly you love me. There, you will feel better on the rug. I knew you were coming." Judith had landed.

"I believe I'll sleep here," declared Judith, one end of the international carpet sample was bunched up under her ear. "Never was so tired on any other first or last day." The long legs shot out straight again. "And if your secret is really thrilling Janie, pray keep it for a more auspicious occasion. I am apt to snore when I should groan, or even sneeze when I should—" A choking spasm interrupted. "Don't tell me to take quinine, Janie. This is the end. I have had it since August and it is due to depart now, exactly now." A couple of sneezes added punctuation to this.

"But get up from that floor instantly," ordered the girl on the divan. "Nothing worse for colds than rag carpet rugs. There's plenty of room up here out of drafts. Come, lovey. Do try to curl up some. I always fear you will break up in splinters when I see you go wooden."

"Too comfy, Dinks, I can't move."

"Sneeze then and I'll catch you. You have just got to get up off that chilly floor somehow. Besides the oil may be contagious. It still smells gooey."

"Anything for peace. Give me a lift. There," Judith hung over the edge but Jane held on to the black head. "It's not so safe as the floor but I suppose it is more prophylactic. Now I will sleep. The girls seem to have died down. Strange"—yawn and groan—"how they do love to fuss up the rooms."

"Temperment, my dear. Dozia wouldn't sleep a wink with her photograph gallery unhung. What do you think of the crowd this year? Spot any stars?"

"A couple. Did you see that beauty with the shiny gold hair? The one who stood under the hemlock alone during the cheering? Isn't she tragically pretty?"

"Exactly that. One couldn't help seeing her, although she struck me as being shy."

"Scared to death, and so unconscious of her charms. There Janie, my brain is sound asleep this moment. If I say real words they must be coming from another world. This is gone." Judith ducked deeper into the pillowless couch. She plainly was sleepy.

"Why Judith Stearns," called Jane severely, "you are giving me as much trouble as a baby. Don't you dare fall asleep. We have got to make beds yet. That comes of your notion not to have ready-to-wear beds in our suite. And you can just see how much fun it is to drag things out on tired nights." Jane sprang up from the divan and tried to yank the sleepy girl after her. "Come on, Pally," she implored. "I'll do most all the fixing, only I really demur at the disrobing. You know my hatred for buttons and fastenings. I wouldn't leave one snap to meet its partner. Come on Judy," the feet were again on the rug, "we will be simply dead in the morning, and we have got to be very much alive. We do miss the Weatherbee. I don't see why we let her go. Dear, prim, prompt Weatherbee! Now we know we loved her. Her successor is too young to be motherly."

"Jane Allen, you're a pest," groaned Judith. "I can't hear a thing but words, and I suppose you are calling me names. Who's this guy Bed, I heard you mention? Lead me to her," and whether the collapse was assumed or real Judith rolled over twice and once more stretched out on the long runner at Jane's feet.

"Have it your own way. Stay there if you insist and sneeze your head off, but I'm going to bed," decided Jane helplessly.

"That's the girl. Her name is Bed. I want to meet her. Heard so much about her. Jane dear introduce me, there's a dar—link," Judith muttered.

"Someone is coming and I just hope it is Prexy or Proxy. I'll open the door wide as I can," declared the outraged Jane.

She stepped over the long girl but even the tap on the door did not disturb Judith.

"It's I—are you up, Jane?" The voice came as the tap subsided.

"Yes Dozia. Come along in. I can't get Judy to bed. Just look at her!"

"Poor child," commiserated Dozia, surveying the figure on the floor very much as a policeman looks upon an ambulance case. "We ought to help her. Is the day bed translated?"

"Yes, I got it ready. But Judy won't undress," Jane protested.

"Why need she? If I ever slept like that I would murder a disturber. Just get hold of that rug Janie, and we'll dump her into bed."

Judith was actually sleeping when the two compassionate friends picked up the rug, hammock fashion, and proceeded to "dump her into bed." She never moved voluntarily. Judith Stearns knew a good thing when it came her way, and what could be better than this?

"She'll ruin her skirt," suggested Jane as they drew the rug out from under the blue accordion pleats.

"What's a mere skirt compared with that?"

Dozia stood aside to admire the unconscious Judy, but striking a statuesque pose she caught the critical eye of Jane and was rewarded with a most complimentary smile.

"Where did you get that wonderful robe, Dozia?" Jane asked. "You simply look like—like some notable personage in those soft folds and with your hair down. What a pity we must make ourselves ugly to be conventional."

"Ain't it now," mocked Dozia, abusing language to make comedy. She swung the velveteen folds about her and spun around to wind them tighter. "Like this? Do I resemble a movie queen? That's what brought me, Janie. This nocturnal visit is consequent upon a disaster. My hammer, the one I put my queens up with, fell through the mirror. Silly little hammer. You know how this house staff feels about breaking looking-glasses."

"Yes, spoils the set of course. You are not insinuating anyone here might be superstitious? I am awfully sorry you broke the mirror. How did it happen?"

"Sissh!" Dozia sibilated, pointing to Judith who had actually turned over. "Don't wake her, this really is a secret. Girlie," dragging Jane down into a chair, "have you noticed that ugly, fat, common country girl, with the wire hair and gimlet eyes? Well, she came in, pushed her way in really, and squatted down plumb in my best Sheraton chair. The size of her!" (This with seething indignation.) "I was so provoked—why, Jane, what is the matter? You are frightened or nervous or something. Have you seen a ghost anywhere?" broke off Dozia.

"Oh no, but I am so tired," Jane edged away from the suspector.

"After all I do believe Judy is sensible, see her slumber."

"Jane Allen, you are a fraud," pronounced the girl in the velveteen robe. "You are smothering some mystery and I must have stepped on the spring," guessed the inquisitive caller. "Was it the tack hammer or the spindle chair or the fat girl? Not she, you have had no chance to do uplift work yet. Land knows that farmer will need your greatest skill, but dear, don't waste it on her. She's incurable."

"Bad as all that?" asked Jane colorlessly. "But what happened? You did not try to hit her with the hammer I hope?"

"I didn't try to hit her, I did hit her. It fell accidentally on her fat head and she tossed it through the mirror. Now what can a girl do in a case like that?"

The haunted look, so foreign to the face of Jane, shaped itself again.

"Is she—did you hurt her?"

"I hope so," dared Dozia. "It would be a charity to send her home. Her name is Shirley Duncan and she's from some country town. But Jane, if she gets really horrid, I mean more horrid than she is now, I want you to stand by me. That's what I came for."

"All right Dozia," said Jane, "but I hope it won't have to go as far as that."

"Me too," responded the carefree Dozia. "But there's no telling what Shirley may do."

For some moments after Dozia glided out Jane stood there, her gray eyes almost misty.

"Of all the tragedies!" she was thinking. Then with a jerk she pulled herself up. "But I guess I can handle it," she declared finally, and when she succeeded in rousing Judith no one would have suspected anything new amiss.

Jane Allen might have worries but they could not dominate her. Sunny Jane, with sunny hair and gray eyes, was no mope. It would take fight to conquer this new condition, she realized, but Jane could fight, and her dreams on this first night back in college were strangely confused with school-day battles.

More than once she awoke with a start, as if some danger were impending, and a sense of uneasiness possessed her. Each time it seemed more difficult to fall back into slumber, and all this was new, indeed, to happy Jane.

"Daddy!" she murmured. "It's because of daddy's——"

She was finally sound asleep.

CHAPTER III

THE MISFIT FRESHMAN

Yes, they were back in college and work was waiting. This thought invaded confused brains and stood out like a corporal of the guard, shouting orders into lazy ears on Wellington campus next morning.

Jane Allen threw first one slipper and then another at Judith Stearns' bed across the room from her own. But still Judith's hand ignored the hair brush on the chair at her elbow.

"Judy," called Jane, "the warning bell has warned. Turn down the corner on that dream and wake up." Each word of this climbed a note in tone until the last was almost a shout. Then Judith's hand moved to Jane's slipper on her own (Judith's) forget-me-nots, the little floral pieces that adorned a very dainty garment with the embroidery on Judith's chest—arms and neck ignored in the pattern.

"What say?" she muttered sleepily.

"Up," answered Jane. "Ever hear that little word before?"

"Yep, pony riding," drawled Judith. "Up, up, one, two, three, go!" and at this Judith sprang up with such vigor and volume (in point of scope) that she sprang over the neighboring bed and swooped down on Jane's hat box! Her black hair now fell fearlessly over the embroidered forget-me-nots, and her bare feet shot in their usual skating strike.

"Good thing that hat box is the new kind," commented Jane, "but even at that it will hardly serve as a divan. Still, I am glad you are up. Do you know where you are, Judy Stearns? And what you are expected to do today?"

"All of those things and additional horrors are seething through my poor brain," moaned Judith, "but a moment ago I was having a fast set of tennis with adorable Jack St. John—Sanzie they call him. Have I told you about him, Jane darling?" Judith gathered herself and her feet up from the black enameled box and glided over to her own corner.

"No, Judy, I do not recall Sanzie," replied Jane, who was already armed with soap and towel for the lavatory. "But keep the story. I shouldn't like to get interested in boy tennis just now. We must forget—" proclaimed Jane in tones so dramatic a poet calendar on the wall trembled in the vocal waves. "Forget! forget——" and Jane was outside the door with a sweeping wave of her big fuzzy towel and a rather alarming thrust of her fist full of soap.

"Ye-eah," groaned Judith, "forget is the word, Sanzie and tennis." She glanced at the tiny clock on a shelf of the bracket type. It was Jane's idea the clock should not be cluttered with surroundings.

"Gee-whiz! It is late, and this the first day. Glad the others on this corridor are all nice and punctual."

In bathrobe and slippers Judith soon followed Jane down the long hall. Neither dallied long in the plunge, for Judith was wide awake now, and presently, after dressing and patting herself and belongings into place, she confronted Jane with this: "I heard Dozia Dalton last night. And I know there will be trouble about the farmer girl. Jane, tell me, is she the scholarship?"

"Yes," almost gasped Jane the irreproachable. "And to think that I, in any way, should be responsible for bringing her to college!"

"But you are not, Janie dear," soothed Judith. "That your father should give this college a scholarship each year is a noble thing, and how can you tell who may win it? That girl is—well, a bit raw," she ground her mouth around the word, "but we have nothing to do with that. She doesn't belong among the juniors, and just leave it to little Judy to steer her off. Don't go trying any uplift; just cut her dead and watch her wilt. From the ashes there may arise a nice little green thing, even if it is of the common garden variety of onion. Now Jane, you have got to do exactly that. Keep Shirley Duncan on her own grounds. Shoo her out of junior haunts."

"You are right, Judy. I have been tortured with the idea that I would have to play fairy godmother to that—that 'hoodlum.' Honestly, did you ever see so ordinary a girl in Wellington?"

"Never. But then she may be a genius. I have read such descriptions of them. There's the first breakfast bell. Smile now and disappoint the horde. They think you have been crossed in love and the old maid depression has settled upon you. You acted that way yesterday," teasingly.

Jane's laugh pealed out at this. It was like ragging a down scale, that rippling crescendo, and Judith needed no other assurance of her friend's good humor.

But the day's tasks left little time for trifles. College work is serious and exacting, each day's programme being carefully and even scientifically marked out to make the round year's schedule complete. Jane and Judith, juniors, with a reputation made in their previous years, "buckled" down to every period with that intelligence and determination for which both had been credited.

Everything was so delightful and the autumn air so full of promise! Jane could not find a true reason for the haunting fear that seemed to follow her in the person of that crude country girl, who somehow had won the Alien scholarship.

It was in free time late the next afternoon that this fear took definite shape. Jane and her contingent were leaving the study hall when Shirley Duncan brushed up through their arm linked line.

She was garbed in a baronet satin skirt of daring hue with an overblouse of variegated georgette. This as a school frock! At first glance Jane almost recoiled, then the possibility of delayed baggage suggested itself and softened her frown.

"Don't notice her," whispered faithful Judith.

Jane's glance just answered when the unpopular freshman broke through the line, grasped Jane's hand and deliberately forced a folded slip of paper into it. Then, with a mocking smile that ran into an audible sneer, she turned and sped away. Her awkward gait and frank romping so close to Wellington Hall brought questioning glances from the line of juniors.

"What's that, Jane Allen?" asked Janet Clarke good-naturedly. "I hope you are not doing uplift for anything like that this year?"

"The merry little mountain maid," mocked Inez Wilson, doing a few skips and a couple of jumps in demonstration.

"How on earth did she ever make Wellington?" demanded the aristocratic Nettie Brocton, disapproval spoiling her leaky dimples.

"Girls, you are horrid!" declared Judith to the rescue. "You all know the freaks love Jane. It's her angel face," and Judith playfully stroked the cheek into which streaks of bright pink threatened admission of guilt—that Jane really knew the uncouth country girl.

"She's a stranger to me," said Jane truthfully, "but in spite of that I must respect her confidence." The crumpled note was thereat securely tucked into the pocket of Jane's blouse.

Winifred Ayres tittered outright, but the advent of Dozia Dalton furnished a welcome interruption.

"Girls," she panted, "what ever do you think? Dol Vincez, our dangerous adversary of last year, runs the beauty shop beyond our gate! Can you comprehend the audacity?"

"We can when you say Dolorez," replied Jane. "Do you actually mean to say she has set up the College Beauty Shop at our very door?"

"She has!" declared the excited Dozia. "Who would dare trust a live and workable phiz to that—traitor?"

"Not I," said Velma Sigsbee.

"Nor I," from Maud Leslie.

"My face must serve me this term," added Inez Wilson, twisting her features to make sure they worked well.

"All the same," demurred Judith, "the temptation is not to be laughed at. Just imagine real dimples speared in," with a finger poked in Maud Leslie's cheek, "and long silky lashes tangles in one's violet gaze——" This was too much even for staid juniors and the race that followed almost justified Shirley's much criticised romp. With this difference: Wellington Hall was now out of the shadows made by the swaying stream of laughing students darting in and out of the autumn sunshine that lay like stripes of panne velvet on the sward, but Shirley's run had begun at the very steps.

Recreation had its limits and that day was counted lost into which a race over the pleasure grounds had not been crowded. It might be for tennis, or even baseball, or yet to the lake, but a run was inevitable. And so they ran.

CHAPTER IV

THRILLING NEWS

Did you read your note, Dinksy?" Judith asked Jane, using the particular pet name adopted because of its very remote distance from the original.

"You know I did, Pally." This was from Pal, of course.

"A bomb threat?"

"Not quite." Jane's hair was rebellious this morning and just now received a real cuffing at its owner's hands.

"How perfectly peachy you would look bobbed, Dinksy. That color and those smooth silky curls! How the angels must have loved you. Know this line?"

"Methinks some cherub holds thee fair,
For kissing down thy sunny hair
I find his ringlets tangled there!"

"You would," interrupted Jane sacrilegiously. "More than his ringlets tangled here this morning," with a final jab of the strongest variety of golden bone hair-pin. "Aunt Mary always said my mood (she meant temper) affected my hair. And I am sure she was always right about it."

"Well, you don't have to tell me about the note if you don't want to, Janie," pouted Judith. "But my idea is, you need counsel and I am as ever the expert."

"Fair Portia, thou shalt be my counsel ever. I had no thought of hiding the little note," insisted Jane, "but it is horribly disappointing. Wait until I rescue it from the basket. There's always a charm about the original." "Don't bother, please, Jane," begged Judith. "We are almost late and I hope for a set of tennis before class. I need it every day to keep off the heartbreak. Darlink Sanzie," she sniffled. "To think he will nary again bat a ball in my black eye."

"Why never again? There are other vacations."

"But no more Jacks like Sanzie. He is unique and has opened a law office by now. Can't you see his stenographer kicking his shapely shins as he dictates? They always do that in the movies, and Sanzie is so up to date, even as to shins. Now, Janie dear, let's along. En route you may tell me about the bomb threat. The corridors are clear."

"She simply wants a chance to talk to me, that's all——"

"But she can't have it," declared Judith. "As your counsel I forbid it. Just give that girl a chance and she will bind you over, body and soul; refined blackmail, you know. Don't you dare answer that note until I dictate the reply," Judith swung her arm around Jane's waist in the most all-embracing manner. "Please, Dinksy," she almost whispered, "wait until we are free this afternoon."

Thus they separated; Judith for her tennis and Jane for a turn on Bowling Green.

But Jane had a deeper problem to solve than even her chum suspected. There was the broken mirror in Dozia's room and the fact that Dozia had actually hit Shirley on the head with a hammer!

"A pretty record that—and made on the first night in college," Jane reflected.

Undoubtedly the freshman's demand that Jane "see her at once" had to do with the outrage. And the interview would be granted, of course, that very afternoon unless Judith interfered.

Incidentally Judith was turning the situation over in her own good-natured mind.

"I would just like to see that gawk get Jane wound up in her miseries," she told herself, while Janet Clarke hunted for stray tennis balls in the hedge. "Jane is such a dear with sympathy that this girl's very crimes would appeal to her—in compassion. No-sir-ree!" She volleyed a vicious ball—"Jane will not see the impossible Shirley alone just yet."

Meanwhile news of Dolorez Vincez's Beauty Shop had spread over the college like a holiday notice. Dolorez was the South American girl who had been expelled from Wellington the previous year because of irregularities in many things but particularly in basket ball games. As told in the book, "Jane Allen: Center," this young lady was really a teacher of athletics, and had been posing as an amateur. Being forced to leave college after opening a prohibited beauty shop she vowed vengeance, and many of the students now felt the Beauty Parlor, opened at the very gates of Wellington and widely advertised, was about to assume the dangers of a golden spider web.

The girls were fairly quivering with excitement, when Dozia Dalton, herald of the sensation, condescended to tell everybody all she knew about the whole thing.

Velma Sigsbee would insist upon interrupting with silly questions, such as the price of a bob or the possible pain of operating for double dimples, but eventually Dozia told the story while Ted Guthrie held Velma's hand in a compelling grip. It was over on the long low bench by the ball field where practice should have been kicking up a dust. But Dol's Beauty Parlor outrage was too delectable to forego even for a final ball game,

"It's perfectly darling," confided the idolized Dozia (any girl with that story on her person would be idolized although Dozia was individually popular). "The place, I mean. It's fitted up——"

"Were—you in?" gasped Winifred Ayres.

"No, of course I was not in," disdained Dozia. "No one who ever knew the trickery of Dolorez Vincez would enter that place."

"Why?" asked the innocent Nettie Brocton. "Would she really do something dreadful——"

"She would, really," declared Jane, her tone not easy to interpret. "She could turn your hair a bright red like mine by mere chemical action of her ventilating system."

"Really!" implored the dimply girl.

"Pos-i-tive-ly!" declared Jane. "But don't attempt it dear. She would send your dad an awful bill for doing a stunt like that. Think of the price of hair like mine!"

That suggestion brought disaster to Jane, for Ted Guthrie swayed at the very end of the bench and the whole line almost went over backwards. It was in Ted's attempt to punish Jane for her vanity that the sudden sweep, like a current in physics, jerked feet from the ground and upset balance generally. Some seconds elapsed (and each was precious) before things again settled down, including Velma's crochet balls, Janet's book, pad, and pencil, Dozia's small bottle of salted peanuts as well as other sundries and supplies.

"Please finish the yarn," implored Nettie Brocton. "Do tell us, Dozia, how the place is fitted up."

"First tell us, please," insisted judicial Judith, "how do you know how it is fitted up? Does our plumber plumb there?"

During all this nonsense Jane cast many a furtive glance along Linger Lane, expecting the obnoxious Shirley to loom up large and lanky by the way, but as yet she had not darkened the shadowy path. If Jane could run off to the Rockery, that landmark between freshman and later college campus lines, there to meet and have done with the demands of her erstwhile tormentor. But no, Judith was openly demanding Jane's concentration on the bench, and every point made by Dozia in her tale of the beauty shop Judith flung at Jane in direct challenge for stricter attention. She was not going to escape if Judith Stearns knew it, and she surmised the intention.

It had finally been told to tingling ears that the poisoned beauty shop, as Winifred Ayres, the writer, had already dubbed the place, was done in wonderful mirrors, and shiny faucets, windy wizzing hair fans and electric permanent wavers and curlers; and when the full description had been given, more girls than one sighed, groaned and grumbled.

"To think it has to be taboo," spoke Ted Guthrie. "Dol was always a wizard, and now thus equipped she might have a lovely way of fanning me thin."

"And fattening me nice and fluffy with the same fan," sighed Winifred.

"My freckles might float away like powder from the butterfly's wings," with a weird fluttering of Dozia's long arms.

"But hair!" exclaimed Judith. "Think of turning me into a golden blonde with eyes like blue-bells under dewiness——"

"It cannot be! It cannot be!" moaned Dozia. "Instead we must raid the place and banish the traitor. How about that for stunt night with the sophs?"

"Wonderful!" sang out Juliette De Puy. She had listened and waited with a certain reserve for which this capable Juliette was famous, but now that the story was told she deigned to add that one word "wonderful." Everyone looked at her suddenly.

"And have you tell the sophs," blurted out Nettie Brocton. "Dozia Dalton you have spoiled it all. Didn't you see we had company?"

"Never noticed the lovely Juliette. Never mind Julie, you may tell the crowd all you've heard," condescended the redoubtable Dozia. "We enjoyed having you and it is perfectly all right."

"Thanks. Come over to our camp some night and I'll do as much for you. I just came in this afternoon, you know, to sub on the ball team."

"Instead of which you subbed on the gossip club," finished Jane, jumping up. "I've got to go back to my room. Don't let me hurry anyone," she said indifferently. Then, just as a strange figure turned from the big boxwood bumper into the lane, Jane escaped.

She hurried to meet Shirley Duncan.

CHAPTER V

THREATS AND DEFIANCE

The girl approaching was not so easy to appraise as her unusual costume proclaimed her to be. Jane realized this; country girls are apt to make such mistakes, and even dinner gown tags on school day togs would hardly be proof positive of inferiority, Jane reflected.

Shirley Duncan swung along with a careless stride, but even the pose might cover embarrassment. Jane sent a welcome smile out to meet her and the stranger jerked her head rather saucily in recognition.

"Have I kept you waiting?" asked Jane in the best of humor.

"Well, rather," replied the freshman, "but I knew better than to break in on that crowd," with an arm sweep toward the ball field. "Can we go up to your room for a few minutes?"

Jane thought quickly. To go to her room might mean an interruption from Judith; also it might mean the danger from an undisciplined voice.

"I have been indoors so much today," she replied, "and our lovely days are flying so, suppose we go over to the rose summer house? We won't be interrupted there and we will both have the benefit of a longer time out of doors. I suppose you feel it, freshmen usually do." They were moving toward the rustic house that looked rather desolate in its coat of faded rose leaves.

"Oh, freshmen feel everything, I suppose," replied the other, "but I can't see why we should be openly abused for all that. I heard there was no more hazing allowed in colleges?"

"We have never hazed at Wellington," Jane said rather indignantly, "and Miss—Miss Duncan, I am sure no one will ever attempt the least abuse even in a spirit of fun at this college."

"They won't, eh?" type broke out in that challenge. "Well, that is just what I wanted to see you about. I suppose I'm not good enough to go to your rooms." Lip curled, nostrils quivered and head jerked up impertinently with that accusation.

"Why, Miss Duncan—" floundered Jane.

"Why don't you call me Shirley? Isn't that a swell enough name?" interrupted the other.

Jane dropped down on the summer house seat with a thud. Here was a problem surely. Antagonism fairly blazed in the girl's dark eyes. Yet she was a stranger—actually Jane's guest.

"Shirley is a very sweet name and I have always loved it," replied Jane frankly. "But my dear young lady, we must not quarrel. We shall never get acquainted that way."

"Oh no, the juniors may do all the quarreling. We freshies must just turn the other cheek of course. But I suppose you know that long lanky friend of yours, they call some foolish name like Doses, hit me on the head with her hammer the other night?"

"You mean Dozia Dalton—yes, she told me her hammer slipped—"

"Slipped indeed!" more scorn and lip curling. "She deliberately dropped it on my head—"

"And you threw it at the mirror," broke out Jane, weary of acting the angel without gaining the slightest return from this rude girl.

"Yes, I broke it and I'm glad of it! Now what are you going to do about it?" Two hands not really pretty, dug deep into the satin skirt pockets, and Shirley Duncan towered over Jane Allen defiantly.

"What am I going to do about it?" repeated Jane. But the irony was lost on her companion. "You did not ask to see me just to be offensive?" parried Jane.

"No indeed, I wanted to remind you I am in this college because your father gave a scholarship, and I suppose that would mean you might be nice to me at least."

"I'm sure I want to be," Jane quickly toned down. "But no girl can make friends with another when she insists on quarreling. I am willing to pay for the broken mirror—"

"You don't need to trouble yourself; if it is to be paid for I'll do it myself. My folks wouldn't let me—sponge on anybody."

"Sponge," repeated Jane, frowning with something like disgust. "Please don't use such horrible slang."

"Oh my! I suppose a scholarship girl must be a mouse or a kitten. Well, when I took it I understood no one in Wellington was to know about it and that the scholarship girl had equal rights with every other girl."

"So she has and no one here does know who wins the scholarship." Somehow Jane stumbled over the word. It was fraught with terror in the hands of this impossible creature.

"Well, I don't believe it" (no regard for Jane's veracity), "but I'll hold on awhile and see." (Condescending, thought Jane.) "My folks always wanted me to go to college and I just came to satisfy them. I don't give a snap for all the high brow stuff and I might as well tell you I am nearly dead with homesickness." (She didn't look it, Jane observed.) "But I'm no quitter, so I intend to stick. Now let's get back to the girl who hit me. Can you make her apologize?"

"No," said Jane flatly, "and what's more I have no intention of trying to. You brought trouble on yourself by going into Dozia's room without being invited. You should know that the younger girls, the freshmen, are not supposed to take such privileges. Then when you annoyed my friend" (Jane almost kissed the word) "she told you outright she was busy and did not want to be bothered. Next thing, you deliberately sat under her stepladder. Do you like to get in the open path of tack hammers?"

"Love to," sneered Shirley. "And I'm crazy about playing ball with them when mirrors are up for back stops. All right, go ahead, as far as you like. I believe now what I heard about the Jane Alien crowd. A lot of goody goodies, too stuck up to bother with country girls." Jane jumped from her seat and gasped at an interruption but did not succeed in sustaining it. "But I've got friends around here who know the ropes. They are not freshies either, so don't bother about me, Miss Allen. I'll see about the looking-glass and the girl who hit me with her hammer."

Jane let her go, was actually glad to see the last of the satin skirt as it swished out into the winding path, nor did she immediately follow it. Instead she sat there, tearing little red rose hips from the tenacious vines and tossing them away regardless of their artistic value as decorative winter berries.

"Tragic," she muttered, "positively tragic. And that is what my darling dad wasted a perfectly good scholarship on." Thoughts of "dad" mercifully intervened and saved the girl's temper further violence. "But what puzzles me is how that girl ever won the scholarship?" Jane silently questioned, and in that unspoken sentence she unconsciously shaped the key to fit the mystery.

How did this girl win the scholarship? For some moments longer Jane sat there. She went over again the incident of Dozia's tack hammer. That she could depend absolutely on Dozia, and knew this strange girl had done more than sit in the path of the showering tack hammer was irrefutable.

"Dozia was a little bit reckless of course," admitted the mentor, "and she did seem to coddle the fact that her hammer fell on Shirley's head. I recall she even said she was glad it hit her and hoped the blow would send the freshie home to her 'maw.'"

Jane wanted to laugh but she refrained. There was a strange proctor in office this year to be considered. If dear old Miss Weatherbee were still in charge it might be much easier to explain the accident.

"And that girl defied me with a threat of friends! She has friends who are not in the freshman ranks? I remember she said that. Who can they be? My enemies naturally," decided Jane.

How these enemies would fill that foolish head with nonsense, and how far they might urge her on to mischief if not to actual danger, Jane Allen did not venture to estimate.

"But Dozia tried first shot to send her home to her 'maw!'"

The humor of the situation now struck Jane like a blow on the funny bone, and she burst out laughing in the very face of the thorny rose bush.

"After all it is too delicious!" she told herself. "And even if she is my dad's scholarship girl there's a heap of fun in the ridiculous situation. I'll find Judy and tell her the whole thing. Too good to keep; too funny to spoil," and the blue serge skirt that fanned the boxwood a moment later never swished a swish. Jane did not give it time to do so.

CHAPTER VI

JANE AND JUDITH

Oh, do tell me, Janie. I was watching behind the big elm the whole time. Couldn't hear a word of course, but I could have seen any attempt at violence. That girl, I tell you, is no ordinary 'critter.' I fully expected she would draw something from that broad satin belt. But do tell? What was it all about?"

"Thank you for the chance, Judy, I was just wondering when you would take breath. It is funny—so funny I am laughing all over," and the gray eyes sent out sparks of mirth, as a senior might have put it.

"Isn't it!" howled Judith, pegging a pillow at Jane's head to keep the fun a-going or the "pot a-boiling" as you will.

"I don't know where to begin Judy. At first I was sort of awe-stricken. Considering the handicaps poor Shirley has loaded herself up with——"

"Including the name. Have you analyzed that?"

"Yes, love, I have. Some maiden aunt with a paper covered library must have inflicted her with that. It doesn't suit at all, although she seems very proud of it."

"And no chance of her growing into it either. Like a chauffeur named Claude or Clarence. Her last name now would be much snappier for her. Duncan makes a topping Dunny," suggested Judith.

"But the girl would never believe that," sighed Jane. "She asked me to call her Shirley and I tried to; now, Judith, listen. Here are a few difficult facts. Shirley Duncan is bound to fight. She has been brought up in the school of affectionate antagonism, and with her it is a case of getting the best of everyone and everything. I did not say getting the better, I mean best."

"I savvy, as our old friend cow-boy Pedro would say. Have you heard from home lately, Dinks?"

"Yes, Judith. All well and lonely. But please concentrate. This matter is serious. Shirley threatened me with friends—says she has friends here who are not freshies. Can you guess who they may be?"

"Never saw a girl speak to her a second time unless she, Shirley, stepped on the other's toes or knocked her hat off. Then the conversation was naturally brief and snappy. It happened to Mabel."

"I can't imagine whom she means, but they are somewhere ready to pounce on us, so let us beware. Next point is: she seems to have money: offered to pay for the broken mirror. In fact she sort of lorded it over me."

"Dozia should strike for a new vanity dresser. One with three side glasses big enough to reflect her wonderful, long flowing locks. A rare chance for Dozia."

"But how could a girl coming in on scholarship have money to squander?" reflected Jane.

"That maiden aunt with the paper covered novels would love good looking-glasses. It might be the salvation of this Shirley girl, if she did have access to a true mirror."

Judith snapped the top on her fountain pen and slammed shut her note-book. Indifferent work was worse than none, she seemed to have decided.

"Had you finished your Lat? Isn't it awful to have to work off a condition? Please don't let me bother you ever, Jude, when you have that task on hand," said Jane seriously.

"I have and it is, if you kept your two questions properly tabulated. You see I am straining for mental stuff. I want to improve the old condition of forgetfulness. That was what knocked friend Virgil, or was it Cicero? I loved the stories and forgot the period. But I am finished for this evening, dear, and you know we have some initiation stunts to take part in. I am glad they are so simple. It seems to me each year the nonsense gets more rational."

"It really does, and I think, as you do, that shows progress. We can all enjoy better fun than that of afflicting the innocent. Of course we still have to have some ceremony or the young 'uns wouldn't think they were really in college. I just wonder how it will strike our rebel Shirley?"

"That interests me too, Dinksy. Let's go and see. We have some lovely little babes this year. That ivory blonde, the timid one with a most atrocious name, Sarah Something, I just love her, don't you?"

"Sarah Howland, I saw Inez marking her card. Yes, she is sweet in spite of her name. Rather a pity sponsors cannot show discrimination. Here is your sweater. Better take it; the wind whistles. I'll pull my riding cap down as a disguise. It takes in most of this-wig," Jane was struggling to stuff her bright tresses into the pocket of her black velvet jockey cap. The effect towered like a real English derby and Judith danced in delight.

"I'll try that with my tarn," she declared. "One's hair is always the surest give-away. Here are the masks—hanging neatly on the nail of last year's tenants. I call that thoughtful."

Mysterious calls and whistles were now creeping in under doorways and through transoms. The sophs were ready to initiate the frightened little freshmen. Tales of "they will do this and they won't do that" had little effect on the individual candidate, but served to keep up the collective nerve by way of distraction.

"If they hold us under the pump I'll be glad of it," sang out Shirley the Rebel. "Haven't had a decent drink of water since I left home, and I suppose the pump has a spring."

"And it's warm enough to enjoy a dip in the lake if they abduct us in canoes," added Jessie Whitely. "I'm almost suffocated in this big thing," with an impatient jerk at the criminal's black robe.

"Say your prayers, say your prayers!" chanted another of the group, seconded by moans and groans. They were waiting like prisoners jammed into the gym lobby, and a guard of sophs patrolled the entrance.

Noticeable in the assemblage was little Sarah Howland—noticeable because she sat on a window sill all alone and dangled her feet contentedly. She actually appeared to be enjoying the prospect of being "roughed." Shirley was noisy as usual, and for once her raillery seemed appropriate. The more timid girls had taken shelter about her, as if expecting she would easily and even gaily vanquish the attacking foe.

Friends had the strong girl now if never before, and she fairly expanded under the compliment. She would show the sophs what country training did for a girl in the way of self-protection, and a few stories of real or fancied battles at High School (no town mentioned) also served to thrill her audience until Shirley came near being popular for the once.

"Of course we shall have to do foolish things," mused Eleanor Meed, "but I won't mind as long as I am not forced to eat something I hate or drink vinegar—"

"Don't worry on that score," spoke up Marie Coeyman. "Nothing like that is apt to be attempted. I heard some of the sophs say—"

"Because they knew you were listening," discerned another. "Don't take any stock in what you overheard. They are apt to do directly contrary to loudly whispered plans."

"But whatever it is to be, I do wish they would get at it and let's have it over," growled Shirley. "It's no fun being cooped up here—"

"Hush, don't let the guards hear you complaining," cautioned Marie. "It's like a trial, you get more for contempt of court if you don't accept your sentence gracefully."

The shuffling of many feet along the stone walk put an end to further speculation.

"Here they come! Here they come!" went a tremor through the crowd of candidates, and when the doors were thrown open a masked committee confronted them.

Orders, all kinds and volumes of them, poured in quickly as tag numbers could be singled out. Some were taken in little groups of four "outside to cool off." Others were commanded to hop around in circles, while still more were given such individual commands as seemed most antagonistic to their particular propensities.

Shirley was still unmolested. She stood bravely awaiting her turn, now and then flinging out a wild arm to make sure its muscles were in good shape for the fray.

Finally someone (we hope it was not Judith) called her number— sixty-eight, and she sprang to the chalk line with what is usually termed alacrity, but it really sounded much more ominous.

"Does your head hurt?" asked the voice, and Shirley nodded. She thought that might be safest.

"What hit you?" went on the prosecutor.

"A hammer!" responded Shirley.

"A nice hard tack hammer?" came the query again.

"Lovely," spoke the bewildered girl.

"What did you do with it?" asked the inquisitor.

There was no response. The Rebel was getting indignant.

"Quick," demanded a second member "of the firing squad."

"I threw it away," faltered sixty-eight.

"What did it hit?"

"A looking-glass." This reply came quickly enough.

"And the glass smashed?"

"Yes—"

"Yes, madam," prompted a guard.

"Yes, madam," repeated Shirley with a quiver.

"For which show of temper you are to dust that room every day for a full week, and you may come along now and get your first lesson."

Shirley straightened up defiantly.

"Go on! Go on!" begged the little freshman recognized as the pretty Sarah Howland. "Hurry or they will make it worse."

The leader marched out and Shirley followed. Those who had heard the sentence realized the misery it inflicted that the strongest girl should be denied the pump, the lake, tree climbing and even boxing possible or gym work, for a mean little contemptible stunt like dusting Dozia's room!

Arrived at the room someone stuck something on Shirley's nose. She attempted to brush it off but was warned not to do so. Presently she realized it was a feather, and it seemed to stick in glue on the very point of her nose!

We will spare the reader an account of Shirley's agony as she vainly tried to "dust" with that feather on her nose. It was too humiliating, but a freshman should not have shown such temper, and there was still the cracked mirror to accuse her!

Every piece of furniture in the room had to be "dusted," that is it was brushed with the evil feather, which somehow or other did stay on the candidate's nose; and if the spectators clapped and laughed Shirley could scarcely blame them, for Dozia Dalton had a foolish lot of truck to be dusted. More than once she halted, but was promptly prodded on until finally the humiliating task had been accomplished.

"Good girl!" called out a voice from behind a mask and Judith quickly stepped up to take off the duster. Juniors favor the freshman in spite of such conditions.

"O—uch!" protested the culprit. "It is hard!"

"Wait a minute!" cautioned Jane's voice. "This will remove it. Sit down, sixty-eight."

The unhappy candidate fell into a chair, while someone applied the alcohol cloth and presently the tiny feather fell with its bit of sticky felt into the palm awaiting to catch it.

"Keep your hands down," insisted someone, for Shirley never knew before the glory of a free nose and she just wanted to pet it a little. But her tormentors intended to fix up any damage they might have inadvertently perpetrated on the feature, and what coating didn't come off with the alcohol was quickly covered with Dozia's powder, until the freshman was made to look even better than nature had intended she should.

This fixing up was almost as hateful to Shirley as was the abominable dusting, but she kept her temper—the lesson seemed profitable already.

Jane was arranging the disordered hair, and as she attempted to stroke it with a wet brush Shirley put up a detaining hand.

"Please don't wet it," she begged in a whisper, and Jane stopped short with her brush raised for action.

"Not wet it?" she thought quickly. "That must mean treatment, and treatment meant the forbidden beauty shop!"

This girl had been visiting that shop. More danger ahead, decided Jane, as she lay down the brush and proceeded to finish the dressing dry.

Judith had overheard the request and pinched Jane's arm to admit it, but a loud demand for the freshman from the group rounding up candidates saved further delay and when Shirley left Dozia's room the latter patted her affectionately.

"Don't worry, dear," said Dozia, "I'll be careful not to raise too much dust next week."

But her sentence was not the most serious thing in prospect for the rebel Shirley Duncan. Not even the good times prepared for the candidates served to allay the dread she struggled against, and only her natural delight in the rollicking fun, and the really fine spread served them by the juniors, helped bring the girl back to a happy frame of mind.

Woe unto the freshie who shows ill will at an initiation!

She may be obliged to walk in the gutter for the full first half year, or wear a baby blue ribbon under her chin!

But Shirley had heeded the warnings.

CHAPTER VII

A QUEER MIX-UP

"Jane, the girls are frightened to death. Can you imagine ghost stories having that effect in this staid, solid, absolutely reliable old college?" asked Maud Leslie.

"It is absurd," admitted Jane, "but Maudie, all students are not scientifically inclined as you are. What about the ghost? Who is he and who saw him?"

"He is the usually uncanny weird noise, nothing even original about him. One would expect more of a college ghost. And just as trite and commonplace is the fact that these nocturnal howls come at safe hours when we cannot be expected to go through a fire or panic drill. I call the whole thing disgusting."

"So do I," assented Jane. "But don't worry, Maud. If there is one line of action I like better than another it is that of laying ghosts. Whizz, whack, bang! I'll make the bones rattle if they come my way."

Jane was punching a bag in the gym when Maud unfolded the story of the ghost scare. It was not really news, for Wellington had been buzzing the spirit's ears for days and not until some of the younger students appealed to the older girls did Jane and other juniors give heed to the fear epidemic.

"I'm glad you're still a junior, Jane," commented Maud, taking breath after vaulting a horse or two. "We should never dare to bring such trivial troubles to you were you a senior."

"And I'm glad to be a junior still," replied Jane. "Judith and I decided on this extra year to specialize. But even were I a senior, Maud, I would be happy to hear your heartbreaks," with a twist of her mouth that took care of the paradox.

"Thanks a lot." Blanco, the wooden horse painted white on a former "sorority spree," was cleared by Maud the scientific, and she came up to Jane, a question in the sudden jerk of her bobbed head. "Jane, will you help us organize a ghost raid? We cannot have the freshies all

scared blue by someone's nonsense, and Dozia, Inez, Winifred and I have done all we could in the way of investigation. That's a trick ghost, Jane, I am convinced of that much, and it will take a double trick to lay it."

"Certainly I'll organize a raid squad, Maud. I'd love to lead the charge myself. Do we have outposts, and pickets, and-trench companies? Or would a bathrobe drill answer as well?"

"Jane, I am serious," Maud pouted. "I tell you some of the girls are asking to have their quarters changed, and if all were given transfers I am sure Lenox Hall would be abandoned to the ghost. Rather shabby of him to choose the babes' quarters."

"Spooks are cowardly as a rule," replied Jane. "And Maudie dear, I realize you are serious. But I can hardly organize a raiding squad instanter. I must at least have time to round up a few reliable girls. No use going after the 'sperit' with a band of cowards. You know yourself what fun that would be for his spookship." "Oh yes, of course, Jane. I did not mean to be impatient, but the girls just begged me to enlist your leadership. You have always been such a— successful leader."

"Thanks again, girlie. But failure is sure to come to him who tries once too often. Not that I should mind failure, except for the sake of those excited children. Really I hate to think how the ghost will feel when we get through rattling his bones." A sudden dash at a pair of ceiling rings set the whole line dangling along the gym and served to illustrate a possible way of rattling spectral dry bones, although Jane's graceful figure, as she swung to and fro, did much to soften the effect.

"When can we make the raid?" persisted Maud. "I have promised to bring a definite answer."

Jane dropped to the mattress and sat with hands clasped over her knees. "Is this ghost a person of regular habits? Does he take exercise every night?"

"The noise was perfectly dreadful last night, and Velma Sigsbee was visiting Lenox night before and she almost went into hysterics when the rattling began. You know what Velma is for signs. Won't wear a thing green and all that."

"And I suppose she attempts to explain it all on purely reasonable grounds of modern thought. The brand that credits the dead with all power, and limits the living with a very flexible and convenient practical faith. The two work together beautifully, of course, for what we can't understand we must put down to faith, and what we want to believe we are inspired to by our friends on the other side. Dovetails perfectly, sort of a fidele de convenance. Well, Maudie, you may tell the babes that we juniors, their natural guardians, will take care of his ghostship if possible this very night; if not tonight then tomorrow at M. I suppose midnight is the time of clangs and rattles?"

"Yes, the girls say it is always midnight. And I just want to say, Jane, that the big country girl, Shirley Duncan, is the only one not terrified. But I suppose country girls are accustomed to wild things." Everyone seemed loath to add further criticism to Shirley's rather unenviable reputation.

"Oh yes; haunted wells and spooky attics, to say nothing of barnyard 'sperits' that roam about to scare the cows into giving buttermilk and cream cheese," replied Jane. "It might just be—"

she hesitated, then jumped to her feet with a little gleeful bounce—"it might be a ghost from Shirley's own home town. Strange we never had one at Wellington before."

"Velma said something like that," admitted Maud. "She said Shirley was so—so antagonistic that her presence here might disturb some friendly communication, and—"

Jane's laugh finished the hypothesis.

"How delicious of Velma!" she exclaimed. "But we must be careful not to bring any more trouble upon poor Shirley. She's only a freshman and has apparently enjoyed few home opportunities," finished Jane.

"But why does she tell the girls such horribly weird stories?" objected the scientific Maud. "She seems to delight in getting an audience for the wildest sort of yarns. And just now naturally they go to the youngsters' heads. Honestly, Janie, no less than three freshmen have begged me to crowd into their quarters tonight. They seem to think a soph might keep off this animated Jinks."

"I can just imagine Shirley telling country ghost stories," reflected Jane, "and I agree with you, dear child, she is very inopportune with them, but it would be worse than useless for me to attempt to interfere. In fact, I think if I did so she would take up Irish Folk Lore to keep stories going. Running out of ghosts she might fall back on fairies. She really seems the queerest girl we have had in a long time."

"Except Dolorez Vincez, she was still more curious," recalled Maud, referring to the South American character in Jane Allen: Center, who still kept within the shadow of Wellington by now running that protested beauty shop just outside the college gates.

"But Dol is something of a foreigner, while Shirley seems to be all American," replied Jane. "Just fancy Americanizing an American born and bred! But this Shirley girl surely needs some sort of treatment. Her week of dusting Dozia's room is up today. I hope the lesson brought down her hoity-toity a peg or two. There come the girls from the village. Be prepared for more ghost stories for I see Ted Guthrie gasping, even at this distance. And behold the windmills— Dozia's arm! Something very exciting must have happened."

"Jane! Jane!" shouted Janet Clarke, the advance guard of the line of girls marching in from the village. "Oh, you missed it! Hello, Maud," seeing Jane's companion. "You girls will stick around a stuffy old gym, will you? Well, then, you have got to miss things. Come on in, children, and watch Jane's hair shoot sparks. Inez, you take the first two paragraphs while I get my breath, and, Winifred, don't forget those adjectives you hit me with under the oaks."

"Do tell?" begged Jane. "Whatever has happened and where is Judith?"

"Arrested!" gasped Inez.

"What? What are you talking about?" demanded Jane. The girls really seemed frightened.

"Yes—she is gone—gone with an officer," panted Inez.

"There, you have had your two paragraphs," interposed Janet. "They were short but complete and I have recovered my breath. It is so exciting, Jane, and so confusing—"

"If you will just be coherent enough to tell me where Judith is we might wait for the emotional details," snapped Jane. "If Judith is in any trouble we have no right to stand around gasping."

"Right, Jane," assented Dozia. "But I did not want to take all the responsibility from Inez. This is what happened. We were coming along Cobble Lane when Judith espied two messenger boys on the rail fence. They were apparently squabbling about something, and just as we came along by the wild cherry tree, a few hundred yards from them, the big fellow gave the little fellow a punch and sent him sprawling in the bushes. Then the big fellow took to his heels—"

"He had something—a package he grabbed from Tim, the little fellow," interrupted Inez.

"Yes, I know, but that is not essential now, we must get to Judith," declared Dozia, showing irritation. "Judith ran—"

"But the policeman darted out from the elderberry clump—"

"Winifred, please!" implored Dozia. "I will not forget to tell that, but if you think you can do it all more intelligently or quickly—"

"Pardon me, Dozia, please, I am just too excited—"

"Did Judith go to help the officer?" demanded Jane impatiently.

"No," fired back Dozia. "It was old Sour Sandy, who always declares we are up to mischief, and when the big boy ran, Judith chased after him while Cop Sandy ran after both. We stood still—"

"He was muttering and threatening so," ventured Janet.

"Were you afraid of him?" charged Jane.

"No, but we could not decide instantly that we should run after Judith. It was all so sudden," said spokesman Dozia. "And of course we realized any more commotion would really get us all in trouble; that old officer is such a crank."

"But to let Judith face it all alone," challenged Jane.

"I really haven't told the one important detail," Dozia vainly attempted to explain. "I was walking with Judith and two other girls were just a little ahead. They were Shirley Duncan and that pretty little thing, Sarah—something—"

"Howland," Jane flung in.

"Yes," went on Dozia. "And Judith seemed so intent on watching them she hardly answered me intelligently."

"There is something up between those two," declared Winifred Ayres. "I know it, and I guess Judy knows it too."

"But what have they to do with the fighting messengers?" demanded Jane, now utterly bewildered from the snarled account.

"The messenger, who got the package from Tiny Tim, shouted at Shirley and she waited. Then, when he could get near enough he threw the paper box to Shirley and she raced off toward the Beauty Shop. When we saw the last of it we couldn't tell whom Judith was chasing, but she ran right into Dol Vin's shop," declared Dozia, "and of course Cop Sandy was not long in doing the same thing. We knew we would be helpless to do anything there if Dol were in, so we came back to see what you would suggest," ended Dozia with a trail of relief in the last few words.

"I suggest that we go after Judith," promptly ordered Jane, and if precious time had been wasted in the recital, the loss was atoned in the pace taken by that rescuing squad as they followed Jane in her race toward Dol Vin's Beauty Shop.

CHAPTER VIII

TO THE RESCUE

The Beauty Shop was presently besieged by an excited crowd of girls, and to give due credit to the purely human element it must be admitted the girls were delighted to be there—at the forbidden post.

"Thrilling!" whispered Velma Sigsbee, and she "said it" for all the others.

The redoubtable Dol Vin (short for Dolorez Vincez) appeared at the quaint square paned door. She was gowned in a very close fitting and striking black satin "clinger" gown. Her hair was done in the most modern of styles, like a window show for her hair dressing parlor, and her foreign face, with its natural olive tones, was very much fixed up with many touches of peach and carmine, as well as darker hints under the eyes; and her lashes—well, perhaps Dolorez had been crying inky tears; that was the effect one gathered from a glance at the vampish make-up.

"Is Miss Stearns here?" asked Jane authoritatively. She and Dol had clashed glances before, and Jane had no idea of condescending to the apostate of Wellington.

"Miss Stearns here!" repeated the highly colored lips. Then shoulders shrugged and scorn fairly sizzled through an indescribable sneer. "I do not check up the patrons. She may be in a chair within. Will you enter?"

The girls surrounding Jane tittered audibly. Since when had plain Dol Vin become so foreign?

"En—ter!" drawled Dozia. "Yes, let's," to Jane. This little hiss was intended as a reactionary simper.

"Miss Stearns would not be here on professional business," retorted Jane. "And she would never occupy one of your treatment chairs." Jane hated to dignify anything in the beauty shop with that description, but acid terms were elusive just then; and besides Jane was now getting anxious about Judith.

"Oh, indeed!" more shoulder shrugging and a futurist pose of the black satin "clinger," "What else, then, might the Lady Stearns be doing at my place?"

"Dol Vincez, you just stop that nonsense," flared Dozia Dalton, stepping up to the fancy little door defiantly. "We saw Judith Stearns run in here after Shirley Duncan, and you know very well that old officer Sandy came in after her. Now where is Judith?"

"Isn't it lovely to have you all here? And begging me for something?" Hands on hips, then a shift of the right hand to a very black ball of hair bunched out where the human ear usually reposes. "I am delighted I am sure with this visitation, and I'd love to ask you all in only I'm busy. You will have to excuse me," and with a very Frenchy bow, the Queen of the Beauty Shop got behind the squared glass door and pushed it shut till the latch clicked.

"Shut the door in our faces," growled Velma, as if everyone had not seen the insulting act.

Jane stood for a moment, thinking seriously and swiftly. She was not concerned with the girls about her; neither had she any of their curiosity about the interior of the shop. She was wondering what it all meant, and how she could trace Judith. A brilliant thought captured her. Why not go inside for a shampoo?

She turned to her companions. "I suppose it is perfectly proper under the circumstances to go inside—somehow. I'll apply for a shampoo!"

"But the rest of us?" wailed the curious Velma.

"Ask for something else," suggested the resourceful Jane.

"Perhaps she won't answer the ring," parried Janet.

"Then we'll knock," threatened Jane, as she pressed the little button over the "treatment hours" sign.

They waited. There were Jane, Dozia, Velma, Winifred, Janet and Inez, six palpitating girls, each taking inventory of her possible beauty spots that might need touching up. Even Dol Vin would succumb to such an onslaught of orders, but—

"Suppose she charges us some dreadful price—like five dollars each?" gasped Velma.

"Can't do it," declared Jane. "We'll go by her price list. But no one seems to answer."

"Peeking out, I'll bet," whispered Janet. "Ring three times, Jane, and she'll know we mean business."

Jane followed that advice, but still no answer.

"There's a side door," suggested Dozia, critically inspecting the long, low old stone building that had been put up originally as a rendezvous for Wellington faculty who might want to get away from the buzz of girls and college. It seemed no one had that sort of disease, however, and the rest cure "went to the wall" for want of patronage. Just what company was now financing the rather expensive venture of Dol Vin no one knew, but it must have taken a lot of money even to buy the window scrim, the porch cretonne and the gold lettering on window and door glass. These details were visible from the exterior, and what, oh, what might the interior look like to correspond?

"The side door," agreed Jane, "for all but one or two. Then perhaps we'll get an answer here."

The ruse worked beautifully, for hardly had the tread of feet—eight of them, four pairs—passed down the steps than in answer to a very lady-like ring of Jane's a colored maid drew open the door.

"May I get a shampoo?" asked Jane sweetly, stepping inside as she spoke and covertly motioning Dozia to follow.

"This way, please," said the white-capped and white-frosted, black-faced maid. And behold! Jane and Dozia were within the mysterious parlor!

Neither spoke. Both were listening. Someone was sobbing in the next room and Dol Vin's voice was remonstrating.

As if suddenly realizing the situation the colored maid hurried out. The sobbing ceased instantly and so did the talking. A step through the hall indicated the coming of Dolorez.

"What does this mean?" she demanded angrily, stepping up to Jane with blazing eyes. "How dare you force your way in here?"

"Is not this a public shop?" fired back Jane, equally angry. "Have you not openly solicited Wellington patronage?"

"As if you came for that! If you do not leave at once I shall phone the police!"

"Do," dared Jane. "And I shall demand that they search the place. Someone is hidden here."

A laugh, empty of mirth but bursting with scorn, followed Jane's accusation. It ran down a falsetto scale like pebbles off a tin roof. Then Dolorez turned to summon her maid.

"Yolande!" she called. "Show these persons out."

The perplexed darky muttered, "Yes'm," and proceeded to obey, but Jane and Dozia never moved. They were listening now to noise of another sort. The girls on the side porch seemed to be having a good time of it.

"Come," demanded the inexorable Dolorez. "My time is precious and I must have this room. If you do not both leave I'll phone the college."

"How perfectly absurd you are, Dolorez," said Jane, more alarmed now that no hint of Judith's whereabouts had leaked out. "You know perfectly well we can explain all this, and you also know we are here to find Judith Stearns and we will not leave until you have told us where she is or where she went? May I use your telephone?"

"Judith Stearns is not here," snapped the South American. "And what's more I don't know nor care where she is. I can't spend my time with wild college girls who try to run down poor messenger boys."

"Very well," said Jane, deciding no more time could be wasted in argument. "But I warn you if our friend has been placed in any compromising position, or has been misrepresented to that hateful officer, we shall hold you responsible, for our girls saw her come here."

Jane and Dozia turned to the door. The maid was evidently well pleased with the move, for she showed glittering teeth in an inopportune smile. Dolorez had gained a very high natural color that cut in streaks through her make-up. She was breathing hard, and Dozia, usually fearless, thought it best not to anger her further. She followed Jane without even throwing out a look of defiance or challenge, and when the door closed on their heels both Jane and Dozia felt and really looked pale.

The situation was growing more complicated every moment, and now the girls from the side porch pounced upon the others with frivolous inquiries about that beauty shop.

"Hush," ordered Jane. "Do you realize Judith may have been taken to that horrible old station house? You three go back to college and make sure she has not returned. We, Dozia, Janet and I, will go into the town hall. You can phone us there in twenty minutes. Now hurry and be prudent. Don't spread any sensational stories."

Jane acted like a senior now, but the emergency was sufficiently exacting to demand such forceful means.

Where was Judith Stearns and what was the meaning of Dolorez Vincez' sinister statement, about running down poor messenger boys? Also who could have been sobbing in the room back of the parlors?

"Look!" exclaimed Jane as they left the tanbark walk. "Who is that running from the back driveway?"

"Little Sarah Howland," replied Dozia in amazement. "Whatever can that innocent little thing be doing around here?"

"I—wonder," sighed Jane as they hurried off to the old town hall.

"Jane," murmured Dozia, halting her companion for a moment as a sudden calling was heard through the fields, "do you think that baby can be implicated with those unscrupulous shop keepers?"

"She was in there, and we saw her run," replied Jane. "I would like to doubt my own eyes—"

Dozia grasped her arm and again they hurried on.

"Find Judith!" That was their slogan.

CHAPTER IX

WHAT HAPPENED TO JUDITH

In that mysterious way peculiar to girls, the students knew, without the facts being apparent, that something strange and perhaps even desperate had happened to Judith.

They had not been told any of the details, but when the party walking in from the village was suddenly broken up, first by the incident of the messenger boys' quarrel and then by Judith's disappearance into Dol Vin's beauty shop, with officer Sandy twirling his club and "gum-shoeing" after her, the whole situation was as clear as if the pieces had been patched together on a movie screen.

Judith, fighting for justice, had been ranged with the culprits!

There was no possibility of her return to the college grounds without her companions' knowledge; neither was it probable she had gone to take a youngster's part at the emergency court in the Town Hall without first having notified Jane or some of the other girls. She would have dragged them along with her, for Judith believed in team play for all things, even at trials and courts of alleged justice.

So it was that the girls' anxiety was not so thinly supported as the mere record of events might have indicated; they knew there was something wrong, knew it instantly and knew it positively; and they were right about it, too.

The outstanding fact was a weighty argument. Dolorez Vincez had been expelled from Wellington the year previous; she had vowed vengeance against Jane Allen and her friend, Judith Stearns (although both girls had actually interceded for the culprit with the college faculty), and now was the time and this was the place to wreak her vengeance.

In a shorter time than occupies this explanation Jane and Dozia and Janet reached the Town Hall. The ancient building of dingy brick filled a conspicuous spot facing the Square; its carriage stone was a revolutionary relic and two reliable cannon set off the much trampled green diamond in front with something of a stately significance. It was fast growing dark in the early autumn evening, but the excitement of an arrest had drawn a crowd from the few business offices and from the passersby at the supper hour, flanked and reinforced by boys, boys who seem to go with excitement—always, at all times and in all places.

The students made their way into the hall with its sputtering gas light, and while Janet went to the telephone booth, Jane and Dozia hurried to the office of the chief of police.

"Judith!"

Both girls had uttered the name and both now elbowed their way through the curious crowd up to the rail, where stood the disconsolate Judith.

"Keep back, keep back," ordered an officer. He was the second and only other active member of "the force" besides Sandy Jamison, he who had "taken Judith in."

Jane and Dozia urged forward in spite of orders, however, and now Judith saw them! She flashed a look first defiant then hopeless. It had defiance for the charge, but was hopeless to make that country court understand. Jane and Dozia answered the code with unwavering determination fairly emitting from their every feature.

But the chief was talking or muttering, and he had been pompously rapping for order.

Officer Sandy was trying desperately to tell his story, but between twirling his club and chewing tobacco he was sorely pressed for a chance to say anything.

"This here girl," he mumbled, "was racin' after a boy with a package of joo-ell-ry. It was joo-ell-ry I know, for them boys from the city store was called to deliver——"

"Never mind about the boys," interrupted the chief, "tell us what the charge is against this girl."

Jane and Dozia exchanged a look complimentary to that chief. He had some sense they privately admitted.

"Yes, yer honor, I'm comin' to that," defended Sandy. "She ran first after a boy, then after a girl, and I seen the package go through the air——"

"Flyin'? Had it wings or was it a toy balloon?" Chief Hadfield was not a man to disappoint his audience, and the laugh that thanked him for this quip set Sandy twirling and chewing more vigorously than ever.

"It was pegged, throwed, fired," shouted Sandy, and his club just touched Judith's sleeve, electrifying her into open indignation.

"Keep that—stick down," ordered the chief, while Judith's indignation subsided.

How pretty she looked standing there in those sordid surroundings! Contrast, the maker of all standards, outlined the tall dark-haired girl in her brilliant red junior cap and definite red sweater, like the central figure in some old time country picture, where urchins and queer men gave her the middle of the stage and plagiarized the scene, "At the Bar of Justice."

"You caught this here flying joo-ell-ry?" demanded the chief.

"Oh no, oh no," parried Sandy. "Someone else caught that," and he waddled his head from side to side in amplification.

"Who? Where is it?" The chief was not playing the gallery now.

"The propri-e-tor of that there beauty institooshun has it, and it's hers. It had her name and address on it."

A sneering titter from the audience followed that foolish statement. Old Sour Sandy had balled things up considerably this time.

"Then what's the charge and who makes it?" shouted and rapped Chief Hadfield.

"Loiterin' and disturbing and I make th' charge!" Sandy put his cap on in the excitement of that speech but quickly yanked it off again in respect to the court.

Jane and Dozia could not remain longer silent. Evidently Judith had been educated in the absurd proceedings before they came. Janet was now in from the telephone booth and stood beside her companions, while Jane attempted to interrupt.

"May I speak?" she called out in the most musical tone her voice would accept.

"Certainly, miss," replied the chief. He evidently did not share the opinion of his subordinate on Wellington girls' character.

"This arrest is an outrage—a frame-up," declared Jane, glad to recall the vernacular. "There are three witnesses here who saw the trouble and we'll find others if you want them. The fact is Officer Jamison is always cross with us students" (she put it mildly), "and he was, perhaps, too willing to listen to our enemies. The proprietor of the beauty shop is a former Wellington student who was asked to withdraw last spring" (again the modification), "and this afternoon she saw her chance to retaliate—to get even." Jane made sure of being understood and now suddenly ceased speaking. She had learned the maxim, "When you say a good thing, stop."

The chief stroked his beard lines (no beard showed just now), then pushed his cap back officially. Judith slid her white hands along the brass rail playfully and even smiled at the man behind it. He was a man if also an officer, and he must know by her manner that Judith Stearns was just a very nice little girl being dreadfully imposed upon.

"Sit down, young lady. We'll be through in a few minutes," said the considerate chief; and Judith dropped to the bench beside Jane, Janet and Dozia. All three could not squeeze her hands at once, but all three managed to do something affectionate, if Janet did have to be content with a mere pluck at the white sweater sleeve.

"Now see here," spoke the chief in a tone of irritated finality.

"Sandy, what do you mean by disturbin' and loiterin'?"

"By loiterin' I mean that racin' after them little boys who was going about their business, and by disturbin' I mean—I mean that—that them college girls is allus raisin' a rumpus."

"Discharged!" sang out the chief and he did sing it. The tune of that single word embraced at least three whole tones and suggested several more.

A tumult followed the announcement but the chief rapped again for order.

"I want you people and Officer Sandy to listen to me," he thundered. "Because girls go to a college ain't no reason why they should be pestered" (his errors were truly elegant), "and next time I hear any such fool complaint there'll be some shiftin' of badges. Clear the court!"

And could you blame the Wellingtons present for shaking hands with Chief Hadfield?

Making their way out finally the girls smiled to those in the curious throng who waited to sympathize or congratulate, and just at the end of the dingy hall Judith felt a small, warm hand grasp her own.

"I want to thank you, miss," spoke a hesitant voice. "You saved me from that 'guy' this afternoon, but I'm awful sorry you got into a scrape."

It was Tiny Tim, the messenger boy.

"Oh, that's all right," declared Judith heartily. "I was glad to be on hand and that doesn't matter. Did you manage to deliver the box safely?"

"I got it into the shop but the right one didn't sign for it. I know that 'cause that black haired one has a queer name and the box was for some Sarah Something. But I guess she'll get it all right," he finished with a professional air of certainty. "She comes there a lot."

"A box of jewelry for little Sarah Howland," said Jane to Dozia.

"And the sobbing in the back room," whispered Dozia in answer.

"That was she who ran out the back way," concluded Jane while Judith and the others were busy taking leave of the messenger boy.

"Some experience!" exhaled Judith, stronger and braver for her recent incarceration.

"That, and something else," paraphrased Jane. "But someone please run to that phone and tell the proctor we are coming. They may send the guards out after us. It wants only ten minutes of tea time. Run!"

The command was followed out to the letter.

CHAPTER X

THE INTERLUDE

Talk about antagonism," glowered Janet. "I call the whole proceedings an outrage, and if you want to know what I would do about it, I would ask a Wellington official to sue this dinky little town for damages." She snapped out the words as if each syllable were a blow on the very heads of the offenders.

"Don't you get excited, Janet," cautioned Jane. "We have our lady- like hands very full at the moment, and to run into more trouble would be positively rash. Besides, here is Judy, unrumped as a babe from its cradle; seems to have enjoyed the whole thing and I can guess why."

"So can we," quickly followed Dozia. "She will put the experience down in her field work for Social Service. This extra year promises to turn out at least two stars in that course."

They were in the lavatory hastily fixing up for tea, almost late but thankful to be within the gates before the gong sounded. The adventures of that afternoon had been thrilling indeed, and a few of the girls shared with Jane the suspicions now settling upon the two freshmen, Shirley Duncan and Sarah Howland. Their presence at Dol Vin's shop, the sobbing heard behind doors, and that wild run of the girl who tried to get away from the place by actually scaling a back fence, and who was recognized as the demure little Sarah, all this furnished plenty of material for a mystery story.

But it was the innocent remark of the grateful messenger boy, that put the climax in at the very peak of interest.

"I know the right girl didn't sign the slip," he had told Jane and Judith, "because that black haired one has a queer name and she isn't Sarah Howland."

So the precious package was for little Sarah Howland. And it was being sent to her, care of Dol Vin. Also, and more important than either particular, the delivery of that message had landed Judith Stearns in court.

Was it any wonder ghosts had been crowded out of the day's or night's programme?

"Don't worry," calmly advised the heroic Judith. "What happened this afternoon is only an introduction. The real thriller is yet to come."

"When?" anticipated Velma.

"Oh, it threatens to be a serial. I may be able to give you a reel or two tonight after study hour."

"Come down to my room," begged Janet. "I have such a big couch and a whole raft may pile up on it."

"That's a good idea," agreed Jane as the last towel was tossed into its basket. "Besides, we haven't a thing to eat in our quarters and what's a good yarn without grub? Land sakes, hear the crockery! We'll miss the hash, I fear me," and only the restraining influence of Miss Fairlie in the lower hall saved a third rail flight via ballustrades.

Sweeping into the dining room Jane's eyes seemed attracted to a corner in freshmen's quarters. It might have been her excited imagination or pure incident, but she did look straight into the frightened blue eyes of little Sarah Howland.

For the fraction of a second there was something like a clash. Jane's look was one of indignant question while the other

unmistakably showed fear. Then Shirley Duncan said something to Sarah and the connection was severed.

Hash may have been served or even real lamb chops, but no power of special dishes served to distract the students from their delicious excitement.

"What in the world are you watching that door for?" Jane asked Dozia, who seemed hypnotized by a brass door knob.

"Cops," replied Dozia cryptically. "I should hate to go out again tonight."

"That's a fork," Winifred Ayres prompted Judith as the latter pierced her pretty sherbet with a prong.

"I know," answered Judith, "but this mound is so pretty I don't want to spoil it at one gulp. A fork is daintier."

"And leakier," finished the critic.

Altogether the air was charged and surcharged with thrills, but it was Maud Leslie who broke the spell.

"Jane," she whispered as they passed out, "don't forget tonight at Lenox. The girls are depending on you."

"Tonight at Lenox, what for?" puzzled Jane.

"Ghosts," said Maud. Then Jane remembered she had promised to raid the ghosts at Lenox Hall and to bring to the frightened freshmen a whole company of braves with their resistless reinforcements. And she had not yet been able to do a single thing about it!

"We will all be finished with our work by 8:15, Judith," Dozia Dalton announced authoritatively, "then you may recite the adventure of a Wellington in Distress. I'll be prepared to take you down verbatim, in case your counsel should need the confession."

"Janet, please have plenty of cheese, crackers and a few nuts. I'm losing weight," implored Winifred.

"And Jane, will you be so good as to bring a few sample apples that came in that last parcel post from Montana?" suggested Ted Guthrie. "I missed things this afternoon but I don't intend to be overlooked this evening."

Jane clutched Judith's arm to disentangle her from the others.

"I have got to speak to you alone, Judy," she whispered. "It's about the noises and the ghosts. The babes are scared blue, threatening to desert the camp. Get outside the door and we can vanish for a few minutes before study hour." They waited at the foot of the stairs until Janet and Winifred ascended, then Judith nearly fell over Jane as they both tried to go through the door at once, but the escape was successful in spite of too much noise from the loose old brass knocker.

Instinctively the two chums turned from the broad stone steps into the left path that ran away from a brilliant arc light into Elm Shadows. Silently both girls exchanged confidences, for Jane's arm around Judith's waist was comprehensive, and each little hug told a story of its own.

"Dear heart!" breathed Judith. "I would just have died if you hadn't rescued me when you did. And I know the others—ran away."

"Judy, love," returned Jane, "they didn't know where you were, really. And those country officers have threatened us before, you know. I suppose they are a little bit jealous that we girls and not their boys, are scattered over the landscape with yells and other appropriate noises. Sit down" (they had reached a birch bench), "I must tell you about Lenox Hall."

"I know about the noises and I do believe they are really uncanny," said Judith, "but what can we do away over at this end of the campus?"

"Go over to the other end, of course," said straightforward Jane, "and I have promised to lay those ghosts tonight."

"Tonight!" sighed Judith, dropping her head on Jane's shoulder.

"Not you, of course. You shan't come," protested Jane. "I only wanted to plan things with you. A warm bed and a nice cup of malted milk will be about all for you this night, Judy dear." The head, as black as Judith's own in the shadows, tried to fold itself on a cheek if no closer, but the attempt scarcely felt comfortable, and Jane just blew a kiss into Judith's ear, then straightened up again.

"As if I would miss that!" murmured Judith. "I am dog-tired, Dinksy, but ghosts! Oh, boy! Lead me to 'em!" and the courage of youth defied that day's record for Judith Stearns.

"We must hurry; see the lights in the girls' rooms, and you know they are bound to slight work tonight. This is what I suppose we will have to do. A few of us—you, if you insist, Dozia and Winifred, and I will somehow get out after Miss Fairlie has made the rounds. I don't know how we'll do it, but we have got to try. Then over at Lenox we may hide in the shrubbery and wait for the ghosts. I am perfectly sure they will come along the path from the gate keeper's cottage. Either they are inside or permitted to enter, and it isn't likely that ordinary spooks come through such walls as ours."

"All right. I'll be there if I don't fall asleep over my trig. But I do think being arrested is awfully wearying—I could dream here in spite of the howling winds. Jane Allen, do you realize this is a cold, bleak, dreary night, and you are tempting ghosts to parade in- -bathing suits or nighties?"

"It is cold; take an end of my scarf and hurry in. May a kind thought prompt us how to elude the wary Fairlie. Take care you don't seem sociable when she taps. It would be fatal if she should enter for a 'cozy little chat.' She has done it, you know."

"Do I know it? Do you think I shall ever forget the cozy little chat she dropped in for, when my alcohol lamp thrust under the couch threatened to burn down the place? I have never been friendly with the inspector since."

Judith ceased speaking suddenly and Jane clutched her arm as voices were heard somewhere. Yes—two girls were leaving Headley Hall and now came close enough to Jane and Judith to send even their subdued voices ahead in the darkness.

"You're a baby," one said. "And you nearly spoiled it all this afternoon."

"I never thought it would be this way. I'm so sorry I—" said the second voice.

"Goodness sake, stop whimperin'. Aren't you satisfied? Hush, there's someone on the bench."

"Shirley and Sarah," whispered Jane in Judith's ear.

But the two figures on the path had turned, and were now lost in the darkness along the lonely hedged-in walk.

"Imagine!" said Judith indignantly. "Those two little freshmen away over here instead of being at their books!"

"And did you notice Shirley was blaming little Sarah for whimpering? I tell you, Judith, there is something queer about that Shirley. She has money yet she came in on a scholarship. Then, there was the registered package of jewelry that brought disaster upon you and the messenger boy, Tim. He said it was addressed to Sarah. She surely shows a woeful lack of luxury, yet someone was sending her jewelry."

"And Dol Vin was receiving their mail, including the box," Judith summed up.

"I am sure it was Sarah I heard sobbing in that back room," insisted Jane.

"There are the girls looking for us. We will have to plead headaches and need of fresh air, for you know I promised them the real story of my incarceration," sighed Judith, following Jane's lead toward the group of searchers who came down the path calling and whistling for Jane and Judith.

"Do tell it to them, they have been so splendid," pleaded Jane. "Besides, we have a night's work before us if we can escape on the ghost hunt, and a good yarn will do a lot to settle all our nerves. Remember, you are not to come unless you simply can't stay in bed, and if you remain in our building you may be able to allay suspicion when Fairlie comes snooping. 'Lo girls!' to the whistlers. 'Here we are! Judy needed the air.'"

With an all star cast and such headliners as were scheduled for Jane and her constituents on that particular night, it was not easy to anticipate the outcome. If the ghosts would only do their part and appear on time!

CHAPTER XI

A TWICE TOLD TALE

Judith tried to beg off on her story of the great adventure, but the girls were insistent. "Just tell us what happened when you got inside the Beauty Shop," begged Velma, who had secret dreams of C. O. D. dimples and longed to hear of such possibilities.

"It was like a screen comedy," replied Judith, who had been beautifully pillowed up and otherwise made comfortable on Janet's solo-couch. The audience was scattered around on cushions, on the floor, on chairs, and even on the one narrow window sill. Queening it from her pillows Judith looked quite Romanesque, with Jane perched on a cretonne pedestal above the divan's level, waving her riding crop regally. The pedestal really was a specially favored trunk of Jane's which had escaped storage quarters and served many useful and practical purposes, the present being one in point.

"You were saying," Jane reminded Judith, placing a firm hand on the heaving breast solemnly, "that the rush in was like a movie scene."

"I said comedy, dear; there's a difference. First, Dol opened the pigeon holed door, then Sarah Howland tumbled in howling—she was honestly very much frightened, next went Shirley Duncan. She seemed wild to get under cover. Then I tripped along—"

"Not scared or anything?" from Nettie.

"Not a bit scared but mad as fury," declared Judith, "for there was old Sour Sandy at my heels taking such long and such big steps I felt every next foot would crush me into the brand new door mat."

"Poor Judy," soothed Jane. "And no one to say thee nay!"

"Say me nix," moaned Judith. "I would have had thee say other things than that. But to the tale. Have you ever seen a mouse run from a cat and a dog after the cat and a boy after the dog? You know that famous picture, I see. Well, when the messenger boy got away somewhere about Dol's establishment, and Sarah went next, then went Shirley and, Little Me, followed by that giant Sour Sandy! Well, girls, I have to admit that for a few minutes I couldn't see a thing but Dol Vin's eyes. She had me hypnotized," and Judith paused to make sure of the dramatic impression.

"I can see her glare!" declared Jane. "Dol's eyes were made for nobler tasks than matching hair shades."

"And mixing flesh tints," contributed Dozia, who just then managed to purloin a sample of the fudge.

"Are you girls sure that keyhole is sealed and the door still impregnable?" demanded Judith the narrator, with a sweeping glance about the room.

Winifred Ayres dropped to the door sill and spread herself across it while Dozia moved her chair to the jam in order to plank her shoulders over the keyhole.

"Air tight," announced Jane, "and every girl here is pledged, Judy. You may proceed with absolute safety."

"The responsibility is yours, Jane, for we had an awful time for a brief interval under the doughty Dol's roof. Things flew—"

"Hair brushes and sponges?" prompted Janet, eager for sensation.

"Can't say as to the missiles," replied Judith, showing signs of relaxing into indifference, "but the way that black head yelled, and Sarah sobbed, and Shirley—I guess she shouted. I know her noise was next loudest to Sour Sandy's and that was some racket!"

"But what was it all about?" demanded Janet.

"About the precious box—jewelry or something valuable. When I saw the big boy take it from Tiny Tim and heard Tim yell, I knew there was mischief brewing if nothing worse, but I never expected to see Shirley Duncan jump into it. She aided and abetted the thief, for she caught that box on a fly and would have escaped if little Judy Stearns had not been right there Judy-on-the-spot."

"But why did old Sour Sandy lay hands on you?" asked Jane, somewhat bewildered by the maze into which Judith was leading her audience.

"Oh, there was such a perfectly wild time of it," replied Judith, "and of course Dol and Shirley had it all their own way—two to one, you know."

"But didn't—little Sarah try to help you?" pressed Jane.

"Little Sarah was having a fit out in the kitchen, and the black maid wanted to pour water over her, said she was in hysterics, only the word she used was somewhat impaired."

"What a perfectly rip-roaring time you must have had," commented Dozia, eyeing the fudge. "And I suppose you were taken in by Sour Sandy because you seemed easiest to convey to the Town Hall. Just like the old detective stories, arrest someone, anyone, and depend upon the evidence to do the rest."

"Yes, I was handiest, nearest the door and dry eyed. Besides, I kept kicking around on a jog trot all over the place because I could not make any other sort of noise. Honestly, girls, it was too funny for words!" and Judith doubled up in the pillows like a human jack-knife.

"I am suspicious, Judy Stearns, that you tempted old Sour Sandy to do his worst; sort of defied him," suggested Jane, dragging a Columbia cushion from Judith's convulsed arms. "Did you really want to be arrested?"

"I did not!" shouted Judith, springing up straight and almost upsetting the entire scene. "It was Dol Vin who insisted that we Wellingtons were spoiling her business, interfering with her customers and—she said this—'now this creature actually tries to steal my parcels from a messenger boy!' Can you fancy that accusation on this poor head?"

"But you didn't have the box?" asked Janet.

"Certainly not. Dol knew that, but old Sandy didn't. I could easily have escaped when he ordered me to 'come along, girl,' but I knew to resist arrest might bring real trouble upon us,

whereas now the whole thing is a farce, and whisper!" (she put her finger to her lips) "it must never be told of within this campus. News from the village rarely gets in here unless we bring it, and it would be a shame to worry prexy with that sort of thing. She would never understand it."

Applause, silent but visible, followed this. Heads were wagged, arms waved and even feet waggled in approval, but no unseemly sounds escaped the secret chamber.

"Never a word!" prompted Jane in a whisper with both hands uplifted.

"Never a word!" repeated the conclave in appropriate response.

"And that will be about all," finished Judith. "I am too tired to move but I can't allow you to carry me. No, don't, please" (no one had offered). "I'll just toddle along—it's lots better than keeping step with Sandy."

"But the treat," wailed Janet. "I have fudge and cheese sticks."

"Please deliver mine," drawled Judith. "I am unable to collect in person—I simply am—tired."

"And you should be," agreed Jane, glad that Judith had been wise enough to break up the party early. In fact Jane was not sure whether genuine fatigue or possible ghost hunts, had inspired the heroic Judy to leave that buzzing bevy of students. At any rate Janet counted out four squares of fudge and measured three ink wells of cheese tid-bits (the well was glass and only used for refreshments), all of which was folded in a paper napkin and handed to Jane.

"Sorry you must leave," murmured Janet, "but Judith has had a trying day. Come again and I'll treat you better."

"We had a perfectly lovely time," insisted Jane, "but I must put Judy to bed. She is apt to walk in her sleep when overtired. Come, dearie, toddle along. Good night, girls. Pleasant dreams," and those who were not too interested in the fudge and tid-bits responded appropriately.

"Oh," moaned Jane, when the two finally reached their own quarters, room 19, "wasn't that an ordeal?"

"Rather," replied Judith, kicking her shoes off. "How did I make out?"

"Wonderfully. You tied them all up in knots without leaving an end to follow. Neither clues nor climax—just a jumble of sounds, but thrilling for all that. I was so fearful they would ask more about the unfortunate Shirley but you veered them off beautifully. Now, Pally dear, tumble in, and I'll slip out and get Dozia. Lenox seems far away just now, and those babes are trembling while we dare to enjoy ourselves."

"Jane dear," interrupted Judith, "I do not believe you should risk going over there tonight. Really I am getting nervous of the whole thing."

"Just reaction," said Jane, her own eyes sparkling. "You have gone through enough today to give you nerves, and I want you to shut your eyes as soon as ever you can. After all I may just—do something else. Leave it to me and Dozia the Fearless. You know what a brave she can be in an emergency."

"And I know what a star you can be in a pinch. But Lenox at midnight—"

"Hush, dear, and let me put out your light. There, you will be asleep before the party winds up. There's the honor ring. Ten minutes more to all lights out. I love an honor system with a warning gong and an inspection. So complete."

Judith required little coaxing to enter dreamland, and when Jane heard Miss Fairlie's step in the hall, on that tripping little inspection tour, the light in room 19 was out.

Also, Jane under the coverlets was fully dressed for her ghost raid at Lenox Hall.

Miss Fairlie's step paused at the door! Jane tittered, but Judith breathed the regular tones of sleep.

For a moment it seemed the inspector would knock! She must want something!

Someone else came along the corridor and directly at that door they chose to whisper!

Jane felt her hour had come, but it was merely the fear of a troubled mind, for presently Miss Fairlie laughed lightly, and the pair journeyed on.

It was a full hour before the coast was safely clear for Jane's venture.

CHAPTER XII

A WILD NIGHT OF IT

It was a beautiful night, with the Hunter's Moon set high and bright in its ocean of flickering stars, like nothing else than moon and stars in the same old blue canopy, brocaded and embossed with incorrigible little gray clouds, ducking in and out of lacy paths and shadowy skylines.

Beneath, on Wellington campus, the dormitories stood up like tiny cottages here and there, the more important building, Madison Hall, towering pompously over the smaller flock. It was in Madison that Jane and Judith as juniors were housed, while over in a west corner grouped about the big walled entrance was, among the lesser landmarks, Lenox, one of the first erected of the Wellington buildings; quaint, roomy and just now decidedly "spooky."

The scene was fascinating in its silence, for only the dimmest of path lights seemed alive over the big place, and not a breath of wind stirred the tenacious oak leaves or other rugged

foliage, too sparse to be counted, now that winter had given warning and was on his ruthless way.

The two figures creeping along like some elfin prowlers were Jane and Dozia, and they made straight through that bold moonlight for Lenox Hall.

"Doesn't it seem silly?" Jane took time to remark. "The very idea of expecting trouble on such a night."

"It's all your doing, Lady Jane," Dozia retaliated, "and if I don't see a ghost after all this I'll never forgive you."

"There was no guarantee, Dozia. But I did promise to appease the fears of those youngsters. What time is it?"

"When I left my nice cozy room for this, it was twenty minutes to twelve. I believe you were on time at the fire escape, so I would say it is now about ten minutes of. Hold my hand, Jane. This may be thrilling but it's awfully weird."

"Don't you like it? Look at that moon, and all the sparklers!"

"But think of those hedges, ugh! I'm wobbly at the knees already, and we're not half way across. Never knew a campus could be so—oceanic. I shall be striking out with my arms presently, feet seem unable to carry all the responsibility," and the tall girl cuddled into Jane's cape as far as the garment would accommodate her.

"You are not really nervous, Dozia the Fearless," Jane rebuked.
"Why, I'm just tingling with the spirit of adventure."

"You may, and the spirit of adventure is a lot more attractive than the spirits we're out gunning for. Do you expect to get off scot-free if you smash anything with that golf stick? What do you think Miss Rutledge will say?"

"I shan't bang unless there is nothing else to do, and then I'm sure I can explain. A Montana girl from a real ranch ought to have some credit for field work." Jane was twirling her capable brassie with rather a dangerous swing and the odd weapon now seemed formidable indeed.

"What's that?" exclaimed Dozia, as a shadow almost tripped them.
"It's an animal I know but—"

"A frightened little rabbit," replied Jane. "They have a lovely time when the thoughtless girls are safe behind doors. But, Dozia, honestly I think I do see something else—bigger than—a rabbit!"

Both girls stopped suddenly and drew back in the shadow of a tall lilac bush. They were well across the campus and now, at the end of the path, near the gate and not far from Lenox Hall, something moved in and out of the moonlit way. It seemed to cross from the big stone wall and glide into the grove of magnolia.

Jane dropped Dozia's arm and stepped out to peer after the shadow. They were scarcely near enough to hear footfalls even had the padding of leaves and heavy grass not actually deadened that possibility.

"Lively ghost!" she whispered. "Let's head it off through the grove."

"But, Jane, it may be some dangerous prowler—"

"How could he get in here? Besides we are protected." She had the golf club firm in her right hand and seemed to depend on it to lay ghosts or prowlers. "Come on, Dozia. Of course that is not a bona fide ghost but it may be the noise maker."

Dozia followed Jane, although she did hang on to an end of the blue cape and pulled back whenever the darkness seemed too uncertain of penetration. The little thickets of ornamental evergreens suddenly loomed up into proportions of veritable forests, and every baby Christmas tree was swelled out like a circular blue fir, thick and prickly.

But Jane headed straight as the foliage allowed, across the campus to the magnolia grove, where the eucalyptus trees shot up bare and leafless, ghostly, spectral in the searching moonlight.

A crisp snapping of some dry brambles sent out an alarm from the hedges close to Lenox Hall and the girls listened anxiously.

"Human," whispered Jane, "and rather dainty. Hardly a masculine foot to that light touch. Don't be alarmed, Dozia. We are two to one and evidently that other one is a female." She said this with assumed confidence, for she feared Dozia might turn and run at any moment.

They were almost in the little grove and it was between there and the boxwood that touched the side porch of Lenox that this hidden thing must be. Jane was by no means as brave as her carefree manner indicated, and every time she held a bush from brushing Dozia's face she took occasion to listen intently for vagrant noises.

Stumbling over low underbrush in their rubber soled tennis shoes was not like walking out in the open, and just as Dozia breathed a sigh of relief that the landscape gardening went no further, a wild scream, shrill and piercing, cut the night like an arrow!

Speechless, the girls stood terrified, while the wail seemed to linger suspended somewhere!

"Oh, what was it?" gasped Dozia, but Jane clung to her arm in silence.

The next instant a clanging of chains and rattling of metals broke out from Lenox Hall.

"Quick," exclaimed Jane, almost dragging her companion forward, "we must locate it, we must reach the dormitory!" But before they could even gain the pathway, the big fire bell pealed out its alarm and; suddenly every window in Lenox Hall blazed with light at a single flash—the answer of that electric button pressed by the matron, who now swung open the big oaken door and stood summoning her frightened charges to "come out" in the order of fire drill.

"Don't hurry, be calm!" she called out in the voice of authority, and by now the freshmen who lined the halls and stairways, had recovered their composure and even courage in the face of rescue.

Jane and Dozia rushed up to Miss Gifford, the matron, and asked about the outside alarm. At her word Jane jumped to the fire box, smashed the glass with her golf club and then turned the key.

By this time the students were outside the building, and in their night robes the seventy-five freshmen shivered from fear and exposure, while Miss Gifford, Jane and Dozia tried to reassure them.

"Where's the fire?" asked Jane, as the local brigade of volunteer citizens dashed in the grounds through the main gateway.

"Where is it?" demanded Miss Gifford of the students. There was no smoke, no blaze, not even an odor of things burning could be distinguished.

"It must have been in the big attic," someone said, "for it was the old brass bell that rang first."

"Who gave the alarm?" demanded the matron.

No one answered this, and the momentary pause was broken now by the wild rush of the fire department along the roadway.

First the hose cart, the "hook and ladder" jerked up to the porch where the girls waited, breathless but calmer now that men and means had come to their rescue.

"One side! One side!" shouted the chief, and to the credit of that department it must be said his men stretched their line of hose along from the hydrant and up those steps, even through the crowd of trembling students, in regular fire drill time. Jane stepped inside the hall and was sniffing audibly.

"Wait a minute!" she commanded. "We haven't located the fire yet and it may not be very much. The house is equipped with extinguishers," she informed the alert chief. "They may answer without water."

The rubber coated men held their hose high and were ready to shout in signal to the man at the hydrant, while Jane took the chief upstairs. He never spoke but tramped ahead as if a word would imperil the dignity of the Wide Awake Hose Company. Neither did Jane venture further remarks for she was "gunning" for the fire and thinking of ghosts!

Doors to right and left were promptly pushed open but no evidence of fire could be found.

"Try the attic," said the chief finally, "rubbish might catch from a flue."

At his order Jane turned into the narrow box stairway, lighted only by a flash in the hands of Chief Murry.

The actual panic of that yell and its subsequent fire alarm was now subsiding in Jane's mind, and instead of Fire the whole situation assumed an aspect of Ghosts. In spite of her courage she was very glad the chief was at her heels, and when she finally reached the last narrow step and stood under the rafters, Jane Allen sent a sweeping eye over that dark attic.

"Not here!" declared the fireman before she could see more than the inky blackness of the old garret, with only that one spot of moonlight pasted on the slanting roof by an invisible window.

As he turned Jane felt obliged to follow, although she would have been glad to go further in and see what it was that moved over by the patch of moonlight. Something did move—she was sure of that, but a fireman and a chief could not be asked to investigate anything but smoke or flame, and neither element was discernible, so she followed down the box stairway to confront the waiting brigade.

"Who pulled that box?" demanded Chief Murry, angrily.

"I did," replied Jane. "But the alarm came from within and the students were out before I did so."

"Well, there's no fire here!" he announced witheringly. "And you young 'uns better get indoors. Been in all the sheds and corners, Ben?" to his assistant.

"Every inch, and there being no kitchen here, 'tain't likely a fire would be tucked away in a closet, though we looked thoroughly. Queer how the thing happened."

Miss Gifford was now trying to march her charges back, but a good sized contingent refused flatly to comply with her orders. They answered her quietly but firmly.

"They would never sleep another night in Lenox Hall. If it wasn't haunted it was surely queer."

With the courage of juniors Jane and Dozia attempted to laugh the whole thing off, but the freshmen were determined.

"How did YOU get over here?" suddenly demanded little Nellie Saunders of Dozia. "I thought it was a rule to stay in your own dorm when a first alarm fire gong sounded in another building?"

"We were visiting," replied Jane so quickly Nellie thought the reply meant something, and was too absorbed in the crisis of the situation to further press her question.

"But you children will be ill!" wailed Miss Gifford helplessly. "You simply must come indoors."

"Come into the recreation room," insisted Jane. "We won't ask you to go back upstairs yet."

"We just wouldn't go," declared Daisy Blaire. "If I can't sleep in another cottage I shall telegraph mamma to come and take me home this very night or day, whichever it is."

This resolve met with hearty approval, for it was seconded from many quarters until open revolt or general mutiny seemed imminent.

The firemen were driving out with the jog trot of a false alarm, and ghosts or no ghosts, Jane, Dozia and Miss Gifford, each and all realized that those frightened children must be persuaded to go indoors. Their bare feet alone made the matter imperative, if bath robes did somewhat lessen the danger from a cold night's exposure.

The sudden tingling of the telephone shot another bolt of terror through them.

"There, that's the hall," said Miss Gifford. "At least make it possible for me to report you are all safe in Lenox."

Jane and Dozia wound arms around a few leaders and this with the matron's appeal firmly broke their deadlock and a thin stream of frowzy heads and pretty boudoir robes dripped into the old walnut hall.

Miss Gifford used the telephone at the foot of the circular staircase. She was giving a very tactfully worded account of the incident to the president, and it was very evident the whole occurrence would be conspicuously free of sensation if the matron's verbal report were embodied in official records.

A long drawn out and happily intoned reply floated from Miss Gifford's lips as she half turned from the telephone and surveyed Jane and Dozia.

"Oh, yes indeed, they are both here, perfectly safe," she announced, "and I don't know what I should have done without their assistance."

So the raiders had been "found missing" at Madison Hall!

CHAPTER XIII

THE AFTERMATH

There was another panic over in Madison," explained Miss Gifford, after leaving the telephone; "when Miss Allen and Miss Dalton were found missing it is a wonder someone over there didn't send out a second fire alarm. Miss Fairlie was much relieved to know her charges were safe and sound here, and I obtained a leave of absence for you for the remainder of the night," she finished. The very much perturbed matron had no idea of being left alone with a flock of obstreperous freshmen.

"Lovely!" exclaimed Jane, dancing around with a group of barefoot girls who threatened to turn the occasion into a Greek playlet.

"Scrumbunctious!" sang out the ballet de chambre, dancing in wild glee now that danger of ghosts and firemen had actually passed.

"But girls," spoke Dozia, "did you notice the little fat fireman who held that big hose nozzle? I do verily believe he was so disappointed he wanted to hit someone. Just see where his old hose scraped my best silken hose. I don't mean that for a parody, but honestly, girls, these were the last and final gift from mater. She has condemned me to wear ordinary lisle hereafter, and just look at that—stock!"

"Only dry dust, it will brush off," soothed Jane. "But I say, girls, how about beds!"

"Beds!" shrieked a chorus.

"Not a bed!" spoke Nellie Saunders for her entire class. "We wouldn't mind cuddling up here on blankets and cushions, but I for one shall not mount those spooky stairs, this night."

"Silly child," scolded Dozia, her own eyes heavy with the ordinary common garden variety of sleep. "Would you expect company to do all the lugging? Who's to set up the billet?" "Volunteers?" called Jane, and from somewhere not before observed stepped out little Sarah Rowland.

"I shall be glad to help," she said timidly, and instantly a volley of eyes challenged her.

"Oh, Sally!" exclaimed Dolly Lloyd. "Don't you dare! The spooks would just eat you up. You look exactly like a cream puff."

Laughter of the most chummy sort followed this, and it was evident Sally, in her cream and white striped robe with her yellow hair flowing over her shoulders, was a popular girl with her companions.

Jane noticed, however, that her face, usually prettily flushed with pink, was now deadly white, and also that the child's eyes shifted in a peculiarly nervous manner.

"It's lovely of you, Sally, and we'll just set a good example while Miss Gifford is searching for that miscreant fire. Come along and get the swaddling clothes for these babes. Aren't they an unruly lot?" and she tossed off her blue cape preparatory for the lugging of couch quilts, pillows and whatever else might seem useful.

Sally tripped up the stairs and Jane was after her.

"Do they really mean to sleep in the recreation room?" asked the freshman, waiting at a landing for Jane.

"Land knows," replied Jane, "but I thought we had best humor them at least past the pneumonia point. I am thankful they did not all break away over the campus to some other building. We will probably shame them into going back to bed when they see how much trouble they are giving. Where might we find the bed clothes storeroom?"

"Just here to your left. But wait until I switch that light." She reached a button and gave the side light its current. Then she stepped back to Jane.

"Miss Allen," she began in more subdued voice, "I just wanted to tell you it was I who rang—the fire bell!"

"Oh, did you?" said Jane lightly, following the hushed tone of voice, "but where did you think the fire was?"

"I knew there was no fire," she confessed, "but I had to do it to cover those other noises."

Jane was mystified, but she realized by Sarah's manner that a complete explanation was not possible just then. Here and there a step or a voice threatened the snatched confidence.

"Did you hear that scream?" whispered Jane.

"Yes, and I—had my room changed to over at the foot of the attic stairs just yesterday, but—but—oh, Miss Allen, it is too dreadful!" she gasped, dropping into a window seat and bursting into tears.

"Don't, dear! Don't, Sally!" begged Jane. "You are all unnerved. Tomorrow you can tell me your fears, if you wish," Jane qualified. "But now let us get back to the girls. They will think something dreadful HAS happened to us."

"But I can't tell you, Miss Allen. If I did I should have to leave dear old Wellington and this—opportunity means so much to me," and again she sobbed convulsively, while Jane put an affectionate arm around the little stranger.

Clapping of hands and calling out foolish warnings from below checked Jane's flow of sympathy, and presently she stumbled back to the recreation room propelling a mountain of blankets and comfortables.

"There. Just see what you have done," she charged the students who were instantly struggling for the blankets to the extent of practically disrobing the accommodating Jane. "Leave me my blouse, please do. It's the only real Jersey I possess. But aren't you ashamed to treat juniors this way?"

"Dreadfully!" drawled a girl already rolled like a cocoon in a pretty blue "wooley" and coiling up on a rug in the farthest corner. "Jane Alien, you're a perfect lamb, and I hope you'll stay with us forever."

"I am sure I have a congestive chill," chattered a fraud of a girl who almost upset Jane in the blanket rush. "Give me the pink one. It's my color," and another tug freed "the pink one" from its company of neatly folded coverlets.

"It is a shame," confessed someone else. "Come on upstairs, girls. Let's defy the ghosts. I have always heard they shun a crowd. Where's the crowd? Let's make them shun us."

"Second the motion and hurrah!" added Nellie Saunders. "Also we should put a price on that ghost's head—offer a reward for the capture. I'm willing to chip in, although as usual I'm a little short this week."

Dozia had been going over the house with Miss Gifford and just then both returned to the recreation room.

"Does anyone know where Miss Duncan is—Miss Shirley Duncan?" asked the matron, keeping her pencil at that name on her report pad.

Jane started involuntarily at the question. She had been secretly wondering where the rebellious Shirley was during all the excitement.

"Oh, yes," spoke up Margie Winters. "She is outside visiting with her folks. She told me this afternoon she had obtained permission."

"Not from me," declared Miss Gifford. Then as if fearing complications she added more tactfully, "But of course I might not have been within reach and someone else may have given permission. Will you just step in here, dear?" to Margie. "I want to note what you say of Miss Duncan's absence," and while the reclaimed mutineers were being actually driven up the stairs by Jane, Dozia and the braver element, Miss Gifford was obtaining what clue she might as to Shirley Duncan's whereabouts.

Herded successfully to second floor the visiting juniors set about distributing their charges into beds—any beds in any rooms but "under covers" was the order.

"I can just about picture the parade trooping into the infirmary tomorrow," said Dozia. "Here, Betty, this solo cot for yours. It is just your cute little size. And those tosies," with a playful thrust at a pair of shivering feet, "I think nervous freshies should wear slippers about their necks at night—like we used to have our mittens on a tape, you know. There," finished the querulous Dozia. "You would have to roll down stairs if another alarm sounded. You're a perfectly sealed packet." Just the tip of Betty's head stuck out of the package.

Somehow all were finally settled and it was Sally—Sarah Howland, who came to the rescue of the visitors.

"But you must rest," she insisted, only a tell-tale pink rim around her blue eyes betraying the hysterical collapse she had so lately experienced.

"We are not the least bit afraid," declared Dozia. "In fact, we are rather anxious to meet said spook. Which room might be one in proximity? Where does the big noise seem to come from?"

"No more shows tonight, Dozia," spoke Jane before Sally could answer. "How much do you want for your money? Isn't a fire and a volunteer fireman's comedy enough?"

"But I am dreadfully keen on spooks," she was pinching Jane's arm cruelly, "and I thought it was—something weird that set off the original alarm."

Sally winced. "Here is a nice big bed," she told them nervously, pushing back a door and disclosing a tranquil untrammelled room, all neat and orderly as if nothing unusual had happened in old Lenox. "We call it the guest room but rarely have company to occupy it. I am sure Miss Gifford will want you two juniors to make yourselves at home in it," finished

Sally with a quaver. She could not entirely hide the fact of her anxiety to get Jane and Dozia behind a closed door. Jane might have understood but Dozia was perplexed.

"It's a lovely room," faltered Dozia, "but I feel more like camping out. What time is it, anyhow?"

"About two-thirty A. M.," said Jane, "and since the youngsters are safely tucked in, I believe we should take Sally's advice. This is quite sumptuous," folding down the extra white shams and coverlet. "Rather a pity to spoil it for such a sliver of sleep."

Miss Gifford was at the door when Sally glided off. "I am so glad you girls are getting to bed," she commended. "What a night we have had? And what a mercy you happened to be within call? I'm sure I don't know how you got here but I am not worrying about the details. Sufficient unto the day is the evil, etc., and"—with a readjustment of her glasses and a closer fold into the soft night shawl—"this condition is dreadful. I have tried to fathom the mystery without troubling the office, but I know now I should have reported it before." (She referred to the nocturnal disturbances, of course.) "Don't fear any further alarm, midnight is always the chosen hour."

"Yes," blurted Dozia, "we know about it, Miss Gifford, and my friend Jane inveigled me into this midnight raid. That is really how we got over here, but I can't say we have to report progress—'stampede' would be more accurate."

"But this is only one night," Jane insisted, "and our fire brigade spoiled every possibility of investigation. But, Miss Gifford, since we have undertaken the task, I should like to propose that you give us an opportunity to try our skill at it. Suppose" (Jane had in mind the tearful face of little Sally) "you give us one more night before you turn the alarm in to Miss Rutledge? I am sure we can control your girls and get them to agree to our plan. In spite of everything, you know, they just adore the fun and sensation of it all."

"Well," faltered Miss Gifford, weakening, "of course I could not risk a repetition of this night's experience; at the same time I do like to keep my records free from appeals to headquarters. It is so much more efficient to manage each cottage independently, subject to a general system. Well, go to bed children and thank you for your moral and physical support. We shall discuss future plans on the morrow," she said sweetly. Truth to tell Miss Agnes Gifford was a very sweet girl—woman, and at the moment both Jane and Dozia fell loyally under the spell of her charms.

"Say, Dinks!" whispered Dozia from her side of the big double bed, "what do you think Judy will say to all this?"

"Judy had her own fun and shouldn't complain. Wasn't she all nicely arrested and tried at a regular police court? What's a spook and a fire to that!"

But Jane knew better. That night at Lenox was a "thriller" indeed, and Judith Stearns might well envy her chums its experiences.

Then while Dozia slept Jane wondered.

What did little Sally Howland mean about taking a room at the attic stairs? And how was that charming little thing implicated with the ghost of Lenox Hall?

The plot was thickening. Sally did not in any way answer to the deceitful type, but some mysterious force seemed to overshadow her.

"Pretty little thing, with such appealing eyes and so honest—"

Jane slept.

CHAPTER XIV

PLEADING FOR TIME

It's a very large order, Jane, but you're the merchant. How on earth do you expect to obtain permission to stay at Lenox without giving the whole thing away?"

"I haven't an idea, but depend on old friend Circumstances to bob something up. It is wonderful how very simple it is to flim-flam a philosopher. They never seem to suspect intrigue and walk right into the trap. I've tried it before with Rutledge! she's a lamb if you watch your ba-as."

It was "the morning after" and that trite phrase surely fitted the occasion. Jane had dragged Dozia from her dreams in spite of threats and defiance, and now both juniors were on their way back to the dining hall at Madison.

"Rather different from the last tramp we took over this prairie," said Jane, "but as a thriller you can't beat midnight moonlight."

"Not that I'd care to," Dozia answered witheringly. "I can't see that the adventure 'got us anywhere' as brother Tom would say. I haven't any brother, you know, Jane dear, but it always sounds better to blame one's slang on him, don't you think?"

"I'm positive," said Jane, "but I have a trick of blaming mine on Judy. Wonder will she sleep all day because I, the faithful alarm clock, did not go off at her ear. There's the bell! I'm not very hungry. As an appetiser I think a night such as the last rather a flivver."

"Isn't it? I have that widely advertised gone feeling myself. Here's a chance to duck in without being noticed."

"We were out for early exercise," prompted Jane significantly, "and don't be too intelligent about that fire when they ask."

"'Deef' and dumb," quibbled Dozia. "Thank you for the party, Jane. I had a lov-el-ly time."

"Don't mention it," whispered Jane, as the line of students swallowed the two adventurers.

But the day was "fraught with questions," as Judith Stearns put it, deploring her own inability to obtain any "intelligent account of the whole performance." It became known early that the two juniors who had been searched for during the night, were not others than Jane and Dozia, but even a veritable grilling at the hands of a picked corps of sophs brought nothing more definite from the wayfarers than "they were over visiting Lenox and the 'fire' was a false alarm."

"And of course we couldn't put our heads out, for fear of panic," grumbled Nettie Brocton.

The day passed somehow, and it was conspicuous by an entire absence of freshmen from the usual intermingling between periods. Even to Jane the reason for this was not clear until, in a burst of confidence with Judith, she outlined her plan of staying over at Lenox "until the ghost business was disposed of."

"Oh, I know," she explained while Judith pondered. "Miss Gifford is keeping them home to prevent them gabbing. That's darling of her. She wants to give me—the newly discovered spook sleuth—a decent chance. Are you coming over with me tonight, Judy?"

"Cables couldn't hold me back. Dinksy, you bribed me into staying home last night but I'll never again 'list' to your blarney. But it wasn't goblins I believe; however, we'll decide that when we trap 'em. Your benign influence has worked well thus far. I promised to help a freshie with some Latin prose and she never came to collect. Now I suppose I have to spoil my pretty hands with basket ball. Don't you wonder how it was we used to love that unladylike game?" Judith assumed a most sedate attitude, but did not succeed in hiding a forlorn rent in her skirt even with a very broad palm plastered over it.

"Ye strangers on my native sill tread lightly for I love it still," quoted Jane. "Seems to me you take about as much pleasure in the big game as you ever did, Judy. But let's away! We need it. I'm all stiffened up with—"

"Your night of terror," finished Judith. "I don't wonder. Anyone might be sore and achey from running that Bingham Fire Brigade. I would love to have seen Dozia at the spigot," and Judith went through some fire antics. "Come along, Jane; we'll give the recruits a try-out," she decided the next moment, "but don't ask me to put them through the paces again tomorrow, for that's to be an afternoon off, if I can arrange it."

"Oh," said Jane tritely.

"Yes, oh," repeated Judith most impressively and with a grimace that supplied more than mere punctuation.

Jane laughed and pushed the big girl ahead of her with sudden playful force.

"Choo-choo! the fire is out and we're going home," she laughed.
"This is just about the speed of the little red hose cart."

"Wait a minute!" called Judith, halting so suddenly she almost threw Jane. "I would rather be the driver if you don't mind."

"Young ladies!" protested one of the faculty, Miss Roberts, she who taught English and looked the part. "Is not that rather boisterous for indoor play?"

The culprits choked an appropriate reply and resumed the usual "indoor" behavior.

"One thing I hate knowledge for," remarked Jane, "it makes one so inhuman."

"Yes, doesn't it? We may break our precious necks in the gym and be buried with military honors but we 'dassent' skin a shin anywhere else. System, of course," witheringly from Dozia.

"Quick!" exclaimed Jane. "There are Nettie and Janet heading this way. They'll want me to tell the whole of last night's experience over again. Let's get at practice and preclude the recitation. I feel like singing the story to the tune of the 'Night Before Christmas,' it's getting so monotonous." "You have no appreciation for thrills, Jane Alien," eluded Judith. "That yarn will stand telling for months to come. I've noticed your variations, however, and can see the effort wearies you. But say, Dinksy, tonight is the night and Lenox is the place. After that, if you like, I'll take up the thread of your famous ghost story, and you may refer all inquiries to me." The last word of this peroration was all but lost on stone walls, for the oncoming horde seized Jane and, exactly as she feared, demanded further details of the big night.

"And did you really see a ghost?" begged Winifred Ayres with a perfectly flagrant relish of the sordid details.

"Packs of 'em," evaded Jane.

"Safety in numbers," remarked Nettie Brocton. "That's my mother's argument for large gatherings. All right, Jane, we'll let you off, but we have our opinion of such utter selfishness. There's the scrub team all lined up outside the gym. I suppose they also are waiting to hear the story."

"Save me from my audience!" wailed Jane, falling into convenient arms. "Why not install a ghost in Madison if you are all so keen on it? I can't see how you expect one paltry spook to cover the entire campus."

"Oh, Jane! Miss Allen, Jane!" called the girls from that basketball line. "We've decided to beg off from practice this afternoon, if you don't mind. We all want to go to the village to see the sights." It was Inez Wilson who acted as spokesman and Inez was quite capable of organizing "a lot of fun" in seeing the village sights.

"What's new?" demanded Judith.

"Oh, something," insinuated Mabel Peters.

"Are we debarred? Too old and cranky or something like that?" teased Jane. Her hair was bursting from her cap like an over-ripe thistle, and her cheeks were velvety in a rich glow of early winter tints. She hardly looked too old even for skipping rope just then.

"Of course everyone may come who wants to," Inez condescended, "but juniors usually don't enjoy henning (shopping)."

"I adore it," insisted Jane. "Do let us tag on and we'll buy the peanuts. But this really was to be an important afternoon at the baskets. However do you children expect to maintain the honor of Wellington if you do not keep fit? Now when I was center—"

"Hear! Hear! Hear!" interrupted Mabel. "Remember that famous song, 'I know a girl and her name was Jane!'"

"A rebold ribald rowdy!" shouted a chorus.

But Jane was escaping—running down the walk with hands clapped over her ears to shut out the memories of her earlier years when that refrain was quite too popular to be enjoyable.

Outside the big gate an auto horn honked, and the students drew back to give the big car approaching full sweep of the country roadway. Then another horn sounded, and from the opposite direction a smart little run-about was seen cutting in at high speed. Both drivers saw their danger and both jammed brakes. The big car rolled to the gutter while the runabout picked up speed and shot by safely. This brought the touring car to the curb where the Wellingtons stood watching, and a glance at the seats showed these occupants:

Dol Vin driving, Shirley Duncan at her side, and a rather elderly country couple spread over the big back seat.

"Shirley's folks!" whispered Inez. "We heard they were in town seeing the sights, and hoped we would run across them." This was evidently the "something" hinted at in the soph's outline of the "henning" party.

Dolorez Vincez was too clever to show embarrassment, and Shirley Duncan was too cruel to hide it. She plainly was urging the driver on.

"That's your college, darter, ain't it?" the girls could hear the elderly woman ask Shirley, but they did not hear the latter's answer. Dolorez called, "Hello, girls," as she swung her car out again in the dusty roadway, and the "darter" deprived that little woman of her coveted information.

"She said hello!" announced Judith.

"Sweet of her," remarked Jane, but she was thinking of Shirley's absence from Lenox on the night of the fire, and wondering if the indifferent freshman had been absent during all the day as well?

"Hurry, hurry!" begged Mabel Peters. "What a lark to meet them at the drug store. They'll be sure to want hot chocolate."

"I would guess at tea," drawled Judith, "but it's sure to be some sort of drink. Come along and we may get a chance to return that cordial hello."

"I'm not going," suddenly determined Jane. "All go along if you like but I'm not going to lap up any more of that sickening chocolate. I've taken the pledge until next allowance day," and she turned back to Wellington entrance.

Judith, quick to interpret Jane's moods, knew the excuse covered a more serious consideration and stepped back to ask "why?"

"That daughter is ashamed of those country parents," Jane made chance to answer Judith, "and it would be horrid to spoil their opinion of us. Delay the girls a while and Dol will have gone through town safely."

"But isn't it dreadful she has such influence over that rebel freshman?" commented Judith, slowly following the flock of students headed for the village. "How are we going to stop it?"

"I don't know," confessed Jane, "but we must stop it some way. Just because she has a claim on my—patronage is no reason why she should disgrace Wellington. You go along with the youngsters, Judy, and I'll go right up to the office now and unburden my conscience." Jane's red haired disposition was asserting itself. "Think of the hair bleaching, then the police farce, and now out riding with that traitor. I'm going to tell Miss Rutledge the whole thing!" and no argument of Judith's could dissuade her.

She turned back into the college grounds and struck a gait calculated to bring her up to that office in short order, and was more than half way through the campus when a small voice called out her name.

"Miss Allen!"

She turned to a side path, following the call, and faced Sally Howland.

"Just a minute, Miss Allen, please," pleaded the strange little freshman. Jane waited till she reached her, then smiled into the serious face of Sally.

"Hello, girlie," Jane greeted her. "What's the excitement?"

"You were so splendid last night, Miss Allen," panted Sarah Howland, "and I am so ashamed to have to deceive you as you must see I am doing." A flush suffused her pale face and she dropped her eyes in pained self-consciousness. "But just—now—for this little while—I can't see what else I am going to do!" she stopped and her hands twitched miserably at her knitted scarf. Evidently the attempt at confession was more difficult than she had anticipated.

"Don't distress yourself, dear," Jane soothed. "I realize you know something of the queer happenings at Lenox, and I can see you have some strong motive for withholding the explanation. There is a reason, of course, and I have faith in your sincerity. After all, Wellington is quite a little city in itself, and we are bound to meet queer problems here. I am on my way to the office now to get one off my mind."

"Oh, please, Miss Allen, don't report—Shirley Duncan," she stumbled and stuttered over the name. "I know she is doing queer things but she is such a—a country girl, and has never had any chances—"

"Did you know her before she came to Wellington?" asked Jane directly.

"No, yes, that is I knew her just before we came," replied the girl, very much confused and plainly embarrassed.

"I have noticed you seem to be friends," Jane pressed.

"Yes, sort of. But I do not agree with her in her attitude toward college life," replied Sarah hurriedly—markedly so. She was trying to shift the subject, Jane saw that plainly.

"It's good of you to plead for her," commented Jane, "but you see, my dear, juniors are quite grown up and are expected to uphold the college traditions. We really can't consider an individual where a college principle is concerned." Jane had her eye on Madison and was shifting to move that way. The freshman laid a detaining hand on her arm.

"If you could just—be persuaded to wait until after mid-year," she said, "perhaps then—things might look differently."

"But Sally, you know I saw you run out of that prohibited beauty shop, and you must know we Wellingtons in good standing do not patronize that place!"

This accusation startled Sarah. She dropped Jane's arm and all but gasped: "When did you see me there?"

"The day of that absurd police business when my friend Miss Stearns was so humiliated," Jane said severely.

"Oh, Miss Allen," and tears welled into Sarah's eyes. "I can't explain, and I am so miserable. Perhaps—perhaps I should not try—" Tears choked the wretched girl, and Jane relented at sight of her misery.

"Really, Sally," she changed her tone, "I do feel awfully sorry to see a freshman in distress, and I am sure I do not want to add to it. I won't go to the office now, if that will make you feel better, but I simply must do all I can to solve the mystery of the horrible night noises at Lenox. Here come the girls from their hike; dry your eyes and try to look pleasant."

Jane did not relish yielding; she had passed that childish stage, when "to give in" seemed noble; it was now a question of expediency, which was best? Should she go on and unburden her own conscience just because she had decided to do so, or should she follow the pleadings of this girl without having an intelligent reason?

Something stronger than psycho-analysis (Jane's new field of study) forced her to look deeply into the tear-stained blue eyes of Sarah Howland, and that same mystic power, older and surer than theory, compelled Jane to reply:

"All right, Sally. I'll wait a while. It's all very queer but even queer things are sometimes reasonable," and she threw an affectionate arm about the little freshman as she turned her back on the judicial office in the big, gray stone building.

CHAPTER XV

THE PICKET AND THE SPOOK

Not going to bed at all, Janey?" queried Judith, letting her hair fall over her shoulders and shaking her head like a happy care-free Collie. "This bed is too inviting to slight that way. I never knew that old spooky Lenox was so gorgeously equipped." Judith was testing the comforts of the big double bed in the guest chamber of Lenox Hall, the same that welcomed Jane and Dozia on the night previous.

"I am not going to run the risk of missing anything," Jane answered from her place in the big cushioned steamer chair. "This is very comfortable and I am all dressed ready to dive after the least suspicious sound. Besides, I'm not a bit sleepy—gone past my sleep, as Aunt Mary would say."

"I don't want to desert you," volunteered Judith, "and it doesn't seem just the thing for me to turn into this downy bed while you sit there like a sentinel. But truth to tell I am shamefully human and just counting on thirty winks before the ghost walks. Be sure to call me at the very first hint. Of course you will want to bag him personally, Jane, but I'll be glad to help you pull the draw string."

It was drawing close to the tainted hour, and Jane sat there wondering how one single day could seem as long as that just past. She had no idea of admitting what part actual fatigue can play in one's perspective, neither would she have owned to nerves as the cause of her unnatural wakefulness; nevertheless these were both factors in her almost painful alertness.

"At least now I have a chance to think," she temporized, "and I wish I could solve the mystery of Sally Howland's peculiar connection with Shirley Duncan."

They were so unlike, so foreign in disposition and character; not relatives, and Sally even disclaimed any previous acquaintance with the country girl. Then Sally's attempt to forestall the midnight noises by taking the shunned room at the very foot of the dreaded attic stairs—what could that mean?

Jane pondered feebly, and feeling just the least bit drowsy she left her place in the steamer chair to get a drink of water in the lavatory. It would not do to actually fall asleep "at the switch."

Voices from the end of the hall near Sally's room forced their way into the corridor as she glided past, and the unmistakable tone of Shirley Duncan riveted Jane's attention.

"You're too silly," she was insisting, no doubt to little Sally. "Don't I give you enough? Here's something daddy gave me. You may have it. Now do be a good, sensible little girl."

A pause, perhaps a remonstrance, for the voice took up its cue again.

"Of course you must have plenty of use for it. Don't be a goose, Kitten. You know how much I care about the old moldy college. But I'm bound to get something for my money."

Jane was at the lavatory door now but she did not at once enter. Surely, under the circumstances it was permissible to listen to the unguarded voice of Shirley Duncan. And she called Sally "Kitten!"

"For mercy's sake don't start to howl," it came again. "I can stand anything but that. It is all working beautifully and I guess before I quit I'll be able to show them that a country girl isn't such a simp as they imagine."

"Miss Allen is here tonight," Jane next heard Sally say, "and you know what that means, Bobbie."

"As if I care for her," and a scornful laugh made the meaning clearer. There were other words but Jane had heard enough. The mention of her own name seemed to charge her honor, and the belated drink of refreshing water was quickly drawn.

Back in the steamer chair Jane had new cause to ponder. What was the threat or power Shirley held over little Sally? And to bribe her with money? Also the affectionate "Kitten" and "Bobbie"?

The wind was stirring, but everything human now seemed withdrawn from activity around Lenox. Jane was waiting, listening for what? The frightened freshmen seemed secure tonight in their dormitories, assured of protection by Jane and Judith, two of the bravest girls in all Wellington. Also they had been promised a solution of the noise mystery and was not that in itself sufficient alleviative?

The clock in the hall tingled a chime, sweet almost playful music for the elves of midnight and a challenge to baser intruders. Jane must have dozed when she suddenly became conscious of something—

Was it a noise? She listened, alert and all but quivering in anticipation. There never had been any question of actual danger surrounding the weird happenings, but now that she faced the mystery something very like panic seized her.

Yes—again! That was surely something metallic!

"Quick, Judy!" she roused the sleeping girl on the bed. "Follow me. There it is—beginning."

"Where! What!" Judith sat up and snatched her robe.

"I'm going to the attic. I am sure it is up there!" and Jane flew out quietly, in fact noiselessly, into the dimly lighted hall.

A queer rumbling sound came from somewhere. Jane could not locate it for it seemed shut in, walled up! It was mechanical yet muffled!

Judith reached Jane as she stood listening.

"Where is it?" she whispered.

"I—can't tell," Jane replied. "Pass around the turn into the linen room. We can reach the stairs that way."

"Not—going up alone!" breathed Judith.

"Why not? It's some lark of the girls, you may be sure, and I'm going to find out what it is now."

"But it's dark," cautioned Judith.

"I have my flash. Listen!"

"Oh," groaned Judith, clutching Jane's arm, for a rattling of something like chains was now distinctly audible.

"Hush!" breathed Jane, laying her fingers lightly on the door knob of the boxed in stairway. The next moment there was a crash and both girls darted up the stairs.

"It was over that way!" insisted Judith, but in the darkness, with nothing but Jane's flash to guide them, it was impossible to tread safely through the attic, which was stored with all sorts of discarded materials.

"Wait a minute," whispered Jane, her heart pounding and nerves almost jumping.

They stood breathless, but not a move answered the silence.

"Come down; do, Jane," begged Judith, shivering in actual fear.

"Wait a few minutes," insisted Jane. "Whatever it is they know we are here!"

"Jane!" breathed the other, "I am honestly ready—to faint."

"Nonsense, just a few minutes." Jane could feel her companion tremble as she clung to her arm.

But not a sound nor a move rewarded their brave defiance.

"If only this place had a light," Jane whispered. "I suppose there is a bulb somewhere." She remembered that the fireman found none, however, and tonight even the patch of moonlight was not there. It really would have been foolhardy to attempt to go further into the low-beamed room, at the risk of running into attack, and evidently the noise had not been heavy enough to arouse anyone else in the Hall, for no sound of moving about came from the lower floors.

"Do come down," begged Judith again, taking two steps herself on the stairs.

"No, I shan't," insisted Jane. "I can wait as long as they can."

As if that gave a cue for action a rope—surely it was a rope—creaked and groaned and the rumbling heard first sounded again— somewhere, it seemed from the very roof.

"There!" said Jane. "They're gone and they went by that rope. Come on down. We can't do anything in this darkness," and, now satisfied that the "ghost" had been scared off, she followed Judith's precipitous escape down, and into the lower hallway.

"What was it? Did you catch him? We heard it? Where is it?"

To the astonishment of the two juniors the halls were dotted with heads thrust out of half closed doors, and the alarmed freshmen opened this volley of questions before Jane and Judith had recovered their breath.

"No, we did not get it," replied Judith, "but we scared it off, and I have my opinion of a ghost afraid of two unarmed juniors." Judy was very brave now, and rather proud of it.

"Young ladies! Young ladies!" Miss Gifford was expostulating. "You promised to stay in your rooms tonight."

"Oh, they are very good girls, Miss Gifford," Jane attested, "and I can assure them that friend spook is a rank coward and has gone by way of a pulled rope. Any pulleys loose around this place?"

"No, we have looked for such things," declared the matron. "But please, girls, go back to bed, and if anything else happens I promise to call you." This was a rash promise for Miss Gifford to make, but she felt the urgency of getting those questioning heads back on their respective pillows and so was willing to make concessions.

"Come in my room," she said aside to Jane and Judith, and they both followed her to the open door.

"That certainly is a noise made by someone who gets up to that attic," insisted Jane without waiting for inquiries, "and I am sure the sounds are made by metal chains."

"That's the weird part of it," interposed Judith.

"Why are chains more formidable than ropes?" asked Jane. "And in an old place like this is it would not be hard to pick up a chain or two, and you know, Judy, one old chain could make a fearful noise."

"Yes—but—how does anyone get up there?" demanded Judith.

"That's the mystery," admitted the matron, who had insisted on the girls remaining while the students quieted down and were safe once more until daylight. "We have looked all over the place, of course, and have not been able to find any hidden way of making ascent to that attic."

"Airship," suggested Judith foolishly.

"See how quickly the noise ceased," remarked Jane. "Someone recognized us, Judy, and has flown before our vengeance."

"Be that as it may," added Miss Gifford with a smile of assurance, "I am convinced this thing is being done out of jealousy or even revenge. You see, I am a new matron here, and when I came I put into execution such rules as I have been trained to follow. That made changes in our staff and a few dismissals. Such action is sure to stir up the wrath of someone, but even with that as a basis, and with all the detective skill I have been able to operate, I must confess I am baffled. This very minute our janitor would be found in his quarters over the stables, for I have phoned him there. And for the past week I have gone over the ground with him personally, he and his wife when they lock up. She is one of the day workers here," explained Miss Gifford.

Jane felt urged to tell of the shadowy figure she and Dozia had seen creeping about the evergreens, but quickly decided the indefinite detail would add little actual explanation. Instead she said:

"We could do nothing in the dark, but just wait until daylight. I have to sleep, of course, we are getting ready for our midyear exams, but just wait until two-thirty tomorrow afternoon after logic. Then expect me over here with perhaps a shotgun if I can find such a weapon on the premises!"

"But what would you shoot in daylight?" asked Judith, half jokingly,

"Even suspicion," replied Jane, "but my chief concern would be to find the way friend spook gets up into that attic and where he comes from. Good night, Miss Gifford, we will follow the freshies now, and I'm so sleepy it would take more noise than that first bombardment made to arouse me."

"Good night, my dears, and thank you so much for your wonderful support," said Miss Gifford.

"Support!" repeated Judith, back again in the guest room. "I suppose she considers the ghost her opponent?"

"I don't," said Jane cryptically. "I consider it the opponent of all Wellington."

"And I suppose, Janie, you are blaming me for holding you back in the attic?" sleepily from Judith.

"No, I'm not, Judy. You have no idea what a coward I am at heart; but somehow you girls have taken a notion I should do things and I can't bear to disappoint you. I must admit this is fascinating. I like it better even than golf, and will also give up my canter on Firefly this afternoon to see it through."

"Oh Jane, don't do that!" objected Judith. "We were all going out to Big Rock and have the horses engaged."

"I'm sorry, Judy, but I've gotten into this thing and I have just got to get out of it or I'll begin to believe in real spooks. I simply can't let it drag me down another twenty-four hours." She brushed her wavy red gold hair viciously. "You may take Firefly. He knows your saddle and will behave, I'm sure. That will give someone else your horse."

"Maud Leslie is crazy to ride but has no habit here," commented Judith significantly.

"Help her to mine," responded Jane promptly. "She isn't far from my size."

"But I wouldn't want to go galloping for nuts while you stay here alone hunting for spooks," Judith said loyally. "Better let two girls take our places if you insist on staying out."

"Oh, no, dear. I'm only going to look around for some sort of trap entrance to Lenox. Besides, you know Dozia doesn't ride, and she'll be here."

"All right, love, I'll leave you with Dozia if you insist. She's big enough to take care of you at any rate. Do you imagine Miss Gifford has materialized some domestic enemy in her change of staff? And that this super-conscious fired janitor or furnace man is operating against her?"

"I don't know, Judy," sighed Jane. "Looks to me more loosely organized than that. Besides, even a fired furnace man would keep union hours at one fifty per. No, I think you'll find the eternal female back of that racket, it's too temperamental for masculine action."

CHAPTER XVI

THE HIDDEN CHAMBER

Was this Wellington and was Jane Allen, the darling of the gym and the record maker for basket-ball, now so prone on solving a perplexing noise mystery that her games were cancelled and even her riding hours filled in with mundane matters, while her companions flew away to gather mountain nuts and wonderful complexions?

Jane's defiant laugh answered this very personal question. She was proud and she was fiery, and someone had been trying to discredit her father's scholarship. Of course that "someone" was Dolores Vincez, the expelled junior of the previous year. Every clue pointed its accusing finger at Dol Vin. She it was who brought those two freshmen, Shirley and Sarah, together at her beauty shop. It was she also who "took care" of Shirley's folks when they came in to see the "darter," and everyone who knew Dol knew, also, that these little attentions must have been rather costly to the country folks, for Dol always made things pay.

In the back of Jane's mind there was growing the germ of suspicion toward that same triangle in the spook alarms. Dol, Shirley and Sarah must be somewhere in that demonstration, but Jane had to admit the clues were not developing with such speed as she usually counted on in college mysteries.

But perhaps this one more day would unearth something tangible. At any rate, the parties and teas and sorority dances were getting into swing, and even a fascinating ghost would soon have to be turned over to the proper authorities, thought Jane, if he did not quickly become more co-operative with the juniors.

Work was serious and exacting. Every period had a record of its own, and while Jane was specializing in sociology she was also keeping up with the regular college course for her A. B. degree.

Promptly after logic dismissed, at two-thirty, she sought out Dozia. "Come along, Doze," begged Jane, "don't let us waste a moment. The girls are all busy now, and perhaps we can make a survey without having a ballet de follies dancing around." Dozia made her notebook safe and swung into Jane's trot for Lenox. Warburton Hall, one of the larger buildings, was just emptying a class from lecture but Jane and Dozia made a complete detour of it to escape attention.

Lenox was deserted, but in less than half an hour it was sure to be swarmed with freshmen running in after classes for a change of blouse, or some other requirement of the day now three-fourths spent.

"Let us get a line on that old tower," suggested Jane, surveying the secretive old building. "I know the racket was in that wing, and see how the round tower begins here and shoots up past all that outside plumbing? I know Lenox was one time a show building here, but freshies have got to have some place to sleep, hence the retrogression."

"Things are pretty well trodden down around here," reported Dozia, sending a critical eye over the little terrace that supported the old stone tower. "Squirrels do not usually wear French heels. See those footprints, Jane?"

In the strong sun a film of soft earth showed the impress of something quite like the pivoted French heel. This was in a small space from which floral bulbs had been removed and where the sheltering round tower had kept off the early winter frosts.

"Seems to me," said Jane, "there is some sort of cubby hole under here." She was poking around the vine-rope foundation.

"Oh, you see they take cellar stuff out that window," explained Dozia. "It saves steps. See the trail of ashes over there?"

"Yes, but that doesn't come from this point, that does come from the window. But I mean this spot here," she was tapping on a frame in which the squares formed the foundation of the building, and where the wooden arches had been originally painted a contrasting color for the sake of trimming.

"You can always push those lattice pieces in," said Dozia. "That was the charmed spot for hide and seek I'll guess, when Wellington was in rompers."

"Just look here!" ordered Jane in a very definite tone of voice. "This is more than a cubby hole." She was pulling at a piece of rope strung through a broken staple. Nothing remained but the iron loop over which the old time outside padlock was usually snapped. Jane pulled so vigorously she opened the hidden door and toppled over backward with the broken rope in her hand. Dozia was in front of the opening before Jane could get to her feet.

"Well, of all—things!" she drawled. "If here isn't some sort of old elevator!"

"A dumb-waiter!" cried Jane. "There are my groaning ropes. Pull, Doze, and let's see if it carries a car."

A couple of jerks at the big cables and the car came down to earth with a bump.

"Now!" exclaimed Jane gleefully. "There's the mystery. This airship goes right up into that tower!"

"But don't you dare ask me to make the ascent," warned Dozia. "The tower may be thick with ghosts as a chimney with swallows."

"But think of it," rattled on Jane. "That old hidden dumb-waiter! Why have we never discovered it before?"

"Didn't need it," said Dozia. "Wouldn't have a bit of use for it now except to save you from getting gray headed and daffy over spooks. Come along indoors and look at the tower from the other end. This elevator must have a 'last stop, all out' platform some place," drawled Dozia, as calmly as if a great part of the mystery had not just been successfully cleared up.

"But I'm not afraid to go up," declared Jane, almost dancing with excitement, "and the elevator works by pulling the ropes from the inside."

"Don't you dare, Jane Allen!" cautioned the imperturbable Dozia. "You might get half way up and stick in a smoke stack, or a rope might break or anything of a large variety of possibilities might occur. I can't be a party to your suicide pact. Walk right up the red carpeted stairs with little bright-eyed Dozia, and view the tower from the objective." She took Jane's arm and dragged her around to the side door, which stood invitingly opened.

By way of the red carpeted stairs they went as far as the attic flight, and from that point tramped plain unvarnished and well worn "treads" which Dozia took two at a time.

In the attic, daylight dispelled many of the night's fancies. For instance, the big black things in the corner were only stored trunks, those shadowy forms hanging from rafters were Miss Gifford's best summer togs in their tailored moth bags, and the thing that glistened in the moonlight like horrible eyes in a ghastly face, were almost that very thing, for some hallow'een trappings hung right under the window, a veritable trap for spectral moonlight.

Jane smiled. "These things had Judy and me scared blue last night. They actually seemed to point long bony fingers at us, but behold! nothing more sinister than a lot of storage stuff."

Dozia was over in the other end of the low raftered room looking for the dumb-waiter "objective," but there appeared to be nothing of the sort either in bricked chimney wall or along weather-boarded partitions.

"I can't see where that tower ends," she said, "See, Jane, this is nothing but a straight wall, and the tower surely is built round."

Jane surveyed the brown boarded wall. "But this is not all the attic," she exclaimed. "See how narrow this room is and gauge the size of the building. There must be another attic back of those boards and that fire brick wall. Now, how do you suppose one reaches the other side?"

"Via dummy," said Dozia. "But no little jaunt in that flivver for me. No indeed, Janie, not even to bag a real, live, active, untamed spook." They were both tapping along the boarded partition but had found no evidence of an opening. "Say, Jane," whispered Dozia, her brown eyes wide with pretended fright, "suppose some awful creature is hidden in there and that she has her meals served from the old dumbwaiter?"

Jane howled at this and danced around in cruel imitation of a possible "awful creature." That she tore a hole in her skirt from contact with an unfriendly nail mattered little, for the dance took in the length of the attic between trunks, boxes, disabled chairs and even dodged an ancient sewing machine.

"An attic party is attractive under certain conditions," Jane repeated. "I thought once I saw something move over this way. Let me look there more carefully."

"Look away," replied Dozia, falling limply into a very uncertain old willow porch rocker.

Jane pulled aside some curtain stretchers, then pried from its corner an old Japanese screen.

"There!" she yelled. "There's the door, now we're getting to it. Dozia, look, a real door into the other attic," and she paid no attention to the noise of falling articles swept aside in her wild rush to open the low door, so completely hidden by the old Japanese screen.

"Jane! Jane!" begged her companion. "Really do go carefully. How can you tell what's in that other place?"

"I can't till I see," insisted Jane, her hand on the iron latch that held the door in place.

"At least wait until I get a club or something," begged Dozia inadequately. "I've heard of queer animals being shut up in such quarters and they have often made splendid ghosts of themselves, too."

But Jane had no ears for warnings, and while Dozia held on to the blue plaid skirt Jane yanked away into the great unknown!

"Oh, look!" she cried in that tragic way girls discover things.
"Just look!"

They had opened up a big storeroom forgotten and abandoned, and in it—were all sorts of college paraphernalia, such as is used in theatricals. The room literally groaned with the stuff, and from the mass one object stood out boldly and significantly:

It was a suit of Japanese armor!

Jane yelled in delight at the discovery and pointed it out to Dozia.

"Don't touch it!" whispered Dozia. "It may be inhabited!"

"Bosh!" roared Jane, laying hold of a dangling armllet.

As she did so the chains rattled! The metallic clangings clanged and the whole array of ghostly noises sounded out in the unholy hour of three o'clock broad daylight!

"The ghost! The ghost!" boomed Jane. "Dozia, see, this thing is hung so it goes off at a touch. Oh, isn't it delicious! To have found it and this way."

"I'm nervous watching that disappearing door," whined Dozia. "Suppose we should get walled up in here, just two babes in the tower?"

"I'm going to get this thing down and show it to the girls," defied Jane. "Oh, Dozia, look there—a companion. One for you and one for me. Let's get into them and go down stairs. The girls will be there and—"

"Say, little girl!" drawled Dozia. "Do you expect me to get in under that scrap iron works?"

"It's all padded," interrupted the excited Jane. "Here," she had the armor off its big hook and simply made Dozia hold the tumbling parts. "There's the helmet, the visor and these—"

"The trunks," said Dozia. "Cute little rompers, aren't they?"

"Called tonlets," said the intelligent Jane, sighing under the weight of the outfit she was trying to shift to a trunk and a couple of boxes.

"I'd hate to have to get in that for a fire," remarked Dozia. She was, however, trying on the scaly breastplate, and attempting to poke her head into the helmet. "Are you sure this stuff is no world's war relic? I wouldn't care to rub shoulders with some old Prussian guard."

"Why, girlie, aside from bagging the ghost, I think we have made a great discovery. Think of this acquisition to Wellington!" and then Jane proceeded to dress up.

But things rattled and fell off almost as often as they were put on, and it was not an easy matter to get inside of anything pertaining to this dilapidated costume.

When an old sword dropped from its hook on a rafter, Jane danced in glee and declared "a ghost did it," although Dozia insisted she had cut a piece of cord on that very hook. Finally Jane was "canned," as Dozia described the state of being inside of tin things, and an attempt was made to move.

"If we should fall—" suggested Jane.

But they didn't.

CHAPTER XVII

"BEHOLD THE GHOST OF LENOX HALL!"

Dozia insisted on carrying the "tin rompers" down stairs in her hands and donning them in a convenient place to avoid possible disaster.

"Yours are shorter and jauntier than mine, Jane," she argued. "Besides, you have a better figure for tonlets. Come along, I'll stop at the landing and buckle into the things. Give me a couple of chains. Don't they chime beautifully?"

"Wait a minute," Jane ordered. "I just discovered the usual slip of paper." She was extracting it from an armlet. "It's quite new and very modern, in fact regular typewriting kind—"

"Oh, tuck it away and come along," Dozia moaned. "I hear the horde howling and the sooner I get this stuff off the better I'll feel. Pickles! but it's heavy."

Jane folded the slip of paper and made it secure some place, then they proceeded to forge their way into the recreation room on the second floor, whither the students had been hastily summoned by the matron.

"Now I know how the baby tanks felt in the big war," panted Jane, who was valiantly leading the way. "I mean those big human machines that rolled over the earth and ploughed things down, as they went."

"Say, Janie, just wait a minute," begged Dozia at the first landing. "This looks a little like a joke but who is the joker? Who got up in that place and rattled these nightly? Also, who let out that wild scream we heard on that first night?" She was talking quickly and in a subdued voice. "We may be breaking the spell by raiding the secret chamber, but suppose the old spook breaks out in a new spot?"

"I've thought of all that," confessed Jane, her smile threatening to unhinge the visor. "But we must give the youngsters their show first. The details will be lost in their joy of rescue."

"They come! They come!" called out Miss Gifford in an uncertain treble. She had been waiting to give this signal.

"Land, I'm losing the panties," groaned Dozia, trying to hold up the tonlets with one hand while she made wild grabs all over the outfit with the other. Dozia's artistic effect was surely in jeopardy. Majestically the two big, black walnut doors swung back, and the crusaders passed between them.

"Behold the ghosts of Lenox Hall!" cried out Jane tragically.

"Behold, behold!" echoed Dozia, raising her arm in its chained gusset and attempting to salute at the peak of her helmet.

Shouts from the girls spoiled further efforts at the theatrical, and presently it was no longer a question of holding the old armor in place, but rather that of getting out of it safely, for what those freshmen didn't say and do to those ghosts!

"Nothing but strung up dishrags," sneered Maud Leslie. "They must have looted every hardware store in town for these. Look!"

She sacrilegiously yanked from their wire strings the metal dishcloths such as are used for scouring purposes, and truth to tell there was indeed a big collection in the string of armor.

"Let's try the breastplate," begged Nellie Saunders. "I've always longed to be a Joan of Arc." And she got her pretty hair inside the head cage with the mouth trap under her chin, then she corseted on the breastplate.

"And THAT'S the ghost?" scoffed Margie Winters, sitting far off in the corner safe from "spiritual" infection.

"Disappointed?" asked Jane.

"Of course I am," growled Margie. "I expected a holiday at least to fumigate, and here we have nothing but a lot of perfectly sanitary junk."

"And I thought we would find a beautiful maniac walled up there," sighed Velma Sigsbee. "It's a perfect shame to have the thing end so unromantically."

"Hard to suit you youngsters," commented Jane. She had fully divested herself of the trappings, and now stood aside while the freshmen surveyed the wreck. Someone suggested getting up surprise theatricals and bringing before the whole college the "ghosts of Lenox," This was a fuse to the bomb of excitement, and presently the roll was called, secrecy pledged, and a committee of arrangements appointed. Prompt freshmen!

"Give Sally Howland a part," called out Ruth Lawrence. "She's just suited for something angelic."

"We'll transpose Othello and sprinkle it with cherubs," said Nellie Saunders, who had been made chairman of the cast. "But the one thing to remember, girls, is secrecy," she announced loftily. "No one outside of Lenox must know what the ghosts are, or anything about the show."

"You'll find tons of stuff up there to fit out the entire performance," Jane informed the excited students. "It seems to me the things have been stored there for ages, and perhaps were the remains of some very grand affair in the early history of Wellington. Now, girls, are you fully satisfied the ghost is annihilated?"

"Perfectly," spoke up Nellie. "And we just don't know how to thank you juniors. Cheers, girls, for our rescuers."

They cheered with the freshmen's dirge.

"One, two, button my shoe; three, four, knock at the door" (they knocked at everything).

"Five, six, pick up sticks" (wild grabs).

"Sticks, sticks, freshies can's mix."

"Rawr! rawr! freshies all sore" (moans and groans).

"Gore, sore, r-o-a-r" (and they roared)!

"Thanks," responded Jane when the roar died down, "and we're glad to be initiated in your sorority. Have a lovely time and be sure to let us know if you need help with the spook revue."

Dozia chimed in feebly and slipped out after Jane.

"They were actually disappointed," she remarked. "I believe they hoped for real gore."

"To tell the truth," admitted Jane, "it did seem a bit commonplace after all the symptoms. But I almost forgot the little note. Did you ever yet meet a case in which the written word played no part? Where did I put that piece of paper?"

"In your shoe?" suggested Dozia as Jane exhausted all other possibilities.

"No, here it is in my sleeve. Sit down and we'll decipher it." They dropped to the nearest bench and smoothed out the paper.

"It's part of a letter," said Dozia, "and written by a boy! Oh, joy, now we will have some fun—a love letter!" and she pored over the torn page.

"Neither the beginning nor the end," said Jane, "but the climax." She read: "'You are a brick if not a wizard, and oh, boy! how that two hundred dollar check did look to me!'"

"Two hundred!" Dozia repeated. "No girl around these diggings ever handled that tidy little sum. Read on, Jane, it may be a will or something, and we may come in for a share—reward, you know."

"Here's our clue," announced Jane. "The name Shirley! Read that." She did so herself. "Shirley, however did you do it, I know you neither stole nor borrowed, so it is all right and"—wait," interposed Jane, "that's torn." She lay the paper on her knees and fitted in the damaged parts. "Here it is. 'I'm back in college and in the big dorm, after the scare, and it's wonderful to have a little sis like you.'"

"Sis!" groaned Dozia. "The lover's only a big brother!" She slumped in her seat dejectedly.

"Shirley's brother," reasoned Jane, "and we have been blaming that girl! She helped her brother to get back to college!" The voice reeked with dismay and incredulity.

"Can you imagine college running in her family?" questioned Dozia the incredulous.

"I suppose we should hardly have read the letter—"

"Why not? Should we have risked our precious lives up in that attic and then turned down this important clue? Indeed I'm all for asking Shirley to introduce me," and Dozia strutted off to show her height if not to display the "runs" in her hose and the "threadbares" in her sweater elbows.

"But it does sort of take one down," mused Jane, following her companion toward Warburton Hall. "I hate to feel I have so misjudged Shirley."

"Pure personal pride on your part, Jane. I have proof positive of the girl's perfidy. Every single day I must paste anew the paper decoration that hides her work. I mean that crack in my mirror. More than once it has done dreadful things to my poor face. If I move just one inch to the left the crack gashes my right cheek. You know how a glass reflects. But this brother. May I see the paper, Jane? His name might be between the lines."

"Oh, it's Ted," said Jane innocently. "See the signature here, but no address, of course. And from that immature hand, Doze, I am sure Ted is a junior."

"But, Jane!" almost gasped Dozia. "What can you do with that letter? It would be positively dangerous to let Shirley know you found it. It would mean, logically, that she rang the ghost chains, and that you knew she had helped her brother financially." All the nonsense had now died out of Dozia's voice, and she compelled Jane to stand while she proclaimed this ultimatum.

"But how could she get up there, Dozia, when we know positively she was not on the campus the night of the big alarm?"

"And little Sarah is innocent, I am sure," went on Dozia, "for she handled that trash with an interest too keen for previous acquaintance with the stuff. Each piece gave her a little spasm of surprise. I watched just how it affected her."

"Queer, I noticed that also," said Jane. "Yes, I'm sure she never saw the armor before. But Shirley is never around in any excitement. I am afraid she spends a lot of time in Dol Vin's."

"But how could she ever get two hundred dollars for brother Ted?"

"I—wonder, Dozia, could she be in partnership with Dol?"

"She might, but wouldn't that mean an outlay?"

"Of course. There'll be little profit there—and two hundred!" The amount was appalling to Jane's practical mind.

Voices broke in on the soliloquy.

"Here come the girls from their ride, and what a shame you didn't go, Jane. Laying a ghost is all right, but if I rode a horse as you do, I'd assign the ghosts to others. 'Lo, girls! Break your necks or anything?" chirped Dozia.

Judith hurried to gain Jane's arm and squeezed it affectionately as she fell in step.

"Such a glorious ride, Jane!" enthused Judith, "and we all missed you so much. Firefly was good, but he knew you were not on his back." Judith looked "nobby" in her riding togs.

"And whom do you think we saw out with a stable horse and instructor?" asked Janet Clarke. "The Rebel Shirley Duncan! And you know, Jane, what a price Clayton asks for his horses."

Jane was amazed. A riding instructor, horse and hired outfit for Shirley Duncan!

What was the secret spring of her prodigious income?

CHAPTER XVIII

FATEFUL FROLIC

Excitement subsided with a thud at the discovery of the cast-iron ghost, and for some days a round of studies and basketball completely absorbed the girls of Wellington. Whatever the restless freshmen had in hand was not evident to the other classes, and only Jane, Judith and Dozia shared the interest, and possible anxiety, following the clues and suspicions in the undertow.

"It's a dreadful thing to be proud," confessed Jane to these companions after a rather too vigorous hour in the gym on Saturday afternoon. "Somehow, when I think of my own darling daddy's scholarship being dragged in the mud this way, I feel—dangerous."

"Don't blame you," acquiesced Judith. "The very impudence of a girl like Shirley breaking into college that way, then boasting she doesn't care a whang what happens! What do you suppose WILL happen at mid-year?"

"A neat little note, 'unable to keep up with her class,' I suppose," said Jane. "And while I don't wish that girl any more harm than she's bent on, I am bound to confess I would sigh in relief at her departure."

"But that lovely brother Ted," mourned Dozia. Judith had been made fully acquainted with the fragmentary letter recovered in the ghost raid.

"That would be hard," agreed Judith.

"And I'm sure there's a sweet little mother—but we saw the mother!" Jane broke off suddenly. "How incongruous that those two country folks should have a son at college like our Ted!"

"Our Ted," echoed Judith, allowing her head to droop on Jane's shoulder impressively.

"Awful!" moaned Judith.

"Turrible," groaned Dozia.

They were walking leisurely up from the gym, and the clouds of young Winter wrapt the gay sunset in fleecy blankets, while capering elves picked up every frightened little leaf and tossed it cruelly from its hiding place.

"It seems to me," said Jane, influenced by the spirit of her surroundings, "that this year has been rather unsatisfactory. Not that I want to shine by the reflected glory of dad's winner, but it would be consistent to have the scholarship always won by good students."

"Rather a jolt," agreed Judith, "to have the romp come in on merit when she can't prove it. It really looks like a trick somewhere, Jane."

"But the exams are very severe and I've seen the report. Nothing 'foohey' about that. Yes, I have known girls to sail along beautifully in school and flunk everything in college. It really can be done."

"But two hundred dollars can't be done that way," Dozia interposed, "and no one seems to be missing her change purse."

"Beyond me," Jane owned up, "and I've almost ceased to wonder about the dumb-waiter tenant. Wish you would agree to my ascent in that car, Judith."

"Yes, you want a party to your folly. You don't feel free to break your pretty neck without fastening the crime on poor Judy Stearns. No, Jane, dear, you don't ride in that Ferris wheel while I'm your side partner. You know scorpions are deadly and love dark corners. Ugh! How could you think of going up in that beastly cage!"

"Don't get excited, dear, I have promised not to try it," acceded Jane. "Although I have felt there might be some clue in the old derrick. Don't go indoors yet, the air is—"

She stopped to watch two girls on horseback gallop along the bridle path.

"Shirley Duncan and some stranger," exclaimed Judith. "And how they are going—oh, mercy!"

"Oh, oh!" screamed all three, for at that moment both riders were vainly trying to check their horses in a sudden dash down one of the steepest grades, straight over a hill almost perpendicular in its slope.

"The horses have left the path," breathed Jane, watching with fascinated gaze the two mounts galloping down at a speed surely disastrous. One, the taller girl, seemed to have some control, but poor Shirley!

"Heavens!" screamed Judith, "she's gone!"

The horse had stumbled and its rider was rolling headlong down the hill, while the frightened animal pawed the earth in a wild attempt to regain its feet. The girls, terrified, started swiftly for the spot, but even as they ran the unfortunate rider went over a sharper turn and struck. Then—she lay in an inert heap against a jagged rock! In a moment they were at her side.

"Her head!" exclaimed Jane, frightened at the deathly face she now stared down at.

"Can we carry her? This is so far from a building," gasped Judith.

"Oh, Jane, see the blood!"

"I can easily carry her," answered Dozia quickly. "Let me pick her up, and take her on my shoulder."

"Wait," Jane cautioned. "It might be dangerous. We must stretch her out flat so that her head is down. There, she may soon regain consciousness. I wonder if one of us should run up to Madison?"

"I'll go," volunteered Judith, evidently glad to escape from the horror of the scene. "See, the other rider is still galloping! She can't stop her horse. Oh, how terrible if the runaway gets out among the autos."

"Hurry, Judith," Jane begged. "Have them bring a stretcher. I am sure we shouldn't lift her head; her face is bloodless."

"She appears to be recovering," Dozia whispered. "Poor Shirley! How dreadful that this should happen!"

"If only she lives," moaned Jane, contrition in voice. Somehow it was unbearable that this country girl had been so severely censored by Jane and her companions. As she lay there, all the horrors of her unhappy school days seemed to fly up and strike Jane in a charge of bitterness.

"I'm sure she is only stunned," Dozia said consolingly. "See, Jane, there is a tiny streak of color coming. She will soon react."

Yes, the pallor was melting into a film more lifelike, but the heavy eyelids looked so deathly! How awful to gaze upon that mockery of death—complete unconsciousness!

"Her horse is walking off quietly, Jane," again Dozia spoke. "I believe the animal is wise enough to know he should not go without his rider."

Even the riderless horse, with his solemn clip-clapping, echoed a terrifying note to the scene. It was all so appalling.

"Shirley! Shirley!" whispered Jane, close to the ear of the stricken girl.

Then "Shirley?" repeated the blue lips in a questioning answer. "Where? Oh, my head!" and a spasm of pain struck across the white face.

"You are all right, Shirley, dear," Jane comforted, relief in her voice. "You just fell from your horse. Lie still until we can take you to the infirmary. Do you feel a little better?" How wonderful to hear the stricken girl speak again!

"The awful noise in my ears!" she gasped. "Like a torrent rushing—"

"That's only the returning circulation," said Dozia in the same quiet monotone Jane had used.

What a relief! To know her mind was clear! And the blood streak on her neck seemed now only from surface scratches—the briars had torn her flesh cruelly as she dashed down that hill.

Over the same hill, but not by the same route, could now be seen the stretcher bearers. With four seniors were also Miss Rutledge, the dean, and Miss Fairlie, the matron of Madison. They were hurrying and silent, only the light tread of crackling leaves on the bridle path accompanying the grave little procession.

Jane and Dozia were chafing Shirley's hands. At the approach of the litter they stood waiting to lift with gentle hands the prostrate girl. It seemed so strangely pathetic: the big country girl in that gay riding habit, the glaring red coat such a contrast now to the helpless wearer. Her little velvet jockey cap still held on with its chin strap, and the new chamois gloves hiding her untamed hands were so strikingly new!

Few words were spoken as the rescuers met. Miss Rutledge gave quiet orders and these were carried out with intelligent care. Finally Shirley was on the canvas stretcher, and Jane was holding a restorative close to her nostrils.

"There, dear. It's all done and you won't move another bit now to hurt your head. See how steadily the girls carry you?"

Dozia held one hand opposite Jane's side and the older students moved, over the uncertain hill, tense and powerful against a possible jolt or jarring movement of the patient. Once down on the path the task was less difficult, and as the corps turned back to take the path from the gateway into the grounds again, Shirley's horse, standing by the post, whinnied after them. No one spoke, but Shirley put a gloved hand over her strained eyes, and it was plain she feared even the sound of the faithful animal's call to her.

At the infirmary Dr. Pawley was waiting, and quickly as they reached the big white room the students were dismissed, while he and his nurse took charge.

"Judy," Jane gulped, but before they could reach a secluded spot her tense nerves gave way.

"Judy! Judy!" she cried. "Why didn't we try to save her from those reckless strangers? Why didn't we beg her to give up the company of Dolorez Vincez?"

"But we did, Janie. We tried every possible way," consoled Judith. "This accident could happen to anyone—to a skilled rider as well as to a beginner. Besides—she will be all right. See how quickly she became fully conscious!"

"But to think—" Jane's words were lost in choking sobs, and for the first time Judith saw what genuine grief could do to sunny little Jane Allen.

Wisely her companion allowed the storm to beat itself out. That sort of hysteria is always best spent unchecked, and Judith Stearns merely stroked the red gold head that had buried itself in her lap, while the shoulders pulsed and throbbed under Jane's continuous sobbing. At last she raised her head and smiled piteously.

"I feel better," she said. "It's awful to have that sort of thing clutch at one's throat. Now my weakness has passed, let us see if there is anything wanted. Hereafter I shall not trust dad's scholarship girl to strangers' handling." And she meant every word she said.

Quickly the news of the accident spread, and just as quickly came the keen suspense and wave of suppressed excitement. Rumors were whispered: first that the victim was in danger of death, next that her injuries were not serious, until even the most sensational among the many pupils realized the importance of withholding their opinions.

Hushed voices around that part of college where the infirmary was situated bespoke an active sympathy, and the weight of oppression that comes with dread had suddenly changed the whole atmosphere into a cloud of gloom.

Dear, thoughtless, headstrong Shirley!

CHAPTER XIX

THE MIRACLE

The days of watching and anxiety that followed the accident left no time for the lesser interests among Shirley's group at Wellington. For that awful uncertain period there was grave danger of brain concussion, and in the fear of that it must be said every girl in Lenox, besides many outside the freshmen's quarters, showed their loyalty to the untamed country girl. No messages could be sent, no flowers even allowed to attest to their kindness, as in the critical time absolute solitude was imperative. Then, like a flash of that robust country vitality, the patient rallied and all danger was pronounced past.

One particular, however, caused Jane keen annoyance. All messages to Shirley's folks had been passed out through Dolorez Vincez, who claimed to be a personal friend of the family. Not even a mother would have been allowed to see the patient, and as Shirley begged that this plan of Dolorez' agency be carried out, no objection was made to it by the very much alarmed dean, Miss Rutledge.

Another puzzling detail was the fact that Sarah Howland begged Jane not to interfere with these arrangements, as any such interference would undoubtedly shock the stricken girl, she argued. Sally and Jane had just left Lenox and were discussing these details.

"And I'm so glad now," breathed Sally in her entreaty to Jane, "that you listened to me and did not report that matter to Miss Rutledge."

"So am I," said Jane in bewilderment. "I am glad of anything I may have done to make her path smoother here. I can't see why Dolorez should step in at this critical moment, though, but I do know she took Shirley's folks around when they were here, and as you say, Sally, to suddenly change the whole line of communication with her family might not only shock Shirley, but also terrify her folks. What a relief that she is now out of danger!"

"I felt like running away at first," confessed Sally, "it was so terrifying. But I realized I might be the very one most wanted here- -if anything serious should happen."

Jane cast a quick inquiring glance at the younger girl following that statement, but was not rewarded by a further gleam of confidence.

"I'm afraid I have neglected her," said Jane, "and I mean to make amends. The juniors usually help backward freshmen, but Shirley seemed to resent my attempts even at friendship."

"Miss Allen," said Sarah in a compelling voice, "you may not know it but—that girl is gifted at mathematics. She can solve the most difficult problems and is always ahead at geometry and trig. Other studies seem to confuse her, and she just laughs at the languages, but she's a perfect gem at math."

"Is that so? I'm so glad!" exclaimed Jane, "for if she is capable at math she ought to pull through her other work. How strange I never heard anyone mention her talent?"

Sally shook her head and smiled. "She is so odd and defiant, but under it all I believe the girl is just a big-hearted, untamed creature. That is why, Miss Allen, I have kept as near to her as she would allow me to come. She is too honest even to affect changes."

"Capable at math?" Jane repeated, trying to believe it. "I am so glad, Sally. I can't tell you what it means to me that this student is not wholly—dull."

"I can guess," replied Sally simply, and Jane wondered then if she knew about the scholarship.

"Why did the girls abandon their plans for the ghost show?" asked Jane suddenly. "I thought they were all so keen about it."

"Perhaps I am to blame," faltered Sally timidly. "But you see, Miss Allen—well, there was a complication there—and—" she stumbled piteously. Jane tried to rescue her.

"But it would only have been a lark, and the freshmen have had no Barnstorm this season!"

"I know," said Sally helplessly, "but Shirley was so sick and—we have given the idea up."

Jane had to be content with that, but the veiled explanation only whetted her curiosity.

Few accidents were recorded in Wellington's history, and the mishap of Shirley ran its course in intense interest. Then presently the patient was again defending herself just as before, scorning even the humblest sympathy offered.

"Served me right," she insisted, talking to Sally. "I know how to ride and can handle any old farm horse that ever pulled a plough, but I want my hands free and my horse must be unchecked. Stylish togs, gloves, saddles and trappings get in my way, and that hill!"

So the accident had served as a lesson, and the fallen pride was not wasted in its effect upon the ambitious equestrian.

Thanksgiving had passed with few of the girls leaving college, as special permission was required for that privilege, and now the holiday season was imminent. Even basketball had

lost some of its power to enthuse, and the fact that Shirley was not considered well enough to go into the rough game, and also that Sally Howland was too small and light to be eligible, served to lessen the interest of Jane and Judith in the personnel of the teams, for as juniors in a second extension year they felt a little too grown up to go themselves generally into the big games.

Jane was chosen and acted as referee, and Judith was forced to play center in the Breslin game, but even winning over the neighboring academy somehow had lost its thrill. Golf was the popular game now with Jane, Judith, Dozia and Janet Clarke; Ted Guthrie, too, toddled around the links, and golf permitted such opportunities for confidences and was so independent of stated hours and limits of endurance that time was given on the course to talk many things over.

The girls had covered the frosted field and were returning before the first period of study, and that magic beautifier, the air of early morning, left little undone in his art of tone and tonic for Jane and Judith, when they dropped their bags and hurried to the day's tasks in mental exploits,

"This very afternoon I am going to talk with Shirley," Jane decided. "And wouldn't it be wonderful, Judy, if she turned out worth while after all?"

"No, it wouldn't," glowered Judith. "Any girl who can be as sick as she was and not have her brother Ted come to see her—well, my interest lags at that point and I don't intend to 'rouse it.'"

"I still have that letter," Jane reflected. "Never seem to get a chance to turn it in. And I didn't want to destroy it."

"Give it to me, Janie, do," teased Judith. "Next to knowing the darling Ted, having his letter in installments might serve. Tonight we'll read it over again. It seems so long since we found it with the ghost."

"Doesn't it? And even the play was given up when Shirley was stricken."

"But they used the armor the other night in their pageant," said Judith, "and everyone thought it wonderful. What a shame they expunged the ghost story."

"Freshmen are so unreliable," sagely commented Jane. "But I'm afraid outside influence spoiled the plot for the spook tragedy. I hope my things come today for the prom. I feel rather in need of a first class time under the beneficent influence of a real orchestra and prudently shaded lights."

"Me, too," agreed Judith promptly if inelegantly.

So the gay season advanced apace, and it was soon one round of trying on gowns and fussing with sample hair dressing in all the "dorms" of Wellington. For the one big function known simply as The Dance all students were eligible, and it was just in advance of this that Shirley "broke loose."

She openly and unqualifiedly "cut loose" from Dol Vin's "interference," as she called it.

"I'm through with her," she told her companions; but it was to Sally she confided the details.

The girls had been planning their dance costumes and Sally was insisting she did not care to go to the dance, when Shirley took another spasm of revolt. She would never again go into that hateful place, she declared, and more than that, she threatened exposure to the beauty shop methods if its proprietor did not soon return some of the "loans" long over due to her (Shirley).

"Kitten," she exploded without warning, "I've had my lesson. Do you know that Dol Vin is actually sending bills to my innocent dad for her entertainment of the country folks? Imagine all she's begged and borrowed from me to meet 'emergencies' in her business, and then to ask my dad to pay her dinner bills! Of course she thinks I'm helpless, and that she has me in her power, but I am not such a 'greenie' now. And we will both be free soon!"

The deep-set eyes took on a look more confident than defiant, and even "Kitten" did not fail to observe a marked improvement in the speaker's manner and appearance.

Shirley was powerful and forceful, with that unruly aggressiveness conspicuous in young children, when the weakness is classified as "having their own way" before twelve years, and as "being capable" after that—the latter faculty true fruit of the former germ. So it was with this country girl; her very crimes were molding into virtues, and that again proves a world old philosophy.

"Your hair is very becoming that way," ventured the blonde Sally, whose own hair was always a most exacting halo—Sally had to live up to it. "And you don't mind being called Bobbie?"

"I like it," answered Shirley. "I suppose you know what a time I had to get the wig back to hair after the treatment. I am positive that east side French woman was trying an experiment on my poor head. But among other things the accident did for me, it gave my hair a chance to shoot." She ran her long fingers through the rather stubby growth that had taken on a decided unruliness in splendid imitation of curl. "You see it was rubbed every day, and that charitable nurse rubbed curl right in it. I just love it and wouldn't interfere with it for anything. Curling hair artificially, I know, simply makes it cranky."

"Yes, spoils its temper and breaks its character. Just like twisting a tender vine and forcing it to turn away from its chosen paths. How are you getting on with your cramming? Can I help you?" asked Sally, diverging suddenly.

"Hopeless," replied the other. "I don't believe I'll wait to face the music."

"Oh, you must, Miss Allen is so interested——"

"That's the hard part of it now. I can't face Miss Allen. She's such a good sport." The bobbed brown head was suddenly dropped into her cupped hands reflectively. "You see, at first, Kitten, I was just a rebel; satisfied to get in here and to have the name of it. Then, these girls whom I so despised were so fine to me," again the look of dejection, "and, girlie, when I lay on my back at the foot of that hill and Jane Allen whispered 'Shirley' into my buzzing ears—it did something to me." Her companion allowed the pause to act without venturing to interrupt it. It was the working of the miracle! "Yes, and she meant it, too," went on Shirley

reflectively. "No silly stuff just because she feared I was done for. She and big, brown-freckled Dozia just seemed to drag me back to earth, while the other!" her eyes blazed. "Do you know why I have never spoken of my companion on that hateful ride?"

"No—I've wondered?"

"I've been ashamed to," declared Shirley, "and thankful the juniors who helped me did not torture me with questions. Well—she was that foreign element with a name like a crocheted alphabet and a face like a week old Easter egg—running its colors, you know. Dol has her down from New York to practice for the stage," this thought revived Shirley's spirits and she gave a gay howl. "I can see why she needs the woods to practice the yells she's cultivating," a foot was kicked out at the thought. "But I'm through with them, Kitten, but please don't think I've reformed," she gasped. "I despise turncoats and—traitors."

Shirley wore an angora tarn, leaf green sweater and big plaid golf skirt just then. No one in Wellington could have criticised her outfit. Even her attire seemed benefited by the miracle.

"Bye-by, little sister," she addressed Sally. "This experience has done something else for me other than opening my stupid eyes—it has given me a real chum."

And she got away before Sally could answer.

CHAPTER XX

TOUCHSTONE

"Have you noticed, Judy," asked Jane, "what a miraculous improvement is manifest in our two pet freshies? To wit: Sally and Shirley."

"Yes," snapped Judith, "and I've noticed something else. You are apt to fall in love with the rebel."

Jane laughed. She was looking so lovely after a wild time in the pool, and a girl who can look well after a swim is surely very pretty. But Jane's hair loved the water, and a flash of sunshine after it just whipped the little ringlets into flossy tangles. Then her eyes always danced from excitement, and her agile form just vibrated energy. Don't blame Jane for this description—it is given through Judy's eyes, whose hair went stringy, whose eyes went blinky, and who actually turned "goose flesh" from a pool swim in December.

"No," said Jane, "I couldn't really love a girl who has been so temperamental, but I could tolerate her, and that's a concession."

"If I don't rub down quickly I'm afraid these goose fleshings will freeze into pebbles. I feel like a big stone as it is," said Judith, shivering, chattering and turning bluer. "Wait for me in the run; I want to talk to you."

The "run" was that part of the gym kept clear for free exercise and was used especially by such students as demanded a substitute for the "beach run in the sand" after swimming. Also, it gave space for track work, although the open season for cross country runs was rarely closed at Wellington.

Jane was dressed and out before Judith appeared. It was Saturday again, a free day; free from study but simply crowded with other contingencies. Students were knotted together, ready for basketball, golf, handball and all other forms of exercise, not to omit the dress rehearsal at dancing already well under way in a corner clear of apparatus and ropes. Here girls were dreamily dancing who knew how to dance well, while others were showing steps to companions and comparing notes on new dances, as applied from various sections of the country. What Boston had last year, Chicago was disclaiming as too old; and again there was Maud Leslie from Jersey actually teaching Nellie Saunders from Buffalo the Drop Step.

Inez Wilson was endangering her life and limb "toeing" and each time she pirouetted on those toes, without the usual padding of the oriental shaped supports, a perfect flock of other dancers slid from danger of her avalanche.

"You'll skid, Ina!" yelled Nellie Brocton. "Besides, this dance isn't going to be for soloists," and Nettie swung away with Janet, crooning and humming to the imaginary orchestra.

Judith came out from the lockers, a challenge now to the effects of her long swim. True, her hair was wispy, and every snap on her blouse had not joined its partner, but taking her all in all Judith Stearns "looked dandy" and said she felt just like that.

"I'm too lazy to run," she told Jane, "besides, my shoe laces would trip me. I'm plenty warm and proof positive against getting cold. Sit down while I tie my shoes."

"See Shirley and Sally practicing," remarked Jane indifferently.

"I don't want to!" retorted Judith. "Jane, I'm alarmed and I know your sinister motive. You have heard Teddy is coming to the dance!"

"No!" gasped Jane, unable to hide her surprise.

"There, I knew you would take it that way. But be warned! Teddy is to be my partner for as many dances as his sister can spare," and Judith tucked a wad of shoestring in at her ankles as if the pocket were in a commodious knitting bag instead of a tennis shoe.

"I hope he's fat and awkward and red headed and clumsy," snapped Jane, tearing off the qualifications like coupons.

"And I know he's tall and graceful and has chestnut hair," fawned Judith. "I've loved Ted from the moment I saw how he curls his cross letters like a riding crop. That's always a sign of originality and genius." There was a hint of strut in Judith's ordinarily graceful motion, and tiny drops of pool water flicked her eyelashes unnoticed. When Judith Stearns professed to "love a boy" she did so heroically, though he be myth or just an ordinary "full back."

Jane made her way over to the dancers' corner. Shirley was howling over her own failure at the Drop Step. She choked back her uproariousness as Jane came along.

"Can't do it," she confessed. "Guess I shall have to stick to 'One Steps.'"

"Every fault is an art at the big dance," said Jane. "It's the one chance we have to stand by our home towns; we all seem to dance so differently. But that's very good, Shirley. I wouldn't give it up if you really want to get it. There's just a queer little knack this way." She threw her arm around the novice and led her off. Judith had condescended to follow Jane up and was now talking to Sally.

For the length of the "arena" Jane and Shirley struggled along, chatting and smiling without restraint or self-consciousness. Girls "made eyes" in criticism, but none ventured to shape their criticism into words, for the rebel Shirley was doing pretty well in everything these days, and why should not a junior take her up if she wished to?

At the turn Shirley drew Jane aside from the dancers and said in an undertone:

"Miss Allen, I do wish you could persuade little Kitten—I mean Sally, to come to the dance. First, I was determined not to go and she persuaded me. Then I found she herself had no idea of attending. Of course it's always a question of clothes!"

"Surely we must insist on her coming," said Jane decisively. "But it is awkward to get around clothes. You know her so well, can you suggest a way?" Jane dared not hint that she would ask nothing better than providing the dance dress for little Sally herself.

"She is so proud, and then lately she has had reverses," said Shirley gently. "But if she doesn't go I simply won't. Nothing could induce me to," and she flashed through with her old time defiance.

"But this one dance is counted the real get-together of the whole year," argued Jane. "When a girl absents herself it usually sort of disqualifies her for all the other affairs. Besides, it is really a benefit and we do so need a new dormitory."

"If we could smuggle a box to her and pretend—Here she comes! I'll think it over and come for advice if I may," said Shirley quickly.

Jane stepped back to the dancers' whirling rim. She was almost deciding that the country girl was charming! But like the country girl herself, Jane detested "reformers" and was unwilling to admit that a change of heart is something wholesome and even commendable. She knew naught of the miracle.

More puzzled than ever at Shirley's proposal that they "smuggle a box to Sally," Jane became anxious lest Shirley might be getting funds from some unusual, if not unlawful, source. The malicious influence of Dol Vin was ever a disturbing factor to be reckoned with, and as yet Jane had no way of knowing that the confidential relation between the two freshmen and the beauty parlor proprietor had been broken off.

Later that day Jane confided in Judith.

"What would I do if I had no Judy to tell my troubles to," she said with a show of sincerity. "You may talk about new loves, but there is, and only will be, one darling Judy."

"Don't kiss me," protested Judy, although Jane was on the other side of the room and gave no hint of any such intention. "I can't bear being babied—makes me homesick." Then she laughed and blew a substitute over to Jane. "Have you seen my dance frock? I know Ted will adore it. Even the box is pretty and has violets on the cover," she sniffed. "I'll try it on tonight—not the box—and make believe you're Teddy."

"Judy, if some of the girls were to hear you rave that way they might take it seriously——"

"And they would be perfectly justified in so doing," mocked Judith.

"Please hear me. I want to talk seriously and started off with such a lovely preamble," interrupted Jane. "It's this way, Judy. Shirley shows the earmarks of wealth, I mean money. Now, where does she get it, and after that poor boy's letter?"

"If I only knew," pursued Judith, refusing to be serious. "How I'd love two hundred!"

"Well, we have got to find out where it comes from," fired back Jane, flushing with determination. "I am not going to be fooled by a change in manner and an improvement in style. If beauty shop money is beginning to flow in here it must be stopped."

"Bravo! We haven't had a real lively little scrap since the ghost fell, and I'd love it."

"You may joke, Judith, but——"

"Calling me by my baptismal name settles it," said Judith, with assumed finality. "I'll apologize, Jane Allen. What do you propose to do, and when are you going to do it? May I act as your honorable secretary?"

"Yes, come with me tonight and pay a visit at Lenox. I want to talk Sally into going to the dance. The girls are so fond of her and she happens to be one of our pets. I really don't know how it happens but it has, and it would look shabby if we were to leave her out. So she must come."

"Got to," agreed Judith. "She's so smart, every freshman is envious. Did you hear Miss Roberts, the real Noah Webster of Wellington, rave about her thesis?"

"Clever girls are so apt to cut dances," said Jane. "We must assume the missionary spirit——" her voice trailed solemnly.

This was too much for the turbulent Judith, as Jane intended it should be.

"I'll go, I'll go!" she cried out in protest. "Although I hate to think of Teddy having to choose between me and daffodilly Sally; still I'll go, Jane, to save you another spasm like that. Where's the Logic? Do you suppose Ethics will be easier? Or perhaps worse—likely worse," she was slamming book pages violently. "Now don't speak to me for one half hour. Then do your worst."

But while Judith was studying Jane slipped out of the room ostensibly for a breath of fresh air. All her chum's hilarity was appreciated, but just now things were assuming a serious turn and Jane felt some responsibility for the swing of the turntable.

"Judy's a dear, but she hasn't a daddy's scholarship to fight for," Jane told herself. "And the marked change in my rebellious Shirley may only be a preliminary to another outbreak. I've just got to see the girls before the lecture," and she flew from the inopportune mirth of Judith Stearns.

Shirley and Sarah were together in Shirley's room—not at the foot of the attic stairs now, but a tiny "nest" under the artistic eaves, chosen for effect on the purse, as well as on the eye.

"I can't do it," Shirley was arguing, as Jane came to the door. "I simply am through at mid-year."

Surprised at this statement, Jane knocked quickly to forestall further disclosure. Both girls answered, and Jane found them glad—even anxious to see her.

"You are both surely coming to the dance," she began, falling into Sally's prettiest cushions. "I came over just to make sure." "Oh, Miss Allen," wavered Sally. "I can't go——"

"Now, Sally," Jane began, "please don't consider it is at all ignoble to be financially embarrassed. In fact, more than half of our girls are continually 'rationed,' as they call a cut in allowance. And if it is only a matter of a pretty little flowered gown——"

"No, that isn't it," interrupted Sally.

"The fact is, Miss Allen, we are both getting ready to—escape," said Shirley, with a double-edged laugh.

"Escape?"

"Go home and desert!"

Jane showed her astonishment. "You couldn't mean anything like that!" she gasped. "Oh, you wouldn't be so disloyal!"

The girls looked at each other, puzzled, neither seeming to know what might be best to reply. Finally Shirley said:

"You must know, Miss Allen, I am totally unprepared for exams, and I see no reason why I should face them. I plan to stay home after the Christmas vacation."

"Shirley!" exclaimed Jane. "If you ever knew my dad you wouldn't treat him like that," her voice quavered with excitement. "He seems to think more of the record of his scholarship girl than of his own daughter's achievements. Oh, you can't mean you are going to cut!"

"Your daddy!" repeated Shirley. "I didn't suppose he cared a snap for his—beneficiary."

"Beneficiary indeed! He called you a very different name. He is a great, big western man, with a heart as fine as the hills and a soul as true as their granite." Jane did not pause to note the effect of her words, although Shirley was almost gasping. "He has what some might call a deep personal interest in the girl he sponsors at Wellington, but it's more than interest," she was almost breathless, "it's affection; my dad just naturally loves the girl he sends here, and if she fails him utterly—"

"Stop! Miss Allen, please do," Shirley entreated. Her face was flushed and her breathing plainly audible. "I had no idea it was like that. Your dad would care? And I would be a coward?"

Sally stood like one shocked into deadly silence. Not even her lips parted, and the color left her face sickly white.

"Don't you know, don't you understand what it means for a student to deliberately flunk? Not even to try?" demanded Jane.

"Bobbie!" said Sally to the big girl who was trying to find words. "We have got to try—you cannot—go."

Then Jane knew why the girls had been calling Shirley Bobbie. It was her companion's affectionate name for her.

"Yes, Kitten," Shirley said. "We have got to, but now, how can we do it?"

The situation was becoming more difficult each moment, and when presently Jane Allen left the two freshmen, she had taken on the weight of a new mystery.

Those girls were in a conspiracy to desert before exams. Why?

CHAPTER XXI

CRAMMING EVENTS

"Now, what can we do? However are we going to get out of this?" Sally asked Shirley. They seemed desperate.

"I don't know. How differently things have turned out from our expectations? I wouldn't mind anything but that darling dad of Jane's. The thought sickens me," and the bobbed head drooped dejectedly.

"But I am more at fault than you," sobbed Sally. "I feel like running away from everything."

"So do I, but we neither will do it. That's the trouble with reformation. I told you I should hate to be reformed—it tags on so many responsibilities. But we are both in for it. And the dance and Ted wanting to come!"

"Yes, isn't it just dreadful? What shall we do?"

"He has got to come, of course. Couldn't disappoint that boy. Oh, I'll tell you, Kitten! Let's write and tell him he must play cousin to both of us. We'll give him a name, say Teddy Barrett, and then all the girls will be crazy about him, and he will be sure to go in for a lark!"

"That might do," agreed Sally. "It would seem cruel to keep him away. But how about our mail? We can't have it come to Dol's box any more."

"Don't want to; won't have anything to do with her," snapped Shirley. "I have a box of our own, and don't see why we didn't think of it before. She is writing me all sorts of apologies, of course, just wants more money, but I know now we might have done this whole thing differently if it had not been for her interference. It was she who scared us so of Jane Allen and her friends. And they would have been such a help if I had not been—so mulish."

"Never mind," Sally tried to console her. "We could not possibly foresee—although I should like to foresee how to get out of it all without scandalizing Jane."

"Trust one step to lead to the next," said Shirley, and that sounded like a proverb of Jane's. (Queer how much Jane and Shirley were alike fundamentally.) "Write to Ted and we'll have one 'whale' of a time at the dance."

"But I haven't decided to go?"

"Oh, yes, you have, Kitten. Wait until you see the old fairy godmother unload her pumpkin. Or did she carry the dress on a broomstick? I forget the details. At any rate, while I'm thinking of a way to appease the wrath of Jane's father by not dishonoring his scholarship, it is the very least you can do to get ready for the dance. I know where you can hire a love of a dress—lots of girls do it—" as Sally drew up a little, "and it only costs five dollars. Let me give you that for Christmas. Write your letter, or shall I do it? Bamboozle Ted until he won't even guess our real meaning, but insist we are his cousins, with first names only."

"But he would have to introduce us to his boy friends?" objected Sally.

"Well, that's all right. He can do that and we'll just tell him we are playing a joke. College boys adore jokes, don't they?"

"Pretty much of a muddle, but I'll try it," assented Sally finally.

"And I suppose I could spare that five dollars."

"I can at any rate. And did you see Miss Allen stare when you called me Bobbie?"

"Yes, but many of the girls have taken that up. It goes so well with your bobbed hair. Don't mind do you?"

"Not a bit. Call me Pickles if you like—that would go well with my disposition." Shirley was hurriedly gathering up books and papers from the little table both girls used as a desk in Sally's room under the eaves. "Do you realize we have spent one hour talking? It's all very well for you, Kitten; you can have a recitation prepared or write a theme as easily as I can

fail. If I had your talent I would never leave this college without an A.B.," she declared emphatically.

"I wonder, Bobbie, did we make a gigantic mistake. If we had not been so influenced by Dol Vin's idea, perhaps we might have managed some way without all that hateful pretense. I can't help blaming myself dreadfully. And to think Miss Allen is so kind without being patronizing—"

"Look here, Kit," demanded Shirley. "I know YOU could have come here without that plan, but what could have put ME through? Nothing but the scholarship. So please don't be getting morbid. We may have been foolish, but we did what seemed right, and Dol Vin was a mighty convincing friend, I'll admit. The question now is the dance, then Ted, and then—I don't know, maybe I'll escape in the night," and the old time rebel spirit danced in the sharp, dark eyes.

Sally piled up her notes and followed Shirley out to recitation. It was not easy now to finish the task which at first seemed almost alluring. It was like trying to uproot some gentle affection to plan to actually leave Wellington.

The girls' secret was spreading poisonous tendrils over every other act and thought; nothing now seemed untouched by that malicious deception, and the very crisis now imminent—was ugly! And this was what both had planned and worked for—to leave Wellington at midyear?

They had not reckoned on the power of girls' love for girls, and of education's influence on sentiment.

Sally Howland had been steeling herself against "growing fond of things" and that very repression made her its victim; Shirley Duncan defied these conditions and was punished with a "true case" of the epidemic called Environment. So that both now seemed all but helpless at the crisis.

A day or two before the dance, when arrangements were running as smoothly as the little lake that dripped through the big grounds of Wellington, a general hike was planned. Each department, freshmen, sophs, juniors and seniors, arranging to go out tramping over the wonderful hills of upper New York state, touching quarries, testing rocks, hunting nuts and cramming into the one pre-holiday jaunt such various needs of outdoor work as were found in the studies then being under test in all grades and classes.

Thus far it was an open winter; no snow, flurries failing miserably to do more than make the air look pretty for a few minutes, and even brooks had kept up their rippling music, chattering away over rock and rill, blissfully unconscious that Winter's deathly breath must soon paralyze every little vein and artery into a rigid, frozen crystal surface.

The December hike was a fixture at Wellington, and as many of the faculty as could do so went with the classes, to urge, to inspire, to prompt and to supervise; not to omit the more enjoyable function of chumming with the students. Troopers they all were, dressed in imitation of the Girl Scouts as far as khaki went around, the others sporting golf togs and carrying water bottles or even "grub" in the convenient golf bags slung over sturdy young shoulders.

No need to dwell on the glories of that day, for a hike on paper carries little sport and usually less material of vital interest. A hike must be "hiked" to be real, the "grub" must be munched by the side of a stream, and the wild things venturing out for crumbs must be "seen to be appreciated," as the "ad" says; so that it would seem unreal to attempt to put into words the glories of a day in the woods with the Wellingtons.

What if Ted Guthrie, the fat, funny, facetious Ted, did slide down a hill and take most of the hill with her? or if Nettie Brocton climbing a tree for dogwood berries attempted to fly by the merest accident? She had no choice but to drop into an ugly hole otherwise, so she spread out and gave a flying leap to the side of safety and made it. No one tried to keep track of "Bobbie," as the country girl was now popularly known, for she ran, climbed, crawled and burrowed, until Jane and Judith had cause to step lively indeed to keep up with her. Jane, accustomed to the great fastnesses of the Northwest around her Montana home, fairly glowed with the spirit of contest, and being Jane it must ultimately be set down that Bobbie lost a point or two in the final scoring.

What a day and what scratches, bruises and blisters recorded it!

"No bones broken!" was the guide's slogan, and they were well satisfied to have the precept fulfilled without undue court plaster.

Coming home the gay groups fell into their usual lines, and separated into such little parties as suited best the confidences of their members.

Ted Guthrie chose to take a ride in the big car of Temple Gaitley, the sponsor of Wellington who lived at its gates and shared her prosperity with any student worthy of the name. Ted would rather ride than walk, after her sliding tournament, and along with her there piled into the car as many foot-sore hikers as the big open car could possibly hold, stretching the word at that.

It was almost evening, the day turned so quickly, when Jane, Judith, Dozia and the two freshmen, Sally and Shirley, cut across the golf links to touch town for some drug store supplies, before going into the college grounds.

The little village always seemed kindly at this hour, for folks going home from work formed its chief feature of public interest, and the tan bark streets were now being fairly well utilized.

"I'll get some stamps," said Shirley, "while you girls hunt for your soaps. Let's round this corner—" She stopped short, for as they cut suddenly from the side street into the main avenue they almost stumbled into a crowd!

"What's up?" asked Shirley tritely.

"An arrest," answered a man pushing his bicycle. "And I guess old Sandy ain't made no mistake this time. He's caught the banshee!"

"Yes, sir," snapped an overgrown boy. "That's what she is. Keepin' folks awake howlin'!"

Sally clutched Shirley's arm. "See, it's Dol's friend, the actress!"

"Sure enough, the foreign element with a name like crocheting," said Shirley. "I always knew she would come to grief with that howling. Girls!" to Jane and the others. "Could we go to the Town Hall and find out what happens? That's the ghost of Lenox Hall, the woman who screamed at midnight."

Too astonished to offer comment the girls drifted along with the crowd, and a break in the ranks afforded just a glimpse of Officer Sandy with a very tall, fancifully dressed, but very much disheveled prisoner. She walked along with the officer as if he might have been a creature of a lower order of creation, but as the boys said, "Sandy did have her goin'."

And she was the "foreign element," the obnoxious visitor at the beauty shop, who was so sorely and fatally stage struck that she had seriously disturbed the peace of decorous little Bingham!

"She would yell right out in the night, like a hoot owl only fiercer!" insisted one of her followers. "And she ain't safe to be loose with a habit like that."

"Defyin' the law and disturbin' the peace," growled Sandy. "I've had a warrant for that noise ever since it scared old Mrs. Miner into fits and she was took to the horspittal on account of it."

"City folks is all right in their place," squeaked a thin little woman, one of the very few women in that crowd, "but if that kind is allowed to run wild over our quiet home towns, I say what is Bingham comin' to?" Queer noises without words gave answer.

The Wellingtons, with other followers, were now almost in front of the Town Hall, when the victim of this country prejudice espied Shirley.

"There is someone who knows me!" she cried out. "Ask that young lady and she'll tell you I'm a legitimate actress, and that I came out here to have room to practice!"

Shirley "ducked," as Judith put it, but Sally, more sympathetic, offered to interfere.

"Don't," begged Jane. "We were at this court only a short time ago. We don't want to wear out our welcome. Come along, girls; I, as junior, am responsible for getting you back on time. Come along."

"Yes," said Shirley bitterly. "Do come along, girls. That's about the way this lady left me when my horse threw me off on the hill. She was not anxious about me then and I guess she isn't as much in danger now as I was at that time," and when Officer Sandy piloted his charge in before the recorder, the doors were closed and the hearing was made private.

CHAPTER XXII

STARTLING DISCLOSURES

Once more Shirley had the center of the stage—a position she loved when it entailed the telling of a thrilling story. And at last the ghost story "was ripe," as Jane expressed it.

"Tell us," she demanded, without regard for the race to college during the telling, "who is that woman and what do you mean by calling her the ghost."

"She's an actress," declared Shirley, "that is, she thinks she is, and she has lots of money and a poor head for managing it. In fact, I have always thought her erratic. You see," went on Shirley, supporting herself by "linking" into the accommodating arms extended, "Dol Vin fetched her out here from the city so that she could practice her howling. She was cast for a part with a wild scream in it, and every time she attempted to practice someone interfered, the police usually."

"No wonder," interrupted Jane. "Why couldn't she stick to the theater for rehearsing?"

"Her own idea," went on Shirley, importance of the occasion echoing in her tone. "She wanted to get it down pat and startle her manager into starring her. It seems a great deal depended on that frightful scream and she kept at it every chance she got." Here the girls threatened to outdo the "lady of the scream," but rough walking checked the attempts. They also realized her fate.

"But how did she get the chance to go up in Lenox attic?" asked Dozia when her voice could be heard. "As I suppose it was she who ripped out that terrifying yell—"

"That I rang the fire bell to cover," put in Sally gleefully.

"And that the fire department wanted to turn the hose on," chimed in Judith.

"Now let me tell it," demanded Shirley.

"Please do," insisted Jane.

"Well, she had more than a scream to put in her important part, so she said! She had also to do some wild acting and Dol Vin is responsible for the idea of Madam Zwachevsky—"

"Oh, spare us," cried Jane. "That sounds like an epidemic."

"It's the name she wastes ink on, but I will spare you girls. Hereafter she shall be Madam Z," agreed Shirley.

"Oh, hurry! Shirley," entreated Dozia. "Here we are at the Cedars, and we never could wait for the rest of that story until after supper."

"I'll rush it through, but Sally, do stop pinching me," she teased, just to make Sally run on ahead in contradiction. "Well, Dol Vin didn't want that racket around her shop, so I suppose she told Madam Z to try it on Lenox," continued the raconteur. "They both insisted it would be a wonderful hazing stunt, and that no college freshman's life was complete without a lively ghost scare. I didn't think it would be more than a lot of fun, so I promised not to tell," admitted Shirley.

They were at the very gate now where the girls had no choice but to separate in preparation for the evening meal, but it was wonderful how quickly the food was disposed of and how soon they were back again in Jane's room for the conclusion of the ghost story.

Jane and Judith could not but notice satisfaction glowing in the freshmen's manner when they were invited into the junior's room. This had been one of Shirley's ambitions, and she did not hide her pleasure at its fulfillment. And if she and Sally felt any qualms of conscience for their own small part in the tragedy of Madam Zeit was entirely covered by the eagerness with which the girls hailed the recital.

"We both insisted at first that she should not dare come on the campus—" began Sally.

"Now, Kitten, I'll take all the blame," interrupted Bobbie. "Land knows, you made fuss enough. Cried—"

"Oh please—"

"Well, you did," insisted Bobbie, "even went into hysterics. But I thought it would be a lark, although really I had no idea the creature would ever find her way up there. I don't see how she did. We had no part in her getting in," she explained eagerly.

"Dol Vin knew all about the attic," declared Janet Clarke. "She was always prowling about there for theatrical stuff; don't you remember, Jane, how she frightened the girls one night with some foolish prank when she was dressed like a bear or something worse?"

"Oh, yes, of course I do," recalled Jane. "And she did continually hunt around Lenox, although she belonged with the sophs."

"That accounts for it then," finished Bobbie. "I am willing to confess that I conspired to hide the crime, but I took no part in planning it. Little Kitten almost died of fright during the whole thing, but I thought it a lot of fun to hear the chains rattle, and I hunted up stories to match. But I was not in Lenox the night of the grand finale when she actually tried out the big scream."

"Well, no wonder the poor babes were scared blue," said Judith. "And Jane, you can now tell all about your discovery of the old dumb-waiter under the tower. That will make the story complete."

"Don't let any more girls in here," ordered Dozia, for knocking at the door gave warning of an influx. "There is no need to give everyone this private hearing. We might want to make a real story of it for the 'Blare'—our holiday edition just needs a live feature like this." So the taps were "deflected" and Jane recounted her story. She told it so graphically that by the time she reached the "big, black hole, and the groaning ropes of the old dummy" the girls were howling and tumbling around in a pretty good imitation of Madam Z herself. They shuddered, acted the spook, and Judith proclaimed something like the old "Curfew shall not" in her swing out the window that she imagined went with the wild night's terrors. This detail of Judith's upset things some, for she fell off the couch (her pedestal for the tragic act), and although she rebounded quickly there were squeals and protests from "toes and fingers."

Sally's eyes were like two twinkling blue stars during all this. Jane and Judith, more than any of the others, guessed correctly what a relief this hour of fun had brought to her tortured mind. And to think there was no blame, not even criticism! What is there more delightfully elastic than the mind and the heart of the young college girl?

"And I'll tell you how this same lady induced me to put on those foolish togs and hire the friskiest horse at Clayton's," further volunteered Shirley. She evidently thought if that much had been good a lot more would be a lot better. So she allowed herself to rock a little in Jane's cozy chair while she told of a bet—yes, she had actually fallen so low—she did bet five dollars that she could ride any horse in that stable. Again the girls applauded—there was danger now in their generous approval.

"And so I could have done it safely if old Zeezie had kept to the roads. But she wanted to show off on the hill in front of Warburton Hall," flared Shirley, "and you all know how I made out at that." Howls, groans and wails answered this.

"And what happened to the five?" asked practical Dozia.

"She never had the courage to collect," replied Shirley, and Jane then felt the obligation of quickly shifting the subject, for just a hint of gloom crossed the country girl's face at this point.

"But what about this last episode?" asked Jane. "How do you suppose Zeezie came into Sour Sandy's clutches?"

"I know how that happened," spoke up Sally, doing her part to relieve Shirley of the embarrassment that seized her at mention of her accident. "This so-called actress is really not right mentally. I know it, but, as Bobbie says, she has lots of money, so of course- -"

"Dol Vin snapped her up," said Judith.

"Yes, and you know the Rumson place? That old stone mansion right in the heart of the country folks settlement?" (They all knew the Rumson.) "Well, I believe she has been going out there every afternoon to rehearse. She would drive out in a hired car and dismiss the man. Then she raved around and did so much loud talking to herself, and even screaming, that the whole neighborhood was up in arms. I heard the other day the folks around Rumson had called on the police to stop the nuisance."

"No wonder they would," agreed Jane. "The children must have been frightened out of their senses."

"They were," went on Sally. "So I suppose old Sandy just set his trap for her—"

"And snapped it tonight," concluded Jane. "Well, I must say she was a character. And to think we all missed the open air performance!"

"And to think you and I let her escape from Lenox, Jane, the night of the alarm."

"What a shame we didn't know she was making her exit by way of the dummy?"

"But in that awful dark place," put in Janet with an appropriate shudder.

"Oh, she was just armed to the eyes with flash lights," Shirley told them. "I never saw such an outfit as that tragedy queen sported."

"Oh, woe is us!" cried out Judith, so loudly that a pair of hands, one from Jane, the other from Janet, was clapped over the unruly mouth. When she promised to speak lower she was allowed to proceed. "But think of missing the court room scene! I am sure she went through a Lady Macbeth act and tried to stab poor old Sour Sandy!" Again the spontaneity of Dozia illustrated the talk, and she made a jab at Jane with the latter's riding crop.

"And then think of the fun of actually hearing her give the famous screech as exhibit A?" put in Jane. "What a pity they made the hearing private?"

"I'll explain that," condescended Janet, who, having no story to tell, needed some outlet. "You see, they arrest people here in Bingham just to keep things going, and have the officers do something besides draw their pay envelopes, so Sandy took in Zeezie as his quota of service for December."

"And I suppose I filled that requirement for November," recalled Judith, with a disdainful pucker.

"Take care YOU are not listed next, Dozia," warned Janet. "You do talk very loud at times. Woke me up last night."

Shirley arose and glanced at the little gilt clock.

"I guess we little 'uns will have to cut this lovely party," she said politely. "We really have a lot of things to do tonight. And who hasn't for the dance?"

"We will walk over with you," volunteered Jane. "Judy and I always take a stroll before we start cramming."

"Which is just about equivalent to saying we may vamoose," said Dozia. "All right, stroll along, the ghost is safe tonight, at any rate."

"And if she gets off with a fine I suppose she will be on a train for New York before morning," concluded Sally, with a satisfied quirk of her yellow head.

Outside the hall Shirley and Sally almost smothered Jane with protestations.

"I thought I would die!" cried Shirley, "but the steely fire of your eyes, Miss Allen, kept urging me on. And now I have at least told all that hateful story!"

"I could hardly sit still," gasped Sally, holding tightly to Jane's friendly arm. "It was like a play, but I was so ashamed—"

"Ashamed! I was never more proud of two girls in all my life," declared resourceful Jane, with unmistakable sincerity. "Why, you both had the girls fascinated—"

"You had them hypnotized," insisted Sally. "It is really wonderful to be popular among such a set of girls," and her voice just touched a tone of regret.

"Indeed, we all have to share honors with you two entertainers," said Jane positively. "You see, the girls first of all want a good time, and if you help provide that legitimately, of course, you can count on polling a heavy vote in any popularity contest."

"Jane Allen is no monopolist," said Judith significantly. It was obvious Jane was determined to share honors with the two bewildered freshmen. That was her way of making things pleasant.

"Now run along and get your togs ready for the dance," said Jane, "and be sure to give me a lot of dances with Teddy!"

"Teddie!" sang out the two freshmen.

"Why yes, your nice brother, Ted," said Judith innocently. "We heard he was coming—"

"And we found a piece of paper long ago," added Jane gently, "that bore the name Ted. It was in the attic, and we dug it out of the ghost's breastplate."

"You didn't!" exclaimed Shirley, in a tone that meant "You don't say so!" She stopped short in her tracks. "And that was the letter we never got, Kitten. Zeezie had been entrusted to deliver it and she claimed she lost it." Shirley could hardly speak distinctly—emotion seemed to choke her.

"Oh, can we have it?" asked Sally, her trembling lips telling on the jerky sentence.

"Right here," replied Jane indifferently, taking a small white slip from her blouse. "I have wanted so much to give it to you, but there never seemed to be a real opportunity."

It was Sally who put out her hand.

"I think it is for Shirley," interposed Jane.

"Give it to Kitten," said Shirley. "We have no secrets from each other now."

"But Ted and the dance?" asked Judith, not to be put off on that score.

"Oh," faltered Sally. "Of course we will hand Ted around." She had not quite recovered from her surprise at the finding of the long lost letter. "And, Miss Allen, please, whatever happens, don't let anything spoil tonight—"

"I won't, certainly not," replied Jane, as the freshmen broke away towards Lenox.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE DANCE

The night of the dance had come, than which Wellington could produce no more momentous occasion. For days the students had been decorating Old Warburton Hall, stripping their own rooms to the point of desolation to pile their banners, their flags, and even their mandolins around the big hall, in artistic and effective settings from ceiling to the smallest nook around the chimney corner windows. Judith and Jane were responsible for the "Bosky Dell" created around the Inglenook. Here the mandolins were cluttered, and about the walls were such artistic woodiness as branches of bright red berries, then sprays of dark gray bayberry, glowing sumac, deep brown oak leaves, and this applied foliage provided the "Bosky" for the juniors' pretty dell.

All college departments shared the honors of decorating, each depending upon its originality to outshine the others, so that now when all was finished and the students drew apart to decorate themselves the atmosphere fairly vibrated with expectancy.

Under the eaves in Sally's room she and Bobbie were putting on finishing touches. Too full of youth to give place to regret, these two freshmen were keyed to the full pitch of the big, jolly, gleeful occasion.

"Can you imagine us going, and bound for such a good time?" said Sally, while Bobbie fluffed the maline butterfly from her companion's shoulders.

"Like a jolly time at a funeral," replied the other, her tone of voice softening the comparison.

"Dear me, must we really leave?" sighed Sally. "I have been hoping for a miracle."

"So have I, Kitten, but we have had a couple of miracles lately and it wouldn't be fair to overwork the fairies. There, you look just like a golden butterfly. Oh, really, Kit, you—are—a dream!"

Bobbie was responsible for the color scheme adopted by her chum, and its success was just now rather inadequately reflected in the conventional mirror that formed a door to the narrow wardrobe. Sally was gowned in gold and white, and the gold of her hair completed the "dream." A big yellow butterfly she was indeed, with the sleazy, clinging, white draperies wound around her slender form, then the wings of golden maline pinioned on either softly rounded shoulder. Sally was a perfect little beauty, and also possessed that whimsical manner so attractive in this delicate, fragile type.

"How do I look, anyhow?" asked Bobbie, and the "anyhow" betrayed her hopelessness.

"Don't you really know you are stunning?" replied Sally. "Bobbie, your height and figure are in such splendid accord with that American Beauty! Whew, girl! I can see who shall charm the partners tonight."

"Do I honestly look—well?" persisted the other. "I wish my hair were long enough to turn up."

"I don't. It is so becoming in that halo just as round as a crown, and more curly every minute. If all misfortunes really have their compensations, then, Bobbie, put down the curls opposite your accident."

The big girl peered closer to the mirror. She never could be vain but just now she might be pardoned a flicker of satisfaction. She did look well, the American Beauty satin made such a startling background for her peculiarly true American type.

"Now, if we are all primped and preened, suppose we rehearse," said Bobbie, powdering the last finger of her left hand to a finish. "You are sure Ted has his lesson all clear and that our—masquerade will not be spoiled?"

"He was just wild about the lark, and wrote a whole page of effusions such as boys always indulge in," replied Sally. "He says he may stick to Barrett for a name, it has such a twangy sound, whatever that may mean; and he also promised to be led by us even to the extent of breaking his own gay heart."

"Nice boy. I hope our little skit won't spoil his fun. It is just for that, you know, little chum, I have agreed to postpone my flight. But be sure of one thing—I shall fly before I ever face that wonderful crowd of girls we were with last night, after the discovery."

"Does it all seem so hideous still?" asked Sally. "I have felt as if some of the black horror were wearing off."

"Mine is turning green—a dark, dark moldy green of envy. Why didn't I know four months ago just a few of the precious things I see so vividly now?" Bobbie sat down at the risk of spoiling some of her preening. Also she ruffed her long (now well cared for) fingers through her short hair with distracting indifference, but not a ringlet showed any ill effects, each fell back on her broad, low forehead in its original place, without a kink of disorder in the line.

"I have learned more than the Wellington course offered," said Sally, "and one thing I am now sure of. Our small towns may offer advantages in freedom and security, but they restrict us in a choice of friends and companions. How could we possibly have guessed that the very girl and her group we expected to antagonize should be our deliverers?"

"I don't quite get your flow of words, Kitten, but I do agree with their meaning. Yes, small towns can turn out gigantic specimens of conceited ego. And that conceit is like a paraffine coating; air tight against personal progress, absorbent for the poisons of jealousy and envy. There, that sounds as if I have learned a little English, doesn't it? But it isn't enough to face Miss Robert's exams."

"It's after eight. There are the girls slamming doors in the first jazz number," said Sally. "Come along, Bobbie, and smile your warmest. Then we shall defy fate for a few more happy hours at least."

Swallowed up immediately in the swirl of young students heading for the dance "Kitten and Bobbie" were presently on the high road to defying fate as per schedule. The music from the dance room was just feeling its way out of brilliantly lighted windows, and the grand old campus seemed very proud of itself indeed, as it stretched out and made a background for the entire picture.

Flocks of automobiles were nestling along the drives, and many a Wellington heart skipped its regular beat at the preliminary thought:

"I wonder if he came yet?"

From companion colleges the boys were making their way into old Wellington, and the students of Yorktown were apt to be especially plentiful. It was from this big college that Ted Barrett—alias Ted- -somebody's brother, was expected.

In contrast to the usual line for receiving, such as so often makes a farce of the formal social event, the seniors and juniors had formed themselves into a ring that surrounded the entrance, and through this ring each guest was forced to pass in at one end and out at the other in initiation to Wellington. Jane was chosen to form one "clasp" of the circlet, with two tall seniors at her side. She gave the welcoming pass-word for the juniors, and in her hand clasp delivered the secret sign.

As the girls from Lenox entered, the eyes of our two special friends immediately sought out Jane. Not even the possible presence of Teddy offered a distraction, for it seemed now as if their fate rested more fully than ever in the hands of the girl whose father had given them the much abused scholarship.

"How sweet!" breathed Sally. "Like a pansy."

"Exactly," answered Shirley. "Did you ever see anything prettier?"

Jane's appearance supported this flattery in every detail. She wore a flowered frock, georgette with pansies sprinkled over it, and in her coppery hair a small bunch of the same velvet flowers was clustered. Among all the others this flowered gown seemed distinctive, although Dozia in her ruffles (to cut her height), and Judith in her sea foam green (to give her color), were indeed highly attractive.

The indescribable jazz music was see-sawing in and out of harmony, and if there were anything actually shy on the score it was more than plentifully supplied by the "ukes," mandolins and banjos of the visiting college boys.

Sally and Shirley had scarcely crossed the circle and were melting into the crowd, when someone tapped Sally on the shoulder.

"Teddy!" exclaimed both girls at once.

"The same, your obedient coz," replied the good looking young fellow, eager to show at once how well he had learned his lesson.

"Come over here," breathed Sally. "I am just dying to speak to you."

"No fair," cautioned Shirley. "Don't forget your lines, Kit."

"Say, girls, tell me," implored the youth, letting his critical eye scale the crowd of pretty girls, "what's this your name is? You're—" to Sally.

"I'm Sally," she replied, twinkling prettily, "and this is Shirley," indicating Bobbie.

"Shirley?" he echoed incredulously.

"Yes, and please don't ask any more questions just now, Cousin Ted. I have promised to introduce you to half of Wellington." This was said so that more than one girl standing near overheard; one was Nettie Brocton and she quickly took the cue.

"Just look at that?" she said to Ted Guthrie. "Sally acts as if the Teddy were her especial cousin."

"Yes, and Shirley is all but blushing."

"Queer," commented Ted Guthrie.

Presently the music suggested a One Step and without waiting for further coaxing Shirley and the handsome Ted floated out among the assembling dancers.

He was handsome, and, although that fact seems trite just here, it may better be known and reckoned with. He was tall, light, nimble and flexible as a young birch, as he swayed in and out leading the excited Bobbie.

"Guess I'll have to call you Bobbie, too," he said in his partner's ear, after more than one girl had pointedly called out, "Hello, Bobbie!"

"Yes, do, please," replied Bobbie. "I am getting so accustomed to it I rather feel it is really mine."

"Suits you splendidly," said Ted, with a boy's idea of compliments being put on thick at dances. "And I am sure I would give the game away if I ever tried on the Shirley."

Bobbie acquiesced just in time to feel Judith Stearns' black eyes demanding to know Teddy. The dancers stopped, and after an introduction Bobbie was swept off her feet by a new partner, while Judith glided off with Teddy.

"Where is Sally?" asked Judith, not seeing the little butterfly on the floor.

"Sally?" repeated the bewildered Ted. Then he recovered himself.

"Oh, yes, Cousin Sally. She's just over there," pointing to Jane's

"Bosky Dell" in a far corner.

"Your cousin?" repeated the shrewd Judith.

"Yes, little coz, I allus calls her," he lisped, to cover any possible attempt at piercing his disguise.

"But she said she was not related to Bobbie?" persisted the irrepressible Judith.

"She isn't," frankly offered Ted. "She is only related to me. Oh, I say, Miss Stearns," he broke off. "Who's the golden girl over by the punch bowl?"

"I knew it," trilled Judith. "No one could possibly miss her. She's Jane Allen."

"Jane Allen!" he almost interrupted. "She whose pater is a benefactor of Wellington?"

"Yes, the only Jane," answered Judith glibly. "Come over and meet her. I know you will like her even better on acquaintance. I don't mind being generous, for Jane and I started together here, and from present appearances we seem liable to end it together."

While she spoke they had ceased dancing, and Judith fancied she just caught a look of question on the young man's face. This coupled with his inquiry about Jane's father, Judith at once assigned to his knowledge of the scholarship Bobbie had obtained. But even that was not just a correct guess, and it seemed the actual presence of this good looking boy from Yorktown threatened to add new complications to those already surrounding the mysterious freshmen.

Both reached Jane's side as Judith and her partner came up. Judith presented the much talked of "lovely Ted" and perhaps a part of Jane's ebullition was attributable to the code shot out from Judith's flashing eyes. It said plainly:

"Now isn't he lovely? I told you so!"

While Jane remembered her own wish:

"I hope he's big, clumsy, ugly, etc.," and of course he wasn't.

He claimed the dance and presently swept the Golden Girl from her place in the little circle.

"Your cousin?" questioned Judith with a very comprehensive smile. "Bobbie, I never saw a girl blush as you did when a coz whispered into her dancing ear."

Wise, discerning Judith!

Bobbie blushed again, but she was not going to be tricked into telling her secret. Her eyes flickered until they rested on Nettie Brocton.

"I must ask Net for a dance," she said. "I suppose it is perfectly proper for a mere freshie to do so?"

"Absolutely," replied Judith, "but you are not slighting me?"

"Not for worlds, Judy. May I have the next?"

"What's your hurry just now Bobbie? Trying to duck me?"

But a sly glance of challenge gave Judith answer, as Bobbie hurried away to dance with Nettie Brocton.

CHAPTER XXIV

KING PIN OF THE FRESHIES

Music and laughter, youth and happiness!

What a splendid affair the dance turned out to be! Even the staid faculty, acting as patronesses, looked on with generous smiles of absolute approval.

As if to add to the gentle flame of curiosity in Jane's circles, she accepted a number of dances from Teddy—in fact the big fanciful "T" which Jane remembered so well in the spook letter, was scribbled all over her dancing card, while Judith accepted Ray Mann, a chum of Ted's, in complacent substitution. Ray was a capital fellow, with such a stock of chestnut hair he might have matched up pretty well with Bobbie, if her spare time had not been so filled in with Dave Jordan, also a "Yorktown man."

Wellington had a reputation for this one big social event, the invitations for which were always censored by a committee of the officials, each boy accepted being socially vouched for by the patronesses. This was as near as the old college would go to co-ed functions, and perhaps the fact that these young girls were always left to themselves for good times (except at the big dance) gave added zest and novelty to the pre-holiday event.

All went merrily indeed, except that Jane was almost lost in bewilderment before she and Teddie had finished out two dances (halves) and one "sitting out" in the Bosky Dell.

Who was this boy's relation? she wanted to know. And why did Sally so promptly surrender him to all other partners? Sally danced so gracefully, and they seemed to step together as dancers do who have learned at the same functions, yet she did surrender him willingly.

Jane dragged Judith out of the din, and after fortifying herself and her chum with two drinks of fruit punch, she dragged her further into semi-seclusion in the cloak room.

"What do you make of it?" asked Judith fairly twittering with suppressed excitement.

"That is what I wanted to ask you," replied Jane, swirling her scarf over her shoulders to tame down a frolicsome little breeze that danced to the jazz music stealing in the cloak room.

"There is a positive mystery about all this. Can't you see how much Ted Barrett looks like Sally Howland?"

"Of course I can," replied Judith. "But surely that letter said 'sister' and was written to Shirley."

"And he is not in any way like Bobbie."

"No, and Bobbie is as shy as a baby when speaking with him." Jane bit her lip in serious reflection.

"But isn't he very nice?"

"Lovely manners and a very takable boy," admitted Jane. "And say, Judy, I love this mystery, but we can't let the freshies beat us at it. Be sure you keep your eyes and ears open and report anything— suspicious."

"Glad to," Judith accepted the commission. "But don't you like my Ray?"

"Couldn't help it," said Jane affably. "Of the two boys I like Ray's hair best. It's so—smoky."

"And Jane! Have you seen who Dozia is lugging around? That awfully big boy, the football giant of Yorktown."

"Makes Doze look small by comparison, and that's an achievement," said Jane. "There's my dance with Nettie Brocton. It would be dreadful if we forgot to take care of our own little playmates. Isn't everything going lovely?"

"Nothing could be improved upon unless it be Miss Robert's hair. That's a bit lopsided."

"But her feather fan is a gem," said Jane, moving toward the dance floor.

"So is her back comb," laughed Judith, as the chums drifted apart among the dancers.

A waltz encore was just then being demanded. The dancers stood about clapping and insisting upon a repetition of the number. Jane and Judith waited a moment before their partners espied them, and as they lingered they heard the girls commenting on Sally. She was, indeed, a charming figure as she stood out there with her partner, who happened to be Ted; and it was Inez Wilson who most particularly noticed the two dancers in the center of the floor. She seized Jane's hand and whispered:

"Oh, Jane, just see how much Sally looks like her partner!"

"Yes," put in Janet Clarke, "they even have the same pose."

"Cousins," said Jane simply, as she and Nettie swung out into the repeated waltz.

The resemblance was very remarkable and standing with the tall boy in his "Tux" the girl in her butterfly gown made quite a charming little picture. Their isolation at the moment, standing well out on the floor almost alone at the end of the "first half," gave them somewhat undue prominence, but it also gave everyone a splendid opportunity of seeing Ted and of admiring Sally's evening frock.

When the number ended a group of freshmen cornered themselves in a window arch and promptly set about whispering some plans. Nellie Saunders was leading, and she declared

Sally was the one to make the presentation. Presently a committee of seniors joined them, and the purpose of the secret session became evident.

Miss Rutledge, dean of Wellington and beloved mother of the entire flock, was to be presented with a glorious bouquet of golden chrysanthemums and Sally Howland, the pet freshman, had been voted by her class the one to do the public honors.

"Where is she?" asked Anne Morley, the senior, waiting to complete the details.

"Just finished dancing," volunteered Nellie. "I'll go get her."

"When the orchestra plays 'Wellington,' that's your cue," said Miss Morley. "The senior class president will make her speech and you freshmen then send up the flowers. Be sure you do it promptly, as the speech has the flowers planted in it," finished the tall, capable senior, leaving the younger girls to carry out her orders.

Nellie was back with Sally immediately.

"Here she is, and doesn't her gown go wonderfully with the golden ball chrysanthemums?" panted Nellie.

"Just like a picture," exclaimed Dolly Lloyd. "Be sure you carry them like a bride's-maid, Sally. Maybe a long time before you get another chance."

"But what is this all about?" gasped Sally, a little bit frightened at the importance of the great sheaf of yellow blooms propped up in the corner.

"You are to present the flowers to Deanie," said Nellie. "You see, the girls always give her something at this dance, and they choose the freshies just to act in the capacity of page. You don't have to say a word," as Sally showed reticence. "A senior makes a speech and you just walk up prettily with this corn shock."

"Oh, girls, I couldn't," exclaimed Sally tragically.

"You couldn't! Why not?" came a chorus.

"Because—oh, I can't just explain, but won't you please excuse me?"

"No, indeed we will not," declared Nellie. "Just another touch of that timidity we fought out when you first came. This is an honor, Sally, and we know whom to choose for it. We know how you stand in the half year's record," and she proceeded to straighten out the maline butterfly on Sally's shoulders—no one could seem to resist that temptation.

"I do appreciate the honor," faltered Sally, "but there is a reason—-a serious reason why I feel I should decline."

"Wait a minute! I'll persuade her," said Dolly, and in the time specified she was back in the corner again and had Jane with her.

"She simply has got to deliver those flowers," explained Nellie. "She matches as if she were dressed for the part. See her yellow head, her yellow and white gown, the dear little golden slippers; then the great huge, gigantic bunch of chrysis—we all chipped in for those—"

"Miss Allen, please let me off," begged Sally, turning two blue eyes, overflowing with meaning, full on Jane.

"I cannot go back on a sorority order," said Jane, wondering why she should. "There's your cue, and Sally, here are the flowers. Bun along, little girl. There's a dear."

Sally was "running along" in the freshmen's glide, almost hidden behind the shock of golden balls, before she could further protest.

"Wellington, dear Wellington!" finished the chorus; and then the senior who was on the little platform by the orchestra, called the dean forward and in "a few well chosen words" told Miss Rutledge how much every girl in college loved her.

Dear, gentle, beloved Miss Rutledge! Her cameo beauty was not lost even in that group of glowing students. She wore her stately heliotrope brocade, and her perfectly white wavy hair just framed a face soft as damask, with enough natural warmth of color to defy any record of years.

Sally glided along with the bouquet, while the dean spoke softly, gently, in that strangely far-reaching voice peculiar to those who train for such concentration. Directly Sally placed the flowers in her extended hands applause broke loose.

What music can compete with the simple inspiration of hand clapping?
And these students knew that score in jazz perfectly.

Finally, Sally turned back again in the little aisle made for her through the assemblage, and before she had proceeded more than a few paces Bobbie rescued her.

"Kitten!" she whispered, putting her strong arms about the now trembling Sally. "How perfectly lovely! Here's Ted. He is too excited to speak. I have just been trying to restore him."

"King Pin of the Freshies!" Ted managed to orate, seizing Sally's hand in congratulation. "That stunt is something we fellows miss. If it were our old 'Shuffles' now, likely we would treat him to a soft little ball on his renowned pate."

"King Pin of the Freshies!" took up Bobbie. "Splendid! I'll tell Nellie that and she can chime it in her new class song. Here they are claiming you, Kitten. Come on and see what's doing in the rear. Boys"—to Teddy—"not allowed."

"Never are when there's anything good in sight," replied Ted pleasantly. "Where's that pretty girl—my dance—oh, here she is," and he seized Judith for the Drop Step just being inaugurated.

In another hour—how short a time it seemed—the dance was over. University boys were piling into their cars, and the girls of Wellington would presently be back again in that cozy, if limited, little world, all their very own.

What a glorious success it had been! Even the night was perfect, and now at the happy shouting of "good-byes" the stars blinked down mischievously, and a busy old moon took time from his science to send out a couple of searchlight flashes to greet youth on its merry way.

Ted "Barrett" was saying good-bye to Jane. He made opportunity for this, although his companions were honking their horn recklessly, bidding him "come now or stay as long as he pleased."

"Miss Allen," said the Yorktown boy, "I can't help telling you personally how fine this has been. To have—the girls here, I know is due to your—special generosity, and some day I hope I'll have a chance to tell you what it has meant to me. Just now," he smiled broadly, "those freshies have me bound in their riddle game and I can't talk intelligently; tongue-tied," he finished.

"I understand," spoke up Jane, smiling herself. "They are a wonderful team—and I am much interested in both."

"So am I," called out the chivalrous Ted, as he answered an ear-splitting honk from his chums and rushed out to the big waiting car.

Sally and Shirley were at the steps to see him off, and now Jane joined them. Ted tossed back a freshman's cap, snatched from the head of a luckless "stude" who must go all the way to Yorktown uncapped. He threw the "inkspot" out high in the air, and as it came down, somehow it managed to come within reach of Jane's outstretched palm.

Promptly she donned it, of course, and the trophy instantly became an object of excited interest among the retiring dancers.

It was only a very small black cloth cap, and a poor freshman was now going home with his inadequate hand on a cold head in lieu of it, but somehow when Jane stuck it on the wall between two Wellington pennants, the juniors' and freshmen's, it seemed a symbol of her mystic relationship with the girl who carried the Allen scholarship.

"I'll leave it here until we can clean up," she said looking affectionately at the small black spot on the wall. "Then, of course, it goes to my room."

"Of course," echoed Judith dolefully. "I suppose the ownership of that puts you in a Yorktown frat."

"Hardly, but it will be a little souvenir of this wonderful night."

Both Sally and Bobbie were beside her now. Their cheeks blazed still with excitement, and eyes continued the dance even now echoing through those beam-bedecked walls.

"Wasn't it wonderful?" exclaimed Sally.

"I never thought I could have such a perfect time," sighed Bobbie.

"That's Wellington," commented Jane loyally. "We do everything just right under that banner," and picking up her little party bag she was ready to leave for sleeping quarters.

"And do you know what Ted called Kitten when she came down from presenting the flowers?" teased Bobbie.

"What?" asked Jane merrily.

"King Pin of the Freshies!" replied Bobbie. "Doesn't that sound like a class yell?"

"I hope it will be some day," said Jane. But Sally's blue eyes were proclaiming something—something far removed from the honor and glory promised by her junior sponsor.

And even Bobbie's insistent joking could not dispel that strange foreboding.

"Sally!" charged Jane, noting her sudden preoccupating, "are you seeing things?"

"Why?" A flush suffused the face just showing the tell-tale lines of fatigue.

"I sometimes think you two girls are base deceivers," Jane joked.

"You change your cast of countenance as quickly as—"

"Now Janie, you leave our little star alone," ordered Judith. "Seems to me any girl would be flustered after a first night of this kind."

"Of course," dimpled Jane. "Here, children, please take these things. I will be held responsible for them and there's no telling who might take a notion to cover her couch with that lovely silk scarf."

They gathered up the precious trophies, flags and scarfs. Then the lights were out at last.

CHAPTER XXV

THE DAY AFTER THE BIG NIGHT.

The flush of success invaded old Wellington. As a whole the place seemed suffused with a pardonable pride, and as individuals each girl seemed justly proud of the small part she played in making up that grand total. Even the big city papers sent out reporters to get a "good story" of the mid-year dance, and more than one scribe waylaid the popular girls, pleading for pictures.

Judith Stearns, as sub-editor of the Blare, the college paper, had a part in giving out this general publicity, and what a joy it was to describe the gowns of Jane, Bobbie, Doze and lists of others!

Jane was busy dismantling the dance room—the big assembly room in Warburton—and no classes were to be called for any work during the morning, so that conditions and students might just slide back into orderliness and thence to the serious work of finishing the last semester.

Party dresses were packed away by reluctant hands, boxes tied up and labelled hopefully for the next dance, while heads that had been curled for the big occasion bore testimony to the skill of many willing fingers (not a few of the fingers bearing blisters to still further testify to such achievements), and altogether the atmosphere was distinctly and decidedly that of the small day after the big night before.

Sally was ruefully tying up her finery in rather compressed packages and Bobbie was begging her not to spoil the stuff outright.

"Don't act so suicidal, Kitten. Be brave today for tomorrow we fly!" she misquoted.

"I can't see how you can joke about it," whimpered Sally, bruising her fingers with a jerk at too strong a piece of bundle cord. "Really, Bobbie, if I ever dreamed it would be as hard as this to go, I don't believe anything would have induced me to come." She bit her bruised finger as well as her trembling lip.

"You don't mean that, Kitten," drawled the indifferent Bobbie, who had agreed to help pack, although she much preferred "firing things in trunks" and utilizing packing time out of doors. "You would never have known the fun we have had here, if you hadn't come, and isn't it heaps better to pay now than never to have known it?"

"Nothing seems better now—everything is worse, coal black, pitch dark, bitter, worse," snapped the usually complaisant Sally.

"If I had your talent, wild horses couldn't drag me from Wellington," said Bobbie seriously. "And I do hope, little Kitten, that I am not wholly to blame for your unhappy predicament," her voice dropped to seriousness.

"Now, Bobbie," and the good-natured little Sally smiled through, "never forget that you really made it possible for me to come here, and that you—"

"Now, that's enough, Kitten. If you start going back we shall find ourselves in each other's arms with awfully red eyes—first thing you know. I still think the miracle will save you, but poor me!" and she affected a most juvenile boohoo. "I am surely doomed."

"Why don't you try it, Bobbie? You might get through—"

"Not in a thousand years. And suppose I did, where would it land me?"

"In your proper place, in class, of course."

"And have every one know—I couldn't, Kitten. I talk bravely, but I'm a rank coward at heart. There, the boxes are tied, I hope to your satisfaction, and it's sweet of you to do the tags. No one would be able to read the addresses if I wrote them. Oh, me, oh, my! somehow today reminds me of old Polly Jenkins' funeral. Her abandoned bedroom looked just about like this," surveying the disorder of the little room under the eaves.

"Well, you run along and attend to the outside errands; I must hide the evidences of our flight," said Sally, with something between a laugh and a sigh. "You may pay all my bills, just say we want to settle things so we can run off home when the holiday is proclaimed, then, if you don't mind, just hand this music to Dolly Lloyd."

"Couldn't I kiss a few of the girls for you so as to save time later?" asked Bobbie in naive sarcasm. "I am so sentimental today I could hug the very old trees, I do believe. All right, little sister, I'll go out and do the financial chores, but my head and my heart are still at the dance," and she hummed herself out with a feeble dance step—to do the aforesaid chores.

Left alone the blonde little freshman dropped her hands in her lap and ceased her nervous activity.

"Really going!" she kept thinking, "and I thought the half year would be endless in its days and hours!" A newly painted calendar- sample just finished by Nellie Saunders and offered as a model for Christmas gifts—focused the girl's attention. How dainty, yet how rugged the deft bit of water color! Trees and landscape all melting into that big flourish "W" for Wellington! It seemed like that; everything attractive just now was blended into the college opportunities, and Sally was about to turn her back on them, for what?

The housemaid tapped at her door and announced a caller. Hurriedly gathering up trifles to put the room in a semblance of order, she hurried down to the reception room, there to confront Dolorez Vincez!

"Oh, good morning," said Sally, trying to cover her surprise.
"Bobbie has just gone out."

"I met her," replied the visitor, without returning the salutation.
"But I would like a few words with you—if we could be alone."

Sally glanced about at the open doors and continually flapping draperies: whatever Dol Vin had to say could certainly not be said in that public room. A coat tree at the door held Sally's tam and Mackinaw. She got into these and suggested a walk outside.

There was no denying it, Dol Vin was a striking looking girl, and even her flashy clothes could not altogether disguise her rather handsome foreign type. Today she wore a big black velvet tam jabbed rakishly on her black head, a flame colored coat that buttoned around her tight as a toboggan ulster, and only the deep olive tint of her face in any way withheld the eye from a criticism of "too much color." Today Dol's cheeks were not tinted, and the way her deep set black eyes flashed, further told how angry she was, and how reckless.

Scarcely had the girls from Lenox gone far enough to be out of hearing than she started in on helpless little Sally.

"What are you two thinking of?" she demanded angrily. "Do you think you can kick out and leave me without warning? Don't you know how short I am—"

"Miss Vincez," interrupted Sally, "I don't see what possible claim you have on either of us. The fact is we both feel you have very much overworked your alleged claim as it is."

"Oh, you do!" and she gripped Sally's arm viciously. "Well, I'll just tell you, sissy, I fixed it so you both could get in here." (Sally pried her arm loose and kept at a safe distance.) "I helped you along, played all your tricks—"

"Stop, please," demanded Sally indignantly. "You know perfectly well it was against any wish of ours that you brought that crazy creature in here to frighten the girls sick in the name of sport, hazing," declared Sally, her voice rising at each word. "And then, you turned the same foolish creature loose to frighten all the other children who might hear her wild voice. How can you dare say to me that such a trick was ever countenanced by us?"

"Oh, my, really!" sneered the foreigner. "How we have grown! Please don't bite me with your sharp tongue. As you say, yes, I did turn her loose, and do you know that now she has been sent away? Put in a hospital! Bah! It is in an asylum for the crazy" (Dol was very foreign now), "where the state, this great big powerful state, shall take all that poor harmless woman's money! Could I not allow her to live a little when she paid me? But they will kill her and get paid for the murder! That's the way they treat the poor crazy folks in their big stone prisons!" she alleged angrily.

"She has been declared insane?"

"Declared insane!" she mocked. "You call it that? Yes, I call it kidnapped, and poor old Zola was so harmless if they would but let her scream and play at acting."

Sally was dumbfounded. The woman who had played ghost was really a lunatic, and this unprincipled adventuress had dared allow her to get into a place like Lenox, and to go about the countryside without restraint! Sally felt almost sick at the thought, and having walked the full length of the hedge-rows she attempted to end the unpleasant interview.

"If you will excuse me—" she began feebly.

"But I shall not," almost shouted the angry South American. "I know what this place can do! I know how your spiteful Jane Allen and her chums got me out—"

"Stop!" cried Sally sharply. "Jane Allen is my friend, and I will not hear her spoken of in that manner."

"Your friend!" and she sneered like some animal snorting. "She may make of you a cat's paw to play at her feet, but she shall never be your friend. If she just knows what you are—"

But Sally turned and deliberately fled from her persecutor. She could no longer stand the tirade, and nothing that she seemed able to do or say had any softening effect upon the angry young woman. Suppose she did meet some of the girls and attempt to tell what she knew of Sally's secret? Would anyone stand by and listen? Was not this expelled pupil actually trespassing even to be upon Wellington grounds?

It was getting close to the noon hour and studies were to be resumed after the luncheon period. Students who had taken advantage of the morning recess to be out at some favorite sports were now returning in flocks, and Sally quickened her steps to reach Lenox before the rush of late comers. She turned just once to see if Dolorez was going through the grounds to leave at the opposite gate, but the blazing red coat was not in sight.

"She probably knows some other way of leaving," thought Sally, recalling the uncanny knowledge of the campus secrets that had been responsible for the entrance of the eccentric Madam Z—.

In the hall Sally met a very much excited Bobbie. "Oh, did she eat you up? Or put horns on you? Or turn you into a goat?" she began. It happened that the hallway was clear just then. "Wasn't she furious? I am so glad I escaped! Come in and tell me all about it."

"Not much to tell," replied Sally, "except that I just turned on her and defied her. I felt the time had passed for intimidation, and I told her so."

"Good for you, Kitten," and Bobbie demonstrated her approval. "I always knew your spunk was just smoldering, ready to burst into flame at the right moment. Now, I saw the cause of Dol's disquietude. Her shop is closed, shut up tight, barred windows and a cute little white sign tacked right under the former artistic door. The sign reads 'To Let' and it is easy to imagine the crepe hanging from the knocker."

"She told me she lost a lot—by the arrest of Madam Z, and do you know, Bobbie, that woman was a real lunatic?"

"Of course I know it. Didn't I ride horseback with her? But they are all gone now and as the poet says: 'Good riddance.' Come along, Kitten, and eat grub. That's a function I decline to omit, Dol Vin or any other threat hanging over my poor bobbed head. Come on, dear, cheer up! The worst is yet to come!"

"Wait a minute, please do, Bobbie. I just can't think straight. You know every afternoon now there is an open forum or a class meeting and I wish we could go before we run into a further danger."

"Oh, no, dearie, don't think of that," cheered Bobbie, strangely irrepressible ever since the big dance. "You can't tell yet what may happen. Stay on the burning deck until the fog horn blows, then take to the life-boats, is my plan of action. I hope we have a substantial meal right now, for paying up bills and collecting receipts is painfully appetising. Come on, dear, and smile while the smiling is good."

"But just suppose Jane or Judy should drop in on us this afternoon and see the things packed up?"

"Tell them I am eloping, break the news gently and blame it on me. I feel as if I could stand for any monumental conspiracy that was ever conspired. I am that experienced in intrigue. Perhaps I'll apply for a government position in the diplomatic corps. I believe I could carry it off beautifully, brass buttons, plumes and all. There's Dolly. Just look at her hair! Like an escaped watch spring."

"Did you meet any little fairy in your walk? Some one who has promised immunity? You seem tragically jolly?"

"No, not a fairy, nor yet a ghost. This is just my natural reaction. And while I think of it, Kit," she let the door slam violently, "don't forget I have not reformed. I positively refuse to be any better than I ever was; I have simply developed, and outgrown the antagonistic influence of some defunct ancestors. Oh, how good it all seems here today? I believe I am glad Dol came and went and took her particular influence with her. Wasn't it lucky I had called in my head and that she didn't leave me with one side done and one side undone? Wonder if we will notice any painfully deserted blondes in her wake?"

It might be the reaction, but Sally could not help wondering why Bobbie was in such high spirits. Then she recalled the old saying, "Too much joy is sorrowful," and hoped her chum's joy would not be thus rudely transformed.

Judith and Jane were waiting for them at the dining hall door.

"Truants," said Jane, "where have you been? We have been planning to send a bell boy after you. My famous dad has just written he is coming through New York and wants to take me and my stepsister home with me. You know who he thinks bears that relationship to me, of course?"

They knew she referred to the scholarship girl, and Sally looked dumb while Shirley looked startled.

"Oh, that would be lovely," said Shirley with marked evasion, "but—"

"My dad never entertains a but," said Jane, "so I hope, Bobbie, you will hurry up your plans to come out and ride a real horse on a real ranch in Montana. Won't she look stunning on a bronco, Sally?"

But the invitation, alluring as it was, did not seem to add zest to the appetite of Bobbie. It had simply swept her off her trustworthy feet, and Sally seemed little better. Another corner to escape from!

CHAPTER XXVI

A SURPRISE IN RECORDS

Holidays, holidays! The air was full of them, and it seemed all the girls in Jane's group were to spend the big Christmas event away from Wellington.

Jane's letter from her father, that which suggested she bring "the little country girl" back to Montana with her for the holidays, seemed like an answer to her own secret wish. She wanted to bring Bobbie home with her, but very much preferred the invitation would come from

headquarters. Jane, like Bobbie, did not wish to appear too ingratiating, also she did not want to make the girl feel she was in any way patronizing her.

The bulletin boards in all "dorms" bore the notice of special assembly in the study hall, and thither the students were now progressing.

"This is where we get all that is coming to us," said Bobbie more literally than elegantly. "I believe the idea is, we are to know before we leave, where we will be put when we come back." She was talking to Sally as they walked out from Lenox.

"Yes, and I wish, Bobbie, we might have escaped it. Think of hearing all the reports read and not being able to take up our exams?"

"If only we didn't have to take them I would feel better. Of course you are safe," said Bobbie ruefully.

"Perhaps it is better to have this one last spasm of courage," replied Sally, although her whimsical expression did not register anything "better"; it bespoke the condition as "worse."

The assembly was well filled up when the two conspiring freshmen took their places as near the door as seats could be found. The biting wintry air permeated the big auditorium, and when the restless shuffling of feet had finally come down to a murmur of soft sporadic shiftings—some girls never could keep their feet still—then the dean, Miss Rutledge, made her annual announcement.

No girl was ever dropped from Wellington without having first received due warning, she told the classes; also she announced that ratings given at this time would afford students opportunity to make the next half year's plans while at home with their families.

It is easy to guess that many hearts fluttered wildly in anxious anticipation during this trying moment. But Wellington was always fair, and no one would be denied a chance to "pull up" if native ability seemed equal to the trial.

The seniors, almost all self-reliant and assured of their standing, had little to speculate upon, and their report was quickly disposed of. In the juniors were many whose standing held interest, but almost all got off favorably. Ted Guthrie had worked off "conditions," as had Inez and Janet, one in math and the other in Greek, but the first half year was pronounced satisfactory for almost all the students whose names have figured in this little tale. Jane and Judith were always counted among the lucky number.

It was in the freshmen's ranks that things were sure to happen. Here were girls just trying out college; some sure to be found unsuitable for pursuing the higher branches of education, others evidently capable as to intellect but poorly prepared, and were thus handicapped with too heavy a burden of "conditions." Again there were those who had drifted through "High" without much effort, and relying on this pace had mistaken the very serious work of college for that of the rather indifferent preparatory work.

Much of this explanation was embodied in Miss Rutledge's statement to the assembled pupils.

"There is also this to be considered," she said. "Some pupils show remarkable aptitude in certain studies, and when this is found in the exact science of mathematics we have reason to feel that the student will eventually make up other deficiencies, and so keep up with her class."

"That's for you," whispered Sally to Bobbie with a very broad nudge, but Bobbie's eyes answered with that look pet animals throw out when in doubt of a master's exact meaning.

Then, there were cited the highest averages, and the first name called was that of Miss Sarah Howland! As Miss Rutledge read the name she looked up from her reports.

"I feel I should add," she said gently, "that Miss Howland has covered more than the work required, and has the peculiarly well balanced intellect that seems to feed from one subject to another. I must congratulate Miss Howland upon her splendid record as a first- year student."

Jane Allen's hands led the applause that followed this, but it was not ended until the ranks of the freshmen had paid ample tribute to their star member. Sally was dreadfully embarrassed. She shook her head in continual protest, but her objection had only the effect of increasing the acclamation. Finally the dean proceeded.

Bobbie was all but biting her nails in sheer nervousness. After all, this had required an amount of courage. Her nails pressed into her palms fiercely. Perhaps it would have been simpler to have avoided the final reckoning? The girls' names being read gave to her tingling ears merely a blurred murmur. Yes, Dolly Lloyd would pass: and there was Margie Winters—Margie was a star in English. Next—

"Miss Shirley Duncan," came the dean's voice, and then she paused.

"Here is a student who has shown exceptional work in mathematics," she continued, "and while her preparation for college has been undoubtedly faulty, her teachers recommend that she continue her work and apply herself with special tutors for those studies in which she has been especially deficient."

Shirley was all but gasping, when again from Jane Allen's seat came the approval of applause.

"She made it," the girls were whispering. "I always knew she was a wizard at math," insisted Nellie Saunders.

"Bobbie is perfectly all right," declared the wise little Margie Winters. "It was all on account of her country ideas—"

"Hush," whispered Dolly Lloyd. "We are all more or less from the country. Do you want to claim the Grand Central Station?"

This set Margie back in her seat—and presently all the "freshies" had been given their ratings. A few very sharp warnings were administered, and that a great deal of cramming would have to be done by some before the mid-year exams, to take place early in January, was made especially plain by the dean. No one would be dropped without warning, but the standards of Wellington would have to be maintained, she concluded.

Little reader, if you expect to get to college begin your "cramming" now in high school, and let each day's record be such as will surely make a satisfactory total in preparation. If more students could only realize this in time!

Assembly was dismissed and the girls surrounded Bobbie and Sally. Jane and Judith seemed personally responsible for these two freshmen, and no one could discount the gleam in Jane's eyes when she squeezed Bobbie's clammy hand.

"Why so—frightened?" she demanded. "Isn't it just wonderful to know you couldn't break away even though you tried so flagrantly?" There was a twinkle thrown in with this, and Jane next piled compliments on Sally.

Never were there two "satisfactory" students so manifestly unhappy. No one could miss the nervous manner Sally tried so hard to hide, nor yet the heightened color in Bobbie's cheeks when she flatly refused to comment on the surprise.

"Queer," observed Dolly Lloyd. "If I turned out satisfactory when I just waited for my little return home notice, it seems to me I would at least emit a smile."

Freed from the scrutiny of their companions at last, Sally and Bobbie bolted for Lenox. It had been a trying ordeal and both felt its effects too keenly to throw it off at once.

"It's over," eulogized Bobbie, slamming down her hat on Sally's camp chair and promptly sitting on it.

"Yes, and you ought to be the happiest girl in all Wellington," declared Sally, standing limp before the dresser that reflected a sad little face unobserved.

"I ought to be happy!" repeated Bobbie. "How about you? Ted knew his guess when he called you King Pin of the Freshies. Sallylun, why don't you try to finish? Couldn't I help you?"

"You know the conditions, Bob? We went into this together and together we quit—" said Sally, rather crudely for her.

"It's a shame," grumbled Bobbie. "I just love it all now."

"But you can remain! Even your conditions are assured."

"And as you said we went in together, etc.," said Bobbie.

Jane Allen was at the door before they heard her step.

"Now," she called out in announcement of her presence, "Bobbie, you have no excuse. Even dad will be delighted, but he couldn't feel as I do about it. Bobbie, I'm just proud of you!" The dry lips moved but did not answer.

"Why don't you trust me?" asked Jane flatly. "I know you are planning something, of course."

"Oh, we do trust you, indeed," declared Sally with quivering lips, "and we both are too grateful to frame words in expression."

"But you are not quite—confidential," pressed Jane. Her eye was checking up the hat boxes and other evidences of "house cleaning" scattered around.

They had positively decided to write her a full explanation to be delivered after they left. This was finally agreed upon as the one practical plan and neither would attempt to violate it now. But this moment, with Jane's affectionate manner as a lure, was indeed a strong temptation! What might have happened did not happen, however, for a team of girls burst in at that very minute and put an abrupt end to the developing confidences.

They descended upon the serious ones with such exhilaration that even the neatly tied-up boxes were threatened with violence.

"We are going to give a 'Dingus' tonight," shouted Betty, "and you are not going to spoil it as you did our ghost party. Sally, this time you two will be left off the committee, then perhaps we can have our fun without your interference. Not that we wouldn't love to have you," she hastened to temporize, "but we know how you do duck our sports, and this time we are bound to put one through. We merely dropped in to invite you, and if you are not on hand be warned!"

"Be warned that we will drag you from your lair!" threatened Nellie Saunders. "This is going to be one grand final rally, and we want above all the two famous members of the clan."

"You may wear your kilts and whitewash brushes," conceded Nellie.

"You should wear a laurel crown, Sally. I suppose next half you will jump right in junior and skip us poor little sophs, at least I hope we'll be sophs," said Margie Winters.

Jane managed to hide her impatience, but she was disappointed. She had expected to draw out the confidence of Sally and Bobbie, realizing she might help them if she but understood the mysterious predicament. But there was no chance of further pressing that point, so she turned and fled, to leave the freshies to their own particular little affairs.

Judith was anxiously waiting to hear the outcome of her visit, as it had been planned between them.

"No wiser than when I left you," confessed Jane. "Whatever those two youngsters are up to I can't sense it nor get them to own up. But, Judy, just keep a sharp watch out. If they run off it shall be our joyful ju-ty to run them back. Some of the old Dol Vin nonsense is still brewing in their childish brains I fear, and it behooves us to eliminate it."

"But why should they want to go now?" puzzled Judith.

"I have admitted I cannot even guess," replied Jane, "but whatever it is it began long ago and it just ripened now. Keep a watch on Lenox, that is all I can advise. I hardly know now which of the two fascinating little creatures I am most in love with. Sally is as dear as ever, and Bobbie more—compelling. If I had a brother I should imagine him just about as deliciously rebellious as Bobbie."

Which was saying a good deal for Bobbie when it came from Jane.

"Do you really think they will attempt to run away?" queried Judith, deeply perplexed.

"There is every evidence of it."

"After everything turning out so beautifully—"

"That's just it. There is some secret behind it all," reasoned Jane.

"I am just as much in the dark as ever."

"Didn't you—couldn't you ask them outright Janie? How dreadful if they should spoil everything, by acting so horrid! To run away!"

"But we must not allow them to do so," argued Jane. "Surely now that we are both warned, we ought to be able to forestall any such attempt."

"You know now how hard it is to keep track of things over at Lenox," faltered Judith. "Not that I wouldn't be willing to sit up nights to watch those babes, but even at that they could slip off," she reasoned.

"The freshies are having an affair tonight, that will mean we must be doubly watchful during the excitement."

"Why not tell some of the other girls, and get them to help us?"

"I should hate to do that," replied Jane. "After all we have only suspicion; it would never do to start a story like that."

"I suppose you are right," sighed Judith, "but if I thought Dol Vin- -"

"There is nothing you can't think about Dol Vin, if that helps you any. But just the same, she still acts the adroit meddler. When I recall how she tried all last year to spoil our time here—yours and mine—and now when I see she is making tools of these two innocents- -" Jane paused from sheer indignation.

"I don't believe the girl is fully civilized," blurted out Judith.

"Of course she isn't, if you mean by 'civilized' being human and kind and American. I would rather be hot headed and fiery, and have all the other bad traits I plead guilty of, than to be as smart and business-like as she is, but have no heart. I honestly believe Dol Vin has a human motor in place of a flesh and blood heart." Jane was getting excited now, and she paced up and down quite like a regular stage person.

"My poor noodle just thumps with the thinking," confessed Judith.

"Of course I am not willing to take the responsibility of policing Lenox Hall all night Jane. There must be some other way."

"I positively decline, Judy, to tell the office or ask for official help. That would be too silly if we have made a mistake," decided Jane falling into a convenient seat.

Judith did not speak directly. She was loath to cross Jane further, yet unwilling to shoulder this rather serious responsibility.

"Why not invite both Bobbie and Sally over here and have them remain all night?" she suggested. "That would be a treat for the—"

"You forget the Lenox girls are having a party," Jane interrupted.

"Then let us break in on the party," followed Judith quickly.

"I agree, Judy, we must keep as close to them for a day at least, as it is possible to do without actually locking them up. Dear me, Jude! Look at the time! And I've got to get in some gym practice. My joints are as stiff as sticks, and I had congested headaches just from laziness. Coming to the gym?"

"No, not today. My head aches from activity. You have me all swirled up. Don't mind if I take a rest, do you? Suppose we have to go on picket duty?"

Jane laughed, defying her fears for Sally and Bobbie.

"When I have anything important to do I must be alert," explained Jane. "Go to sleep if you like Judy, but be ready if you hear me whistle. It may be a race between the freshies and juniors you know."

"Oh—hum!" groaned Judith as Jane raced off.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE REAL STORY

It was just before six o'clock that same evening when Dolly Lloyd burst into the gym where Jane was exercising.

"They're gone!" she exclaimed. "Sally and Bobbie have left Lenox, and are rushing to get the six-thirty train. Why do you suppose they have sneaked off like that?"

"Gone? Are you sure?" asked Jane.

"Positive, we have a note and—"

But Jane heard no more. Snatching up her sweater, she jabbed her arms into it as she ran, and hardly stopped until she hammered on the door of the stable where her horse, Firefly, with others were kept.

Jim, the stable-boy, answered immediately, but seemed unable to comprehend the unseemly haste, as Jane dashed in, loosened the headstall of her intelligent mount, led him to the path and then sprang up bareback to overtake the runaways.

Jim stood speechless. That a student should romp off like that in bloomers too—and without a hat!

And how she was a-going it!

Her hair flew out in a cloud about her head, while Firefly, who was plainly wildly excited at his unexpected caper, just did as Jane told him without the slightest regard for lack of bridle or saddle. Wasn't he from Montana and didn't his mistress train him to go as she chose without foolish restrictions? Students along the way looked in amazement at the racing girl, but being Jane Allen some allowance was made for the caprice.

At the cedars a shrill train whistle warned Jane she had but a few seconds more to make the little Bingham station, and she promptly imparted the same message to Firefly.

"We'll make it, boy," she whispered. "Take Janie to the station, careful—careful—" in that droning, even voice a horse always knows how to interpret.

There, she touched the back platform, told her horse to wait, and threw his strap over the livery post; then she hurried to the front to find her freshmen.

There they were! Bags in hand, standing now as the train was pulling in.

Jane saw them some seconds before they espied her, and quick as a flash she had a hand on each of the others.

"Girls," she called, "drop those bags. Where are you going?"

Sally dropped her bag from sheer surprise, but Bobbie had a firmer grip.

"Oh, please, Miss Allen," begged Bobbie tearfully, "don't detain us, we must go. This is our train."

"If you go you must take me with you—and this way," she included her gym togs in the statement. "Just be reasonable and rational. There, let the train go" (it was going). "There are others. But you just come over to that bench and tell me. What does all this mean?" There was no time for recrimination. The story so long bound up in the hearts of these two girls sprung freely to their lips.

"You will hate us both, Miss Allen," stumbled Sally. "But we never meant to deceive you for so long a time."

"We were silly geese," retorted the impetuous Bobbie, "and I suppose now, outside of Wellington grounds, we may as well try—to confess. We have both deceived you! There is Shirley Duncan and I am Sally Howland."

"What!" gasped Jane, unable to understand the shifting of names from one to the other.

"I never won your father's scholarship," went on Bobbie, her voice trailing evenly over every incriminating word. "Shirley won it and—"

"I sold it to her," sobbed the other, eager to have done with the hateful admission.

"Sold it?"

"Yes, there was no other way. Ted—my brother Ted—had to have two hundred dollars to get back to Yorktown, and everything seemed gone when uncle died. I had won the scholarship, to come to Wellington, but I couldn't leave Ted stranded in his junior year," choked the little freshman.

"That was it!" exclaimed Jane, leading the girls away from the tracks, now cleared of the New York express, and guiding them to the back of the station where Firefly waited proudly. What a relief!

"You rode—that way?" gasped Bobbie. "Without a saddle?"

"Why certainly. It was the best gallop I've had in months. Now, naughty girls, wait. Sit down. I'm too excited to stand up. You" (to Sally) "are Shirley Duncan, and you" (to Bobbie) "are Sally Rowland?"

"Yes," replied both miserably.

Then she, whom we must know as the real Shirley, spoke.

"I know it must seem despicable, Miss Allen, but there was dear Ted, so disappointed, and he was such a splendid student. I could come here, but he simply had to have that two hundred dollars to go back to Yorktown." The voice took courage with its tale of loyalty.

"And you are simply a wonderful little girl to have managed it all," declared Jane, showing not a single trace of resentment. "It is actually fascinating—to think you actually exchanged identities!"

"But I had no such laudable excuse," moaned Bobbie. "My folks just wanted me to go to college—any old college in any old way—and we always thought dad's good honest money would pave the way. But it didn't, and I never could pass the exams, so I simply fell into this from sheer vanity."

"That is not so," expostulated the new Shirley. "Bobbie would never have dreamed such a thing if Dol Vin did not happen along with her wonderful plan. You may imagine she was the real brains—of the plot."

"Dol Vin—"

"Yes, she taught—a summer gym class at our place," explained Bobbie, "and when she heard my wail about not being able to get into college she offered the scheme. At first it did seem abhorrent, but she glossed it over so—"

"And obtained such a generous commission—" put in the real Shirley.

"Then you see, Kitten here was passed right in on her second exams, while I sailed in on the exams she took for the scholarship," confessed Bobbie, digging her heels in the cinder path recklessly.

"And you both thought this an unpardonable offense?"

"Certainly, we knew every moment we were both hypocrites," blurted Bobbie. "Kitten has been fairly blistering under the stigma."

"The train is gone," said Shirley the original. "And, Miss Allen, you are not dressed for this. We will have to go back, I suppose."

Jane had been thinking quickly, in fact her brain had been fairly churning with the new turn in events. She jumped from the bench and confronted the downcast freshmen.

"I have it!" she exclaimed. "It is just perfect. Here you two girls both came in on dad's scholarship, have both made good and are both now eligible to finish the course. Don't you see how magically it has all turned out?"

"We don't," admitted Bobbie.

"That's because you don't know how generous Deanie Rutledge can be. We will go right back and tell her the whole thing and she will, I am positive, think the matter one inspired by the noble effort you made" (to Shirley) "to keep your brother in college. Bobbie, you did want to come to college, that is always a laudable ambition, and think of the thousands who fail every year?"

"But they don't come," persisted the still doubting Bobbie. "But you did. And if you WERE a little rebel at first, doesn't that explain it? Your preparation was all wrong—you heard Deanie say so. Come on, now, I'll walk and let you lead Firefly, Bobbie. I know it will be a treat to you to even lead him. Sorry you can't ride in that tight skirt."

"Wait a minute," demanded Bobbie, stopping short, "do you mean to say, Miss Allen—"

"Jane—"

"All right," with a smile. "Do you mean to say, Jane, that the dean would ever understand and condone all this?"

"What are deans for?" asked Jane, the miracle worker. "I'm just wild over the whole thing and daddy will want to adopt you both. It is simply thrilling! You have doubled the value of the scholarship."

"But if we did come back and the girls knew it? Our change of names?" queried the real Shirley, apprehensively.

"Don't you see how simple it is? We will just explain that you exchanged identities to try out how one girl could work on another girl's reputation. That you both intended to go back to your real selves at the half year—"

"So we did," declared Bobbie. "Shirley was to be transferred to Breslin and I expected to—withdraw."

"But you don't want to?"

"No," hesitating, "but I can't see—"

"I can. The whole thing is a wonderful story and when we give the girls the one fact, that you simply exchanged places for a lark, and then didn't know how to get out of it, that will be enough for them. Come along there, Firefly, meet my two college chums. And now, Bobbie, talk to him once in a while, so he will remember you when you dash over the hills of Montana."

"Sort of—fairy story," breathed Shirley, a little tragically.

"And Teddy is your brother?" asked Jane. "However did he keep the lark up at the dance?"

"He thought it was only a lark," replied his sister.

"And so it was," suddenly declared Bobbie. "Jane Allen has made it so and I'm for a full A.B. course at old Wellington! Let gossips do their worst," and she capered ahead to the playful clip-clap of Firefly, every step indicating the relief she was experiencing.

"If Bobbie feels that way I am sure I should not hold out," relented Shirley. "In fact, both Ted and I have our own incomes now. We only had to wait for an adjustment, but at the time we were simply panic-stricken. I wanted to pay Bobbie back last month, but have not succeeded in getting her to take the money as yet."

"I think it is all perfectly delicious!" declared Jane. "Won't Judy and Dozia just howl? Of course no one need know about the loan. That is purely a personal matter." (More miracles.)

"Jane," called back Bobbie, "don't you remember how you used to question that name Shirley? Didn't seem to think it fitted me. Well, you see how you were right. I should have been plain old-fashioned country Sarah."

"Nevertheless," insisted Jane, "you have proven how well you can act. Take care we don't cast you for a leading role in some of our masquerades!"

They turned into the campus again, happy in their new-found security, for what Jane undertook she was sure to accomplish, and even this complication melted away into a fascinating story under her skillful guidance.

"Hurry! Hurry!" she prompted, "we must account for this little race. There's Judy. Run on ahead and tell anyone you meet—tell them we're coming," she ended foolishly to Bobbie. "Your turn to think."

"Tell them we had a race, and with a good handicap, Kitten won," suggested Bobbie, responding quickly to Jane's suggestion.

"But what about all our things? Our hats and coats?" demurred the real Shirley.

"They'll be too interested to notice that detail," said Jane. "I'm so happy, happy, happy! Run along Firefly—there's Jim waiting. Now, come girls, after we deliver Firefly to his keeper we are going right up to the hall—Judy! Judy!" she broke off, for Judith evidently had not seen them come in the gate. "Over here Judy!" she shouted again, and this time Judy responded.

She rushed up to the culprits and likewise confronted Jane.

"Don't you three dare to deceive me!" she stormed with good nature sufficient to hide the girl's evident embarrassment. "Where have you been and what have you been doing?"

"I wouldn't attempt to deceive you Judith," said Bobbie bravely, "we were running away!"

"Why?" the question was put seriously.

"Because we have both been deceiving you all, and no matter how generous you two friends try to be, I am at least going to set that matter straight before the whole college. I am Sarah Howland and this is Shirley Duncan." She placed her hand on little Shirley's arm.

Judith was dumfounded! They expected she would be, naturally, but she now stood there speechless.

"Be a good sport Judy," urged Jane, "and help us stage a real happy ending. Don't you want to jump on Firefly and ride him over to the stable?"

"I don't. Why has Shirley become Bobbie?"

Jane wanted to laugh, but Bobbie's face was very serious, and Shirley's lip was quivering. Jane released her horse and watched him canter over to the stable.

"We'll all be late for tea, but never mind," she said. "Let us tell Judy all about it. She'll die of curiosity if we don't. Look at her poor face."

"Jane Allen if I knew a big secret I'd tell you," declared the abused one.

"Here's a seat; there, now listen," began Jane. "Shirley Duncan exchanged places on the scholarship certificate with Sally Howland, that's Bobbie, because Sally couldn't get in otherwise, and Shirley- -"

"Needed the money," confessed Shirley, insisting on having a part in the confession.

"But it was for her brother Ted, you know," interrupted Bobbie loyally.

"Is that Teddy your brother? And Bobbie you blushed so when you danced with him, and I accused you—" It was Judith's turn to talk quickly now, and she made good use of the opportunity.

Finally something like order was restored.

"You must help us Judy—" pleaded Jane. "I insisted the girls should come right along and simply tell their story frankly to Deanie. You know how splendidly she came to the rescue of our friends last year."

"You need not be afraid to tell her your story girls," agreed Judith. "In fact I think she'll be just tickled to death to have two such little Trojans in our midst. But what about the others?"

"Oh, I don't want to face it," faltered Shirley nearly in tears.
"Why can't we withdraw and do as we planned, Bobbie?"

"Because we won't let you," insisted Jane. "Just now you are bound to feel a little frightened, but if you could see it as I do; as Judy does," she hurried to add. "I tell you girls the others will just want to carry you around on their shoulders, they'll be so proud of you," finished Jane a little breathlessly.

"Carry us around?" questioned Bobbie. "If you hadn't caught us we would be making pictures of ourselves with our faces pressed to the damp window panes of that train you hear whistling now," she declared, with a flash of her natural humor. "Kitten's face wouldn't be pretty either, if she puckered it that way."

Jane knew the battle was won, now that Bobbie joked and smiled, so she jumped up quickly and urged them along.

"Come on everyone, there's a light in the office," she said. "We will just have a few minutes to talk to Deanie."

The girls went back, and when the holiday finally came both freshmen were hailed as the particular friends of Miss Allen and were to spend their vacation at her father's ranch in Montana.

* * * * *

The next volume of this series will sustain Jane's reputation for unmatched personality in her Wellington record as "Jane Allen: Senior."

THE END