

Jane Allen: Right Guard

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Jane Allen of the Sub-Team

THE SAALFIELD PUBLISHING COMPANY
Akron, Ohio New York

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Jane Allen, Right Guard

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As Right Guard, Jane proved herself worthy of the position.

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Jane Allen: Right Guard

1

CHAPTER I

DAY DREAMS

"Come out of your day dream, Janie, and guess what I have for you."

Hands behind him, Henry Allen stood looking amusedly down at his daughter.

Stretched full length in a gaily striped hammock swung between two great trees, her gray eyes dreamily turned toward the distant mountain peaks, Jane Allen had not heard her father's noiseless approach over the closely clipped green lawn.

At sound of his voice, she bobbed up from the hammock with an alacrity that left it swaying wildly.

2

"Of course I was dreaming, Dad," she declared gaily, making an ineffectual grab at the hands he held behind him.

"No fair using force," he warned, dexterously eluding her. "This is a guessing contest. Now which hand will you choose?"

"Both hands, you mean thing!" laughed Jane. "I know what you have in one of them. It's a letter. Maybe two. Now stand and deliver."

"Here you are."

Obligingly obeying the imperative command, Mr. Allen handed Jane two letters.

"Oh, joy! Here *you* are!"

Jane enveloped her father in a bear-like hug, planting a resounding kiss on his sun-burnt cheek.

"Having played postman, I suppose my next duty is to take myself off and leave my girl to her letters," was his affectionately smiling comment.

"Not a bit of it, Dad. I'm dying to read these letters. They're from Judith Stearns and Adrienne Dupree. But even they must wait a little. I want to talk to *you*, my ownest Dad. Come and sit beside me on that bench."

Slipping her arm within her father's, Jane gently towed him to a quaint rustic seat under a magnificent, wide-spreading oak.

3

"Be seated," she playfully ordered.

Next instant she was beside him on the bench, her russet head against his broad shoulder.

"Well, girl of mine, what is it? You're not going to tell me, I hope, that you don't want to go back to college."

Henry Allen humorously referred to another sunlit morning over a year ago when Jane had corralled him for a private talk that had been in the nature of a burst of passionate protest against going to college.

"It's just a year ago yesterday, Dad," Jane returned soberly. "What a horrid person I was to make a fuss and spoil my birthday. But I was only sixteen, then. I'm seventeen years and one day old now. I'm ever so much wiser. It's funny but that is really what I wanted to talk to you about. Going back to Wellington, I mean. I want to go this time. Truly, I do."

"I know it, Janie. I was only teasing you."

Henry Allen smiled down very tenderly at his pretty daughter.

"Of course you were," nodded Jane. "I knew, though, that you were thinking about last year, when I behaved like a savage. I was thinking of it, too, as I lay in the hammock looking off toward the mountains. Dear old Capitan never seemed so wonderful as it does to-day. Yet somehow,⁴ it doesn't hurt me to think of leaving it for a while.

"Last year I felt as though I was being torn up by the roots. This year I feel all comfy and contented and only a little bit sad. The sad part is leaving you and Aunt Mary. Still I'm glad to go back to Wellington. It's as though I had two homes. I wanted to tell you about it, Dad. To let you know that this year I'm going to try harder than ever to be a good pioneer."

Raising her head, Jane suddenly sat very straight on the bench, her gray eyes alive with resolution.

"You don't need to tell me that, Janie." Her father took one of Jane's slender white hands between his own strong brown ones. "You showed yourself a real pioneer freshman. They say the freshman year's always the hardest. I know mine was at Atherton. I was a poor boy, you know, and had to fight my way. Things were rather different then, though. There is more comradeship and less snobbishness in college than there used to be. That is, in colleges for boys. You're better posted than your old Dad about what they do and are in girls' colleges," he finished humorously.

"Oh, there are a few snobs at Wellington."⁵

An unbidden frown rose to Jane's smooth forehead. Reference to snobbery brought up a vision of Marian Seaton's arrogant, self-satisfied features.

"Most of the girls are splendid, though," she added, brightening. "You know how much I care for Judy, my roommate, and, oh, lots of others at Wellington. There's Dorothy Martin, in particular. She stands for all that is finest and best. You remember I've told you that she looks like Dearest."

Jane's voice dropped on the last word. Silence fell upon the two as each thought of the beloved dead.

"Dad, you don't know how much it helped me last year in college to have Dearest's picture with me," Jane finally said. "It was almost as if she were right there with me, her own self, and understood everything. I've never told you before, but there were a good many times

when things went all wrong for me. There were some days when it seemed to me that I didn't want to try to be a pioneer. I wanted to pull up stakes and run away. I sha'n't feel that way this year. It will be so different. I'll walk into Madison Hall and be at home there from the start. I'll have friends there to welcome——"6

Jane's confidences were suddenly interrupted by the appearance of Pedro, the groom, leading Donabar, Mr. Allen's horse, along the drive.

"I've got to leave you, girl." Mr. Allen rose. "I've an appointment with Gleason, to look at some cattle he wants to sell me. I'll see you at dinner to-night. Probably not before then."

With a hasty kiss, dropped on the top of Jane's curly head, her father strode across the lawn to his horse. Swinging into the saddle, he was off down the drive, turning only to wave farewell to the white-clad girl on the beach. Left alone, Jane turned her attention to her letters.

Those who have read "Jane Allen of the Sub-Team" will remember how bitterly Jane Allen resented leaving her beautiful Western home to go East to Wellington College. Brought up on a ranch, Jane had known few girls of her own age. To be thus sent away from all she loved best and forced to endure the restrictions of a girls' college was a cross which proud Jane carried during the early part of her freshman year at Wellington.

Gradually growing to like the girls she had formerly despised, Jane found friends, tried and true. Being a person of strong character she also made enemies, among them arrogant, snobbish7 Marian Seaton, a freshman of narrow soul and small honor.

Due to her interest in basket-ball, Jane soon found herself fighting hard to win a position on the freshman team. She also found herself engaged in a desperate struggle to rule her own rebellious spirit. How she won the right to play in the deciding game of the year, because of her high resolve to be true to herself, has already been recorded in her doings as a freshman at Wellington College.

"You first, Judy," murmured Jane, as she tore open the envelope containing Judith's letter and eagerly drew it forth.

She smiled as she unfolded the one closely written sheet of thin, gray paper. Judith never wrote at length. The smile deepened as she read:

"Dear Old Jane:

"It's about time I answered your last letter. I hope to goodness this reaches you before you start East. Then you'll know I love you even if I am not a lightning correspondent. I just came home from the beach yesterday. I had a wonderful summer, but I'm tanned a beautiful brown. I am preparing you beforehand so that you will not8 mistake me for a noble red man, red woman, I mean, when you see me.

"I'm dying to see my faithful roommate and talk my head off. I shall bring a whole bunch of eats along with me to Wellington and we'll have a grand celebration. Any small contributions which you may feel it your duty to drag along will be thankfully received. I'm going to start for college a week from next Tuesday. I suppose I'll be there ahead of you, so I'll have everything fixed up comfy when you poke your distinguished head in the door of our room.

"I've loads of things to tell you, but I can't write them. You know how I love (not) to write letters, themes, etc. You'll just have to wait until we get together. If this letter shouldn't reach you before you leave El Capitan, you will probably get it some day after it has traveled around the country for a while. Won't that be nice?"

"With much love, hoping to see you soon,"

"Your affectionate roommate,

"Judy."

Jane laughed outright as she re-read the letter.⁹ It was so exactly like good-humored Judy Stearns. She did not doubt that she was destined presently to hear at least one funny tale from Judith's lips concerning the latter's pet failing, absent-mindedness.

Picking up Adrienne's letter from the bench, Jane found equal amusement in the little French girl's quaint phraseology.

"Wicked One:" it began. "Why have you not answered the fond letter of your small Imp? But perhaps you have answered, and I have not received. *Ma mère* and I have had the great annoyance since we came to this most stupid studio, because much of our mail has gone astray.

"We have finished the posing for the picture 'The Spirit of the Dawn.' It was most beautiful. *Ma mère* was, of course, the Dawn Spirit, allowed for one day to become the mortal. She had many dances to perform, and was superb in all. I, too, had the dance to do in several scenes. When we meet in college I will tell you all.

"We shall not pose again in these motion pictures for the directors are, of a truth, most queer. They talk much, but have the small idea of art. It became necessary to quarrel with them frequently, otherwise the picture would have contained many ridiculous things. It is now past, and, of a certainty, I am glad. I am longing to make the return to Wellington. It will be the grand happiness to see again all my dear friends, you in particular, beloved Jeanne.

"*La petite* Norma will soon finish the engagement with the stock company. We have the hope to meet her in New York, so that she and your small Imp may make the return together to Wellington. Take the good care of yourself, dear Jeanne. With the regards of *ma mère* and my most ardent affection,

"Ever thy Imp."

Jane gave the letter an affectionate little pat. It was almost as though she had heard lively little Adrienne's voice. How good it was, she reflected happily, to know that this time she would go East, not as a lonely outlander, but as one whose place awaited her. There would be smiling faces and welcoming hands to greet her when she climbed the steps of Madison Hall. Yes, Wellington was truly her Alma Mater and Madison Hall her second home.

CHAPTER II

A COUNCIL OF WAR

"What does it all mean? That's the one thing I'd like to know."

Judith Stearns plumped herself down on Ethel Lacey's couch bed with an energy that bespoke her feelings.

"It is as yet beyond the understanding," gloomily conceded Adrienne Dupree.

"You'd better go downstairs and see Mrs. Weatherbee at once, Judy," advised Ethel.

It was a most amazed and indignant trio which had gathered for a council of war in the room belonging to Ethel and Adrienne.

"I'm going to," nodded Judith with some asperity. "I have Jane's telegram here with me. I just stopped for a minute to tell you girls. Why, Jane will be in on that four o'clock train! A nice tale we'll have to tell her!"¹²

"Oh, there's surely been a misunderstanding," repeated Ethel Lacey.

Judith shrugged her shoulders.

"It looks queer to me," she said. "You know Mrs. Weatherbee never liked Jane. It would be just like her——"

Judith paused. A significant stare conveyed untold meaning.

"She couldn't do anything so unfair and get away with it," reasoned Ethel. "Jane could take up the matter with Miss Howard and make a big fuss about it."

"She could, but would she?" demanded Judith savagely. "You know how proud Jane is. She'd die before she'd give Mrs. Weatherbee the satisfaction of seeing she was hurt over it. She——"

"Oh, what's the use in speculating?" interrupted Ethel. "Go and find out, Judy. We're probably making much ado about nothing."

"It is I who will go with you," announced Adrienne decidedly. "I am also the dear friend of Jane."

"Let's all go," proposed Judith. "There's strength in numbers. If Mrs. Weatherbee hasn't been fair to Jane it will bother her a whole lot to have three of us take it up."

Adrienne and Ethel concurring in this opinion,¹³ the three girls promptly marched themselves downstairs to the matron's office to inquire into the matter which had aroused them to take action in Jane Allen's behalf.

Ten minutes later they retired from an interview with Mrs. Weatherbee, more amazed than when they had entered the matron's office. They were also proportionately incensed at the reception with which they had met.

"I think she's too hateful for words!" sputtered Judith, the moment the committee of inquiry had again shut themselves in Ethel's room.

"She might have explained," was Ethel's indignant cry. "I don't believe that Jane's not coming back to Madison Hall."

"Jane *is* coming back to Madison Hall," asserted Judith positively. "She said so in her last letter to me. That is, she spoke of our room and all. If she hadn't intended coming back, she'd have said something about it."

"Of a truth she intended to return to this Hall," coincided Adrienne. "This most hateful Mrs. Weatherbee has perhaps decided thus for herself. Would it not be the humiliating thing for our *pauvre Jeanne* to return and be refused the admittance?"

"That won't happen," decreed Judith grimly.¹⁴

"We're going to the train to meet her, you know. We'll have to tell her the minute she sets foot on the station platform."

"But suppose we find that it's true?" propounded Ethel. "That she doesn't intend to live at the Hall this year? Something might have happened after she wrote you girls to make her change her mind."

"There's only one thing that I know of and I'd hate to think it was that," returned Judith soberly. "You know what I mean, that Jane mightn't care to room with me."

"That is the nonsense," disagreed Adrienne sturdily. "We, who know Jane, know that it could never be thus. But wait, only wait. We shall, no doubt, prove this Mrs. Weatherbee to be the g-r-rand villain."

Adrienne's roll of r's, coupled with her surmise as to the disagreeable matron's villainy, provoked instant mirth.

Downhearted as she was, Judith could not refrain from giggling a little as her quick imagination visualized in stately, white-haired Mrs. Weatherbee the approved stage villain.

"We'll just have to wait and see," declared placid Ethel. "It's after two now. Let's take a bus into Chesterford and see the sights until 5 train time. We'll be on pins and needles every minute if we sit around here."

"I'm going without a hat. I just can't bear to go back to my room for one. I guess you know why," shrugged Judith.

"It is the great shame," sympathized Adrienne. "I am indeed sad that our Dorothy has not returned. She could perhaps learn from Mrs. Weatherbee what we cannot."

"I wish Dorothy *were* here," sighed Judith. "A lot of the girls haven't come back yet. I thought I'd be late, but I'm here early after all. Too bad Norma couldn't come on from New York with you."

"It was most sad." Adrienne rolled her big black eyes. "She has yet one more week with the stock company. *La petite* has done well. She has received many excellent notices. Next summer she will no doubt be the leading woman. She has the heaven-sent talent, even as *ma mère*."

"Alicia Reynolds is back," announced Judith. "I met her coming in with her luggage about an hour ago. She was awfully cordial to me. That means she's still of the same mind as when she left Wellington last June. She's really a very nice girl. I only hope she stays away from Marian Seaton."¹⁶

"Neither Marian nor Maizie Gilbert have come back yet. I wish they'd stay away," came vengefully from Ethel. "With Alicia and Edith Hammond both on their good behavior Madison Hall would get along swimmingly without those two disturbers."

"They'll probably keep to themselves this year," commented Judith grimly. "It's pretty well known here how badly they treated Jane last year and how splendidly she carried herself through it all."

"Oh, the old girls at the Hall won't bother with them, but some of the new girls may," Ethel remarked. "We're to have several new ones."

"There'll be one less new girl if I have anything to say about it," vowed Judith. "If there's been any unfairness done, little Judy will take a prompt hike over to see Miss Rutledge."

"Jane wouldn't like that," demurred Ethel.

"Can't help it. I'd just have to do it," Judith made obstinate reply. "As Jane's roommate I think I've a case of my own. If Jane has chosen to room somewhere else—then, all right. But if she hasn't—if she's been treated shabbily,—as I believe she has been—then I'll go wherever she goes, even if I have to live in a house away off the campus."

CHAPTER III

BAD NEWS

"Oh, girls, it's good to be back!"

Surrounded by a welcoming trio of white-gowned girls, Jane Allen clung affectionately to them.

All along the station platform, bebies of merry-faced, daintily dressed young women were engaged in the joyful occupation of greeting classmates who had arrived on the four o'clock train. Here and there, committees of upper class girls were extending friendly hands to timid freshmen just set down in the outskirts of the land of college.

Stepping down from the train Jane had been instantly seized by her energetic chums and smothered in a triangular embrace. A mist had risen to her gray eyes at the warmth of the welcome. She was, indeed, no longer the lonely outlander.¹⁸ It was all so different from last year and so delightful.

"It's good to have you back, perfectly dear old Jane!" emphasized Judith, giving Jane an extra hug to measure her joy at sight of the girl she adored.

"What happiness!" gurgled Adrienne. "We had the g-r-r-r-eat anxiety for fear that you would perhaps not come on this train."

"Oh, I telegraphed Judy from St. Louis on a venture," laughed Jane. "I knew she'd be here ahead of me."

"Then you did receive my letter," Judith said with satisfaction. "I was afraid you mightn't."

"I didn't answer it because I was coming East so soon," apologized Jane. "I took your advice, though, about the eats. There was a stop over at St. Louis, so I went out and bought a suitcase full of boxed stuff. Maybe it isn't heavy! We'll have a great spread in our room to-night. Who's back, Judy? Have you seen Christine Ellis or Barbara Temple yet? Is Mary Ashton here? I know Dorothy isn't or she'd be here with you."

As Jane rattled off these lively remarks, her three friends exchanged significant eye messages.

"Then—why—you——" stammered Judith, a swift flush rising to her cheeks.¹⁹

"What's the matter, Judy?"

Jane regarded her roommate in puzzled fashion. She wondered at Judith's evident confusion.

"Nothing much. I mean something rather queer." Judith contradicted herself. "Let's take a taxi, girls, and stop at Rutherford Inn for tea. We can talk there."

"But why not go straight to Madison Hall?" queried Jane, in growing perplexity. "I'm anxious to get rid of some of the smoke and dust I've collected on my face and hands. We can have tea and talk in our own room and be all by ourselves."

"I wish we could, Jane, but we must have a talk with you before you go to the Hall," returned Judith, her merry features now grown grave.

"What is it, Judy?"

All the brightness had faded from Jane's face. Her famous scowl now darkened her brow. She cast a quick glance from Adrienne to Ethel. Both girls looked unduly solemn.

"Girls, you're keeping something from me; something unpleasant, of course," Jane accused. "I must know what it is. Please tell me. Don't be afraid of hurting my feelings."

"We're going to tell you, Jane," Judith said reassuringly. "Only we didn't want to say a word until—until we found out something. But this isn't the place to talk. Let's hail the taxi, anyway. Then he can stop at the Inn or not, just as you please. We'll tell you on the way there."

"All right."

Almost mechanically Jane reached down to pick up the suitcase she had placed on the station platform in the first moment of reunion. All the pleasure of coming back to Wellington had been replaced by a sense of deep depression. In spite of the presence of her chums she felt now as she had formerly felt when just a year before she had stood on that same platform, hating with all her sore heart its group of laughing, chatting girls.

"Do not look so cross, *cherie*," Adrienne had slipped a soft hand into Jane's arm. "All will yet be well. Come, I, your Imp, will lead you to the taxicab."

"And I'll help do the leading," declared Judith gaily, taking hold of Jane's free arm. "Ethel, you can walk behind and carry Jane's traveling bag. That will be some little honor."

Knowing precisely how Jane felt, Judith affected a cheeriness she was far from feeling. She heartily wished that she had not been obliged to say a word to rob her roommate of the first joy of meeting.²¹

While traversing the few yards that lay between the station and the point behind it where several taxicabs waited, both she and Adrienne chattered lively commonplaces. Jane, however, had little to say. She was experiencing the dazed sensation of one who has received an unexpected slap in the face.

What had happened? Why had Judy insisted that they must have a talk before going on to the Hall? Surely some very unpleasant news lay in wait for her ears. But what? Jane had not the remotest idea.

"Now, Judy," she began with brusque directness the instant the quartette were seated in the taxicab, "don't keep me in the dark any longer. You must know how—what a queer feeling all this has given me."

Seated in the tonneau of the automobile, between Adrienne and Judith, Jane turned hurt eyes on the latter.

"Jane," began Judith impressively, "before you went home last year did you arrange with Mrs. Weatherbee about your room for this year?"

"Why, yes."

A flash of amazement crossed Jane's face.

"Of course I did," she went on. "Mrs. Weatherbee²² understood that I was coming back to Madison Hall."

"Humph!" ejaculated Judith. "Well, there's just this much about it, Jane. About nine o'clock this morning a little, black-eyed scrap of a freshman marched into my room and said Mrs. Weatherbee had assigned her to the other half of my room. I told her she had made a mistake and come to the wrong room. She said 'no,' that Mrs. Weatherbee had sent the maid to the door with her to show her the way."

"Why, Judy, I don't see how——" began Jane, then suddenly broke off with, "Go on and tell me the rest."

"I didn't like this girl for a cent. Her name is Noble, but it doesn't fit her. She has one of those prying, detestable faces, thin, with a sharp chin, and she hates to look one straight in the face," continued Judith disgustedly. "I went over to see Adrienne and Ethel and told them. Then we all went downstairs to interview Mrs. Weatherbee. She said you weren't coming back to Madison Hall this year."

"Not coming back to Madison Hall!" exclaimed Jane, her scowl now in fierce evidence. "Did *she* say it in just those words?"

"She certainly did," responded Judith. "I²³ told her that I was sure that you were and she simply froze up and gave me one of those Arctic-circle stares. All she said was, 'I am surprised at you, Miss Stearns. I am not in the habit of making incorrect statements.' Adrienne started to ask her when you had given up your room and she cut her off with: 'Young ladies, the subject is closed.' So that's all we know about it, and I guess you don't know any more of it than we do."

"So *that* was why you didn't want me to go on to the Hall until I knew," Jane said slowly. "Well, I know now, and I'm going straight there. Mrs. Weatherbee has never liked me. Still it's a rather high-handed proceeding on her part, I think."

"If she did it of her own accord, I don't see how she dared. I'm not going to stand for it. That's all," burst out Judith hotly. "Miss Howard won't either. As registrar she'll have something to say, I guess. If she doesn't, then on to Miss Rutledge. That's going to be my motto. I won't have that girl in your place, Jane. I *won't*."

"I won't let her stay there if I can help it," was Jane's decided answer. "I'd rather the affair would be between Mrs. Weatherbee and me, though. If she has done this from prejudice, I'll²⁴ fight for my rights. It won't be the first time she and I have had words. It seems hard to believe that a woman of her age and position could be so contemptible."

"That's what I thought," agreed Judith. "Well, we'll soon know. Here we are at the edge of the campus. Doesn't old Wellington look fine, though, Jane?"

Jane merely nodded. She could not trust herself to speak. The gently rolling green of the wide campus had suddenly burst upon her view. Back among the trees, Wellington Hall lifted its massive gray pile, lording it in splendid grandeur over the buildings of lesser magnitude that dotted the living green.

She had longed for a sight of it all. It was as though she had suddenly come upon a dear friend. For a moment the perplexities of the situation confronting her faded away as her gray eyes wandered from one familiar point on the campus to another.

"It's wonderful, Judy," she said softly, her tones quite steady. "Even with this horrid tangle staring me in the face I can't help being glad to see Wellington again. Somehow, I can't help feeling that there's been a mistake made. I don't want to pass through the gates of Wellington²⁵ with my heart full of distrust of anyone."

"You're a dear, Jane!" was Judith's impulsive tribute. "Adrienne says Mrs. Weatherbee may turn out to be 'the grand villain.' Let's hope she won't. Anyway, if things can't be adjusted, wherever you go to live I'll go, too. I won't stay at the Hall without you."

"Thank you, Judy." Jane found Judith's hand and squeezed it hard. She had inwardly determined, however, that her roommate should not make any such sacrifice. It would be hard to find a room anywhere on the campus to take the place of the one the two had occupied at Madison Hall during their freshman year.

"I'm glad there's no one on the veranda," presently commented Jane.

Having dismissed the taxicab, the three girls were now ascending the steps of the Hall.

"Better wait here for me, girls, I'd rather have it out with Mrs. Weatherbee alone," she counseled. "I hope I sha'n't lose my temper," she added ruefully.

Mentally bracing herself for the interview, Jane crossed the threshold of the Hall and walked serenely past the living-room to the matron's office just behind it. She was keeping a tight grip on herself and intended to keep it, if possible.²⁶ She knew from past experience how greatly Mrs. Weatherbee's calm superiority of manner had been wont to irritate her.

Jane loathed the idea of having a dispute with the matron the moment she entered Madison Hall. She had begun the first day of her freshman year in such fashion. Afterward it had seemed to her that most of the others had been stormy, as a consequence of a wrong start.

She reflected as she walked slowly down the hall that this new trouble, was, at least, not of her making. She had the comforting knowledge that this time she was not at fault.

CHAPTER IV

THE REASON WHY

Primed for the momentous interview, Jane was doomed to disappointment. The matron's office was empty of its usual occupant.

"Oh, bother!" was her impatient exclamation. "I'll either have to wait for her or go and find her. I'll go back to the veranda and tell the girls," she decided. "Then I'll come here again. Mrs. Weatherbee may not be in the Hall for all I know."

"Back so soon. What did she say?"

Judith sprang eagerly from the wicker chair in which she had been lounging.

"She is not there," returned Jane with a shadow of a frown. "I'm sorry. I wanted to see her and get it over with. Where's Ethel?"

"Oh, she forgot that she had an appointment²⁸ with Miss Howard. She rushed off in a hurry."

"Mrs. Weatherbee has perhaps gone to make the call," suggested Adrienne. "Why do you not ring the bell and thus summon the maid?"

"A good idea."

Standing near the door, Jane's fingers found the electric bell and pressed it.

"Where is Mrs. Weatherbee?" she inquired of the maid who presently came to answer the door. "Isn't Millie here any more?" she added, noting that a stranger occupied the place of the good-natured girl who had been at the Hall during Jane's freshman year.

"No, miss. She's gone and got married. Did you want Mrs. Weatherbee? She's upstairs. I'll go and find her for you."

"Thank you. If you will be so kind. Please tell her Miss Allen wishes to see her."

Disturbed in mind, though she was, Jane replied with a graciousness she never forgot to employ in speaking to those in more humble circumstances than herself. It was a part of the creed her democratic father had taught her and she tried to live up to it.

"Wish me luck, girls, I'm going to my fate. Wait for me," she said lightly and vanished into the house.²⁹

"She's taking it like a brick," Judith admiringly commented.

"Ah, yes. Jane is what *mon père* would call 'the good sport,'" agreed Adrienne. "She is the strange girl; sometimes fierce like the lion over the small troubles. When come the great misfortunes she has calm courage."

Re-entering Mrs. Weatherbee's office, Jane seated herself resignedly to wait for the appearance of the matron. When fifteen minutes had passed and she was still waiting, the stock of "calm courage" attributed to her by Adrienne, began to dwindle into nettled impatience.

She now wished that she had not given her name to the maid. It looked as if Mrs. Weatherbee were purposely keeping her waiting. This thought stirred afresh in Jane the old antagonism that the matron had always aroused.

After half an hour had dragged by Jane heard footsteps descending the stairs to the accompaniment of the faint rustle of silken skirts. She sat suddenly very straight in her chair, her mood anything but lamb-like.

"Good afternoon, Miss Allen," greeted a cool voice.

Mrs. Weatherbee rustled into the little office,³⁰ injured dignity written on every feature of her austere face.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Weatherbee."

Courtesy to an older woman prompted Jane to rise. Her tone, however, was one of strained politeness. There was no move made toward handshaking by either.

"I was greatly surprised to learn that *you* wished to see me, Miss Allen," was the matron's first remark after seating herself in the chair before her writing desk.

Mrs. Weatherbee's intonations were decidedly accusing. Jane colored at the emphasis placed on the "you."

"Why should you be surprised?" she flashed back, an angry glint in her gray eyes. Already her good resolutions were poised for flight.

"I am even more surprised at the boldness of your question. I consider it as being in extremely bad taste."

"And I am surprised at the way I have been treated!" Jane cried out passionately, her last remnant of patience exhausted. "I understand that you have seen fit to ignore the arrangement I made with you last June about my room. Miss Stearns has informed me that you have given it to an entering freshman. It's the most unfair³¹ proceeding I've ever known, and I shall not submit to such injustice."

This was not in the least what Jane had purposed to say. She had intended to broach the subject on the diplomatic basis of a mistake having been made. She realized that she had thrown down the gauntlet with a vengeance, but she was now too angry to care.

"*Miss Allen!*" The older woman's expression was one of intense severity. "Such insolence on your part is not only unbecoming but entirely uncalled for. You appear to have forgotten that you gave up your room of your own accord. I reserved it for you until I received your letter of last week."

"Of my *own accord!*" gasped Jane, unable to believe she had heard aright. "My letter of last week! I don't understand."

"I am at a loss to understand *you*," acidly retorted the matron. "I know of only one possible explanation for your call upon me this afternoon. I should prefer not to make it. It would hardly reflect to your credit."

"I must ask you to explain," insisted Jane haughtily. "We have evidently been talking at cross purposes. You say that I gave up my room of my own accord. You mention a letter I wrote³²

you. I have *not* given up my room. I have *never* written you a letter. You owe me an explanation. No matter how unpleasant it may be, I am not afraid to listen to it."

"Very well," was the icy response. "Since you insist I will say plainly that it appears, even after writing me a most discourteous letter, you must have decided, for reasons of your own, to ignore this fact and return to Madison Hall. Not reckoning that your room would naturally be assigned to another girl so soon, you were bold enough to come here and attempt to carry your point with a high hand. I am quite sure you now understand me."

"I do not," came the vehement denial. "I repeat that I never wrote you a letter. If you received one signed by me, it was certainly not I who wrote it. I am not surprised at your unfair opinion of me. You have never liked me. Naturally you could not understand me. I will ask you to let me see the letter."

Mrs. Weatherbee's reply was not made in words. Reaching into a pigeon-hole of her desk she took from it a folded letter minus its envelope and handed it to Jane.

Her head in a whirl, Jane unfolded it and read:33

"Mrs. Ellen Weatherbee,
"Madison Hall,
"Wellington Campus.

"Dear Madam:

"Although I regret leaving Madison Hall, it would be highly disagreeable to me to spend my sophomore year in it with you as matron. Your treatment of me last year was such that I should not like to court a second repetition of it. Therefore I am writing to inform you that I shall not return to the Hall.

"Yours truly,

"Jane Allen."

CHAPTER V

THE UNKNOWN MISCHIEF MAKER

"This is too dreadful!"

Springing to her feet, Jane dashed the offending letter to the floor, her cheeks scarlet with outraged innocence.

"That was precisely my opinion when I read it," Mrs. Weatherbee sarcastically agreed.

"But I never wrote it," stormed Jane. "That's not my signature. Besides the letter is typed. I would never have sent you a typed letter. Have you the envelope? What postmark was stamped upon it?"

"It was postmarked 'New York.' No, I did not keep the envelope."

"New York? Why, I came straight from Montana!" cried Jane. "I haven't been in New York since last Christmas."

"I could not possibly know that. A letter³⁵ could be forwarded even from Montana to New York for mailing," reminded the matron with satirical significance.

"Then you still believe that I wrote *this*?"

Jane's voice was freighted with hurt pride. Something in the girl's scornful, fearless, gray eyes, looking her through and through, brought a faint flush to the matron's set face. The possibility that Jane's protest was honest had reluctantly forced itself upon her. She was not specially anxious to admit Jane's innocence, though she was now half convinced of it.

"I hardly know what to believe," she said curtly. "Your denial of the authorship of this letter seems sincere. I should naturally prefer to believe that you did not write it."

"I give you my word of honor as a Wellington girl that I did *not*," Jane answered impressively. "I cannot blame you for resenting it. It is most discourteous. I should be sorry to believe myself capable of such rudeness."

"I will accept your statement," Mrs. Weatherbee stiffly conceded. "However, the fact remains that *someone* wrote and mailed this letter to me. There is but one inference to be drawn from it."

She paused and stared hard at Jane.

Without replying, Jane again perused the³⁶ fateful letter. As she finished a second reading of it, a bitter smile dawned upon her mobile lips.

"Yes," she said heavily. "There is just one inference to be drawn from it—spite work. I had no idea that it would be carried to this length, though."

"Then you suspect a particular person as having written it?" sharply inquired the matron.

"I do," came the steady response. "I know of but one, perhaps two persons, who might have done so. I am fairly sure that it lies between the two."

"It naturally follows then that the person or persons you suspect are students at Wellington," commented the matron. "This is a matter that would scarcely concern outsiders. More, we may go further and narrow the circle down to Madison Hall."

Jane received this pointed surmise in absolute silence.

"There is this much about it, Miss Allen," the older woman continued after a brief pause, "I will not have under my charge a girl who would stoop to such a contemptible act against a sister student. I must ask you to tell me frankly if your suspicions point to anyone under this roof."

"I can't answer that question, Mrs. Weatherbee.³⁷ I mean I don't wish to answer it. Even if I knew positively who had done this, I'd be silent about it. It's my way of looking at it and I can't change. I'd rather drop the whole matter. It's hard, of course, to give up my room here and go somewhere else. I love Madison Hall and——"

Jane came to an abrupt stop. She was determined not to break down, yet she was very near to it.

"My dear child, you need not leave Madison Hall unless you wish to do so." Mrs. Weatherbee's frigidity had miraculously vanished. A gleam of kindly purpose had appeared in her eyes.

For the first time since her acquaintance with Jane Allen she found something to admire. For the sake of a principle, this complex, self-willed girl, of whom she had ever disapproved, was willing to suffer injury in silence. The fact that Jane had refused to answer her question lost significance when compared with the motive which had prompted refusal.

"You might easily accuse me of unfairness if I allowed matters to remain as they are," pursued the matron energetically. "As the injured party you have first right to your old room.³⁸ Miss Noble, the young woman now occupying it with Miss Stearns, applied for a room here by letter on the very next day after I received this letter, supposedly from you.

"I wrote her that I had a vacancy here and asked for references. These she forwarded immediately. As it happens I have another unexpected vacancy here due to the failure of a new girl to pass her entrance examinations. Miss Noble will no doubt be quite willing to take the other room. At all events, you shall have your own again."

"I can't begin to tell you how much I thank you, Mrs. Weatherbee." Jane's somber face had lightened into radiant gratitude. "But I *can* tell you that I'm sorry for my part in any misunderstandings we've had in the past. I don't feel about college now as I did last year."

Carried away by her warm appreciation of the matron's unlooked-for stand in her behalf, Jane found herself telling Mrs. Weatherbee of her pre-conceived hatred of college and of her gradual awakening to a genuine love for Wellington.

Of the personal injuries done her by others she said nothing. Her little outpouring had to do only with her own struggle for spiritual growth.³⁹

"It was Dorothy Martin who first showed me the way," she explained. "She made me see myself as a pioneer, and college as a new country. She told me that it depended entirely on me whether or not my freshman claim turned out well. It took me a long time to see that. This year I want to be a better pioneer than I was last. That's why I'd rather not start out by getting someone else into trouble, no matter how much that person is at fault."

During the earnest recital, the matron's stern features had perceptibly softened. She was reflecting that, after all, one person was never free to judge another. That human nature was in itself far too complex to be lightly judged by outward appearances.

"You know the old saying, 'Out of evil some good is sure to come,'" she said, when Jane ceased speaking. "This affair of the letter has already produced one good result. I feel that I am beginning to know the real Jane Allen. You were right in saying that I never understood you. Perhaps I did not try. I don't know. You were rather different from any other girl whom I ever had before under my charge here."

"I kept up the bars," confessed Jane ruefully. "I didn't wish to see things from any standpoint⁴⁰ except my own. I'm trying to break myself of that. I can't honestly say that I have, as yet. I shall probably have a good many fights with myself about it this year. It's not easy to make one's self over in a day or a month or a year. It takes time. That's why I like college so much now. It's helping me to find myself.

"But that's enough about myself." Jane made a little conclusive gesture. "I hope there won't be any—well—any unpleasantness about my room, Mrs. Weatherbee. I'd almost rather take that other vacancy than make trouble for you."

"There will be no trouble," was the decisive assurance. "If Miss Noble objects to the change there are other campus houses open to her. I see no reason why she should. She only arrived this morning. She will not be kept waiting for the room. The girl who failed in her examinations left here at noon. I will see about it now."

Mrs. Weatherbee rose to put her promise into immediate effect.

"If you don't mind, I'll join Judith and Adrienne on the veranda. I am anxious to tell them the good news," eagerly declared Jane, now on her feet.⁴¹

Glancing at the disturbing letter which she held she handed it to Mrs. Weatherbee with: "What shall you do about this letter?"

"Since the star witness in the case refuses to give testimony, it is hard to decide what to do," smiled the matron. "I might hand the letter to Miss Rutledge, yet I prefer not to do so. It is purely a personal matter. Suppose I were to prosecute an inquiry here at the Hall regarding it. It would yield nothing but indignant protests of innocence. If the writer were one of my girls she would perhaps be loudest in her protests."

Though Jane did not say so, she was of the private opinion that the person she suspected would undoubtedly do that very thing.

"A girl who would write such a letter would be the last to own to writing it," she said dryly.

"Very true. Still things sometimes work out unexpectedly. If we have a mischief maker here, we may eventually discover her. Girls of this type often overreach themselves and thus establish their guilt. I shall not forget this affair." The matron's voice grew stern. "If ever I do discover the writer, she will not be allowed to remain at Madison Hall."

CHAPTER VI

THE PLOT THICKENS

"And Mrs. Weatherbee's gone to oust the disturber of our peace! Oh, joy!"

To emphasize further her satisfaction Judith gave Jane an ecstatic hug.

"You can't be any gladder than I am."

Jane returned the hug with interest.

"But how did it thus happen so beautifully?" questioned Adrienne eagerly.

"It was a mistake——No, it wasn't either. It was——"

Jane paused. She wondered if she had the right to put her friends in possession of what she had so lately learned. Mrs. Weatherbee had not enjoined silence. Adrienne and Judith were absolutely trustworthy. They had forewarned her of the situation. It was only fair that they should be taken into her confidence.⁴³

"I've something to tell you girls," she went on slowly. "You must wait to hear it until we are in our room. I'd rather not go into it out here on the veranda."

"All right. We'll be good. I hope the noble Miss Noble will hurry up and move out," wished Judith. "I can imagine how delighted she'll be."

"She may care but little," shrugged Adrienne. "Of a truth, she has not been here so long. But a few hours! It is not much!"

"I don't believe she'll relish it a bit," prophesied Judith. "She looks to me like one of those persons who get peeved over nothing. Isn't it funny, though? Mrs. Weatherbee made a mistake last year about your room, Jane. Do you remember how haughty you were when you found out you were to room with little Judy?"

"Yes. I was a big goose, wasn't I?" Jane smiled reminiscently. "It wasn't Mrs. Weatherbee's fault this time. That's all I'll say until we three go upstairs."

"Wish she'd hurry," grumbled Judith, referring to the usurping freshman. "This evacuation business isn't going along very speedily. I wonder if she's unpacked. She hadn't touched her suitcase when I left her. Her trunk hadn't come yet. Maybe it came while we were out.⁴⁴ I hope not. Then there'll be that much less to move."

"Had this Miss Noble examinations to take?" asked Jane.

"No, she told me she was graduated from a prep school last June. Burleigh, I think she said. I really didn't listen much to her. I was so upset over having her thrust upon me, I didn't want to talk to her."

"Poor Judy."

Jane bestowed a sympathizing pat upon Judith's arm.

"All the time I was thinking 'poor Jane,'" laughed Judith. "Oh, dear! Why doesn't Mrs. Weatherbee come back. I'm crazy to hear the weird story of your wrongs, Janie."

It was at least fifteen minutes afterward before the matron descended the stairs, looking far from pleased.

Watching for her, Jane stepped inside the house and met her at the foot of the stairs.

"You may move in as soon as you please, Miss Allen," she informed Jane, her annoyed expression vanishing in a friendly smile.

"Thank you. I sha'n't lose any time in doing it."

Jane returned the smile, thinking in the same⁴⁵ moment that it seemed rather odd but decidedly nice to be on such pleasant terms with the woman she had once thoroughly disliked.

"Did you notice how vexed Mrs. Weatherbee looked when she came downstairs?" was Judith's remark as the door of her room closed behind them. "I'll bet she had her own troubles with the usurper."

"First the disturber, then the usurper. You have, indeed, many names for this one poor girl," giggled Adrienne.

"Oh, I can think of a lot more," grinned Judith. "But what's the use. She has departed bag and baggage. To quote your own self, 'It is sufficient.' Now go ahead, Jane, and spin your yarn."

"It's no yarn. It's sober truth. You understand. I'm speaking in strict confidence."

With this foreword, Jane acquainted the two girls with what had taken place in the matron's office.

"Hm!" sniffed Judith as Jane finished. "She's begun rather early in the year, hasn't she?"

"I see we're of the same mind, Judy," Jane said quietly.

"I, too, am of that same mind," broke in Adrienne.⁴⁶ "I will say to you now most plainly that it was Marian Seaton who wrote the letter."

"Of course she wrote it," emphasized Judith fiercely. "It's the most outrageous thing I ever heard of. You ought to have told Mrs. Weatherbee, Jane. Why should you shield a girl who is trying to injure you?"

"I could only have said that I *suspected* her of writing the letter," Jane pointed out. "I have no proof that she wrote it. Besides, I didn't care to start my sophomore year that way. When I have anything to say about Marian Seaton, I'll say it to her. I'm going to steer clear of her if I can. If I can't, then she and I will have to come to an understanding one of these days. I'd rather ignore her, unless I find that I can't."

"You're a queer girl," was Judith's half-vexed opinion. "I think, if I were in your place, I'd begin at the beginning and tell Mrs. Weatherbee every single thing about last year. I'd tell her I was *positive* Marian Seaton wrote that letter. She'd be angry enough to tax Marian with it, even though she made quite a lot of Marian and Maizie Gilbert last year. If Marian got scared and confessed—good night! She'd have to leave Madison Hall. We'd all be better off on account of it."⁴⁷

"No, *ma chere* Judy, you are in that quite wrong," disagreed Adrienne. "This Marian would never make the confession. Instead she would make the great fuss. She would, of a truth, say that Jane had made the plot to injure her. She is most clever in such matters."

"I'm not afraid of anything she might say," frowned Jane. "I simply don't care to bother any more about it. I have my half of this room back and that's all that really matters. If Marian Seaton thinks——"

The sudden opening of the door cut Jane's speech in two. Three surprised pairs of eyes rested on a sharp-chinned, black-eyed girl who had unceremoniously marched into their midst. Face and bearing both indicated signs of active hostility.

"Did I hear you mention Marian Seaton's name?" she sharply inquired of Jane.

"You did."

Jane gazed levelly at the angry newcomer.

"Which of these two girls is Miss Allen?"

This question was rudely addressed to Judith, whose good-natured face showed evident disgust of the interrogator.

"I am Jane Allen. Why do you ask?"

Jane spoke with curt directness.⁴⁸

"I supposed that you were." The girl smiled scornfully. "I only wished to make sure before telling you my opinion of you. It did not surprise me to learn that it was *you* who turned me out of my room. I had already been warned against you by my cousin, Marian Seaton. No doubt you've been saying spiteful things about her. I know just how shabbily you treated her last year. If she had been here to-day, you wouldn't have been allowed to take my room away from me. She has more influence at Wellington than you have. She will be here soon and then we'll see what will happen. That's all except that you are a selfish, hateful troublemaker."

With every word she uttered the black-eyed girl's voice had risen. Overmastered by anger she fairly screamed the final sentence of her arraignment. Then she turned and bolted from the room, leaving behind her a dumbfounded trio of young women.

"Brr!" ejaculated Judith. "What do you think of that? I'm sure I could have heard that last shriek, if I'd been away over on the campus. Marian Seaton's cousin! Think what Judy escaped!"

"You are very funny, Judy," giggled Adrienne.⁴⁹ "And that girl! How little repose; what noise!"

"Yes, 'what noise,'" Judith echoed the giggle. "Really, girls, am I awake or do I dream? First a strange and awful girl comes walking in on me. Then I learn the pleasant news that Jane's deserted me. Along comes Jane, who doesn't know she's lost her home. Enter Marian Seaton as a letter writer. Result Jane and Mrs. Weatherbee become bosom friends. Jane is vindicated and her rights restored. Right in the middle of a happy reunion in bounces the tempestuous Miss Noble. Quite a little like a nightmare, isn't it?"

"It has the likeness to the movie plot," asserted Adrienne mirthfully. "Very thrilling and much mixed."

"I never dreamed coming back to Wellington would be like this."

Jane smiled. Nevertheless the words came with a touch of sadness.

"Don't let it worry you, Jane," counseled Judith. "I was only fooling when I said this afternoon had been like a nightmare. You may not have another like this the whole year. Things always happen in bunches, you know. I move that we re-beautify our charming selves and go down to the veranda. We'll be on hand⁵⁰ if any of the girls arrive. There's a train from the east at five-thirty. Dorothy may be on that."

"I hope she is," sighed Jane.

Mention of Dorothy Martin made Jane long for a sight of the gentle, whole-souled girl whom she so greatly loved and admired.

"Go ahead, Jane, and change your gown. I'll unpack your bag for you," offered Judith. "Beloved Imp here may help, if she's very good."

"Thank you, Judy."

Jane began an absent unfastening of her pongee traveling gown, preparatory to bathing her throat, face and hands, dusty from the journey.

While her two friends laughed and chattered as they unpacked her bag, she gave herself up to somber reflection. The events of the afternoon had left her with a feeling of heavy depression. Why, when she desired so earnestly to do well and be happy, must the ancient enmity of Marian Seaton be dragged into her very first day at Wellington. Was this a forerunner of what the rest of her sophomore days were destined to be?

CHAPTER VII

AN UNPLEASANT TABLEMATE

Despite the unpropitious events of the afternoon, evening saw a merry little party in full swing in Judith's and Jane's room.

Barbara Temple and Christine Ellis came over from Argyle Hall. The five-thirty train had brought not only Dorothy Martin but Mary Ashton as well. Eight o'clock saw them calling on Judith and Jane, along with Adrienne and Ethel. Of the old clan, Norma Bennett alone was absent, a loss which was loudly lamented by all.

So swiftly did time fly that the party ended in a mad scurry to comply with the inexorable half-past ten o'clock rule.

Jane went to bed that night considerably lighter of heart. Reunion with the girls who⁵² were nearest to her had driven the afternoon's unpleasantness from her thoughts, for the time being at least. The friendly presence of those she loved had proved a powerful antidote.

A night's sound sleep served to separate her further from the disagreeable incidents of the previous day. She had two things, at least, to be glad of, she reflected, as she dressed next morning. She was back in her own room. More, she now stood on an entirely different footing with Mrs. Weatherbee than heretofore.

This last was brought home to her more strongly than ever when, in going down to breakfast, she passed the matron on her way to the dining-room and received a smiling "Good morning, Miss Allen."

It was at decided variance with the reserved manner in which Mrs. Weatherbee had formerly been wont to greet her.

"Well, we are once again at the same table," remarked Adrienne as Jane slipped into the place at table she had occupied during her freshman year. "Until last night I ate the meals alone. It was *triste*."

Adrienne's profound air of melancholy made both Jane and Dorothy laugh.

"What made you come back to college so⁵³ early, dear Imp?" questioned Dorothy, smiling indulgently at the little girl.

"I had the longing to see the girls," Adrienne replied simply. "This past summer I have greatly missed all of you."

"We've all missed one another, I guess," Jane said soberly. "Often out on the ranch I've wished you could all be with me. Next summer you must come. I'm going to give a house party."

"What rapture!" Adrienne clasped her small hands. "I, for one, will accept the invitation, and now."

Somewhat to Jane's surprise Dorothy said not a word. She merely stared at Jane, a curiously wistful expression in her gray eyes.

"Don't you want to come to my house party, Dorothy?"

Though the question was playfully asked it held a hint of pained surprise.

"Of course I'd like to come. I will—if I can." This last was added with a little sigh. "Did you bring Firefly East with you, this year, Jane?" she inquired with abrupt irrelevance.

"Yes. Pedro started East ahead of me with Firefly. They haven't arrived yet. Are you going to ride this year, Dorothy?"⁵⁴

Jane was wondering what had occasioned in Dorothy this new, wistful mood. It was entirely unlike her usual blithe, care-free self.

"I'm afraid not." The shadow on Dorothy's fine face had deepened. "Frankly, I can't afford to keep a riding horse here. I don't mind telling just you two that it was a question with me as to whether I ought to come back to college. We were never rich, you know, just in comfortable circumstances. This summer Father met with financial losses and we're almost poor. Both Father and Mother were determined that I should come back to Wellington on account of it being my last year. So I'm here. I've not brought any new clothes with me, though, and I shall have to be very economical."

Dorothy smiled bravely as she made this frank confession.

"Who cares whether your clothes are new or old, Dorothy?" came impulsively from Jane. "It's having you here that counts. Nothing else matters. I'm ever so sorry that your father has met with such misfortune."

"Ah, yes! I too, have the sorrow that such bad luck has come to your father. *We* are the lucky ones, because you have come back to us," Adrienne agreed impressively.⁵⁵

"You're dears, both of you. Shake hands."

Her eyes eloquent with affection, Dorothy's hand went out to Jane, then to Adrienne.

"We try to be like you, *ma chere*," was Adrienne's graceful response.

"That's very pretty, Imp," acknowledged Dorothy, flushing. "I'll have to watch my step to merit that compliment. Now that you've heard the sad story of the poverty-stricken senior, I call for a change of subject. Did you know that Edith Hammond isn't coming back?"

"She isn't!"

Jane looked her surprise at this unexpected bit of news.

"No. Edith is going to be married," Dorothy informed. "She was heart-whole and fancy-free when she left here last June. Then she went with her family to the Catskills for the summer. She met her fate there; a young civil engineer. They're to be married in November. She wrote me a long letter right after she became betrothed. Later I received a card announcing her engagement."

"I hope she'll be very happy," Jane spoke with evident sincerity. "I'm so glad we grew to be friendly before college closed last June. It was awfully awkward and embarrassing for⁵⁶ us when we had to sit opposite each other at this table three times a day without speaking."

Tardy recollection of the fact that there had also been a time when the wires of communication were down between herself and Dorothy, caused a tide of red to mount upward to Jane's forehead.

The eyes of the two girls meeting, both smiled. Each read the other's thoughts. Such a catastrophe would not occur again.

"I wonder how many new girls there will be at the Hall," Dorothy glanced curiously about the partially filled dining-room. "Let me see. We had four graduates from Madison. Edith isn't coming back. That makes five vacancies to be filled. Do you know of any others?"

The approach of a maid with a heavily laden breakfast tray, left the question unanswered for the moment.

"You forget, *la petite*," reminded Adrienne as she liberally sugared her sliced peaches. "She will no longer live at the top of the house. She has already made the arrangements to room with Mary Ashton. So there are but four vacancies. I would greatly adore to be with my Norma, but Ethel is the good little roommate. I am satisfied."⁵⁷

Adrienne dismissed the subject with a wave of her hand.

"Norma can have Edith's place at our table," suggested Dorothy. "That will be nice. I'll speak to Mrs. Weatherbee about it right after breakfast."

"Perhaps we should not wait until then."

Adrienne half rose from her chair. Noting that the matron's place at another table was vacant she sat down again.

"Here she comes now!"

Jane followed her announcement with a muffled "Oh!" Mrs. Weatherbee was advancing toward their table and not alone. Behind her walked the aggressive Miss Noble.

"Miss Noble, this is Miss Martin." The matron placidly proceeded with the introductions and rustled off, unconscious that she had precipitated a difficult situation. Her mind occupied

with other matters, she had failed to note the stiff little bows exchanged by three of the quartette.

It had not been lost upon Dorothy, however. Greeting the newcomer in her usual gracious fashion, she wondered what ailed Jane and Adrienne.

"Have you examinations to try, Miss Noble?" she asked pleasantly, by way of shattering the frigid silence that had settled down on three of the group.

"No, indeed." The girl tossed her black head. "*I am from Burleigh.*"

"Oh! A prep school, I suppose?" Dorothy inquired politely. The name was unfamiliar to her.

"One of the most exclusive in the Middle West," was the prompt answer, given with a touch of arrogance. "I must say, Wellington doesn't compare very favorably with it in *my* opinion."

A faint sparkle of resentment lit the wide gray eyes Dorothy turned squarely on the freshman.

"That's rather hard on Wellington," she said evenly. "I hope you will change your mind after you've been with us a while."

"I hardly expect that I shall, judging from what I've already seen of it. That is, if Madison Hall furnishes a sample of the rest of the college."

Turning petulantly to the maid who had come up to attend to her wants she ordered sharply:

"Bring me my breakfast at once. I am in a hurry."

A dead silence ensued as the maid walked away. Signally vexed at the stranger's disparaging remarks, Dorothy had no inclination to court a fresh volley.

Jane and Adrienne were equally attacked by dumbness. They were devoting themselves to breakfast as if in a hurry to be through with it.

"I didn't intend to speak to you ever again," the disgruntled freshman suddenly addressed herself to Jane. "I suppose you think it's queer in me to sit down at the same table with you after what I told you yesterday. I was going to refuse, then I decided I had a perfect right to sit here if I chose. If you don't like it you can sit somewhere else."

"Thank you. I am quite satisfied with this table." Jane's reply quivered with sarcasm. "I sat here at meals last year. I have no intention of making a change."

"It is, of a truth, most sad, that we cannot oblige you," Adrienne cut into the conversation, her elfish black eyes snapping. "It is not necessary, however, that we should say more about it. We are here. We shall continue to be here. It is sufficient."

She made a sweeping gesture as if to brush the offensive Miss Noble off the face of the earth.

The latter simply stared at the angry little girl for a moment, too much amazed to make reply. Adrienne's calm ultimatum rather staggered her.

Too courteous to show open amusement of the situation, Dorothy resorted to flight. With a hasty "Excuse me" she rose and left the table. Jane and Adrienne instantly followed suit, leaving the quarrelsome freshman alone in her glory.

Straight toward the living-room Dorothy headed, her friends at her heels. Dropping down on the davenport she broke into subdued laughter.

"You naughty Imp," she gasped. "I know I oughtn't laugh, but you were so funny. Wasn't she, Jane?"

"Yes." Jane was now smiling in sympathy with Dorothy's mirth. A moment earlier she had been scowling fiercely.

"What's the answer, Jane?"

Dorothy's laughter had merged into sudden seriousness.

"Marian Seaton's cousin," returned Jane briefly. "I didn't intend to mention it," she continued, "but under the circumstances I think you ought to know the truth."

Briefly Jane acquainted Dorothy with the situation.

"The whole affair is contemptible," Dorothy's intonation indicated strong disapproval of the cowardly attempt to deprive Jane of her room.

"It looks as though Marian were guilty," she continued speculatively. "She's the only one at Wellington, I believe, who would do you a bad turn."

"You forget Maizie Gilbert," shrugged Jane.

"Oh, Maizie, left to herself, would never be dangerous. She's too lazy to be vengeful. She only follows Marian's lead."

"This Marian well knew that with Mrs. Weatherbee Jane could not agree," asserted Adrienne. "She had the opinion that when Jane arrived here Mrs. Weatherbee would listen to nothing she might say. So she had the mistaken opinion."

"Mrs. Weatherbee always means to be just," defended Dorothy. "She has rather prim ideas about things, but she's a stickler for principle. I am glad she's over her prejudice against you, Jane."

"So am I," nodded Jane. "About this whole affair, Dorothy, I don't intend to worry any more. I'm going to be too busy trying to be a good sophomore pioneer to trouble myself with either Marian Seaton or her cousin. Nothing that she did last year to try to injure me⁶² succeeded. As long as I plod straight ahead and keep right with myself I've nothing to fear from her."

CHAPTER VIII

A HAPPY THOUGHT

During the week that followed Jane became too fully occupied with settling down in college to trouble herself further about Marian Seaton. Neither the latter nor Maizie Gilbert had as yet returned to Wellington, a fact which caused Jane no regret.

She did not doubt that as soon as Marian put in an appearance she would hear a garbled tale of woe from her belligerent cousin. Whether Marian would take up the cudgels in her cousin's defense was another matter.

Firm in her belief that Marian had written the disquieting letter, Jane was fairly sure that the former's guilty conscience would warn her against making a protest to Mrs. Weatherbee that her cousin had been shabbily treated.

As it happened she was quite correct in her surmise. When, late one afternoon at the end of the week, Marian and Maizie Gilbert arrived at Madison Hall they were treated to a sight that disturbed them considerably.

To a casual observer there was nothing strange in the sight of two white-gowned girls seated in the big porch swing, apparently well pleased with each other's society. To Marian Seaton, however, it represented the defeat of a carefully laid scheme. Sight of Jane Allen, calmly ensconced in the swing and actually laughing at something Adrienne Dupree was relating with many gestures, filled Marian Seaton with sullen rage, not unmixed with craven fear.

"*What* do you think of that?" she muttered to Maizie as the driver of the taxicab brought the machine to a slow stop on the drive. "I never expected to see *her* here."

"Maybe Mrs. Weatherbee didn't receive it," returned Maizie in equally guarded tones.

"Something's gone wrong," was the cross surmise. "Watch yourself, Maiz, when you talk, to Mrs. Weatherbee."

"Oh, she couldn't possibly know," assured Maizie. "This Allen snip has just managed to have her own way. You know what a hurricane she is when she gets started."⁶⁵

"Just the same you'd better be on your guard," warned Marian.

"Madison Hall, miss."

The driver was impatiently addressing Marian. Deep in considering the unwelcome state of affairs revealed by Jane's presence on the veranda, neither girl had made any move to alight.

"Oh, keep quiet!" exclaimed Marian rudely. "We'll get out when we are ready."

"Charge you more if you keep me waiting," retorted the man. "Time's money to me."

This threat resulted in the hasty exit of both girls from the machine. Provided with plenty of spending money, Marian thriftily endeavored always to obtain the greatest possible return for the least expenditure.

As the luggage-laden pair ascended the steps, some hidden force drew Marian's unwilling gaze to the porch swing. A quick, guilty flush dyed her cheeks as her pale blue eyes met the steady, inscrutable stare of Jane's gray ones.

Immediately she looked away. She could not fathom the meaning of that calm, penetrating glance.

In consequence Marian could not know that Jane had been seeking confirmation of a certain private belief, which the former's guilty confusion had supplied.

"Do you think she's found out anything?" Marian asked nervously of Maizie, the instant they had entered the house.

"Mercy, no. If she had she'd have glowered at you," reassured Maizie. "She just looked at you as though you were a stranger. You needn't be afraid of *her*. She's too stupid to put two and two together."

"She must know about the letter, though. What I can't see is how she managed to stick here in spite of it. Every room here was spoken for last June. Mrs. Weatherbee told me so. I'll bet Elsie's had to go to another campus house. It's a shame! That letter was meant to do two things. Get Jane Allen out of the Hall and Elsie in. Don't stop to talk with old Weatherbee, Maizie," was Marian's injunction. "We'll just say 'How do you do. We're back,' and hustle upstairs. Be sure to notice if she seems as cordial as ever. If she is, it will be a good sign that we're safe."

Meanwhile, out on the veranda, Adrienne was remarking under her breath to Jane:

"Did you observe the face of Marian Seaton? Ah, but she is the guilty one!"⁶⁷

"I noticed," replied Jane dryly. "I was determined to make her look at me, and she did. It upset her to see me here. She wasn't expecting it."

"It is the annoyance that she has returned," sighed Adrienne. "All has been so delightful without her."

"I'm going to forget that she's here," avowed Jane sturdily. "Come on, Imp. Let's go over to the stable and see Firefly. I promised him an apple and three lumps of sugar yesterday. I must keep my word to him."

Rising, Jane held out an inviting hand to Adrienne. The little girl promptly linked her fingers within Jane's and the two started down the steps, making a pretty picture as they strolled bare-headed across the campus to the western gate.

"Hello, children! Whither away?"

Almost to the wide gateway they encountered Dorothy Martin coming from an opposite direction.

"We're going to call on Firefly. Want to come along?" invited Jane.

"Of course I do. Firefly is a very dear friend of mine."

"I must stop at that little fruit stand below⁶⁸ the campus and buy Firefly's apple," Jane said as the trio emerged from the campus onto the public highway. "I have the sugar in my blouse pocket."

She patted a tiny bulging pocket of her white silk blouse.

"Marian Seaton and Maizie Gilbert have returned," Adrienne informed Dorothy, with a droll air of resignation. "But a few moments past and we saw them arrive. We made no effort to embrace them."

"Miss Howard isn't pleased over their staying away so long," confided Dorothy. "She told me yesterday that every student had reported except those two. She asked me if I knew why they were so late. She hadn't received a word of excuse from either of them. Too bad, isn't it, that they should so deliberately set their faces against right?"

"They walk with the eyes open, yet are blind," mused Adrienne. "I have known many such persons. Seldom is there the remedy. I cannot imagine the reform of Marian Seaton. It would be the miracle."

"You may laugh if you like, but I've wondered whether there mightn't be some way to find the good in her. Dad says there's some⁶⁹ good in even the worst person, if one can only find it."

Silent from the moment Adrienne had mentioned Marian's name, Jane broke into the conversation.

"After I read that miserable letter, I felt as though I hated Marian Seaton harder than ever," she went on. "When I saw her to-day I despised her for being what she was. All of a sudden it came to me that I was sorry for her instead. It's a kind of queer mix-up of feelings."

Jane gave a short laugh.

"You have the right spirit, Jane. I'm proud of you for it. You make me feel ashamed. While I've been merely saying that it's too bad about Marian, you've gone to the root of the matter," assured Dorothy earnestly.

"Yet what could one do thus to bring about the reform?"

Adrienne's shrug was eloquent of the dubiety of such an enterprise.

"Begin as Jane has, by being sorry for her," replied Dorothy thoughtfully.

"I am French," returned Adrienne simply. "The Latin never forgets nor forgives."

Having now reached the fruit stand where⁷⁰ Jane had stopped to purchase a large red apple for her horse, the subject of Marian Seaton was dropped.

Arrived at the stable the three girls spent a merry session with Firefly, who demanded much petting from them.

"He's the dearest little horse I ever saw, Jane!" glowed Dorothy when they finally left him finishing the apple which Jane had saved as a good-bye solace. "If ever I owned a horse like Firefly I'd be the happiest girl in the whole world."

"There aren't many like him."

Jane turned for a last look over her shoulder at her beautiful pet. Pursing her lips she whistled to him. Instantly he neighed an answer.

"Is he not cunning?" cried Adrienne.

Dorothy admiringly agreed that he was.

Jane smiled in an absent manner. An idea had taken shape in her mind, the pleasure of which brought a warm flush to her cheeks.

In consequence she suddenly quickened her pace.

"What's the matter, Jane? Training for a walking match?" asked Dorothy humorously.

"I beg your pardon," apologized Jane, slowing down. "I just happened to think of a letter⁷¹ I wanted to write and send by the first mail."

"Run on ahead, then," proposed Dorothy. "We'll excuse you this once."

"Oh, it's not so urgent as all that. I just let my thoughts run away with me for a minute."

Nevertheless there was a preoccupied light in Jane's eyes as the three returned across the campus to the Hall.

The instant she gained her room she went hastily to work on a letter, a pleased smile curving her lips as she wrote. When it was finished she prepared it for mailing and ran lightly down the stairs and across the campus to the nearest mail box. She gave a happy little sigh as it disappeared through the receiving slot. How glad she was that the idea had come to her. She wondered only why she had never thought of it before.

SEEKERS OF DISCORD

Fifteen minutes after the arrival of Marian and Maizie a disgruntled trio of girls sat closeted in the room belonging to Marian and Maizie.

"It's all your fault," stormed Elsie Noble, her sharp black eyes full of rancor. "If you'd come here as you promised instead of being a week late you could have used the wonderful influence you *say* you have with Mrs. Weatherbee to let me keep that room. It's forty times nicer than the one I have."

"I couldn't get here any sooner. Howard Armstead gave a dinner dance specially in honor of *me* and we had to stay for it."

Marian crested her blonde head as she flung forth this triumphant excuse.

"Of course you did. You're so boy-struck you⁷³ can't see straight. I might have known it was because of one of your silly old beaux. I'm glad I have more sense."

"You don't show any signs of it," sneered Marian.

"Stop quarreling, both of you," drawled Maizie. "Go go ahead, Elsie, and tell us what happened about the room. That's the thing we want to know. For goodness' sake keep your voice down though. You don't talk. You shout."

"I'd rather shout than drawl my words as if I were too lazy to say them," retaliated Elsie wrathfully.

"All right, shout then and let everybody in the Hall know your business," was Maizie's tranquil response.

"If you came here to fuss, Elsie, then we can get along very well without you. If you expect to go around with us, you'll have to behave like a human being."

Marian's cool insolence had an instantly subduing effect on her belligerent relative. She knew that Marian was quite capable of dropping her, then and there.

"I don't know what happened about the room," she said sulkily, but in a decidedly lower key. "I⁷⁴ came here at nine o'clock in the morning. Mrs. Weatherbee sent the maid with me to the room. That Stearns girl said I must have made a mistake. I knew that she wasn't exactly pleased. She said hardly a word to me. She went out and stayed out until just before luncheon. Then she came in for about ten minutes and went downstairs. I didn't see her again."

"She was probably running around the campus telling her friends about it," lazily surmised Maizie. "I'll bet she was all at sea. Wonder if she went to Weatherbee with a string of complaints."

"What happened after that?" queried Marian impatiently.

"What happened?" Elsie pitched the question in a shrill angry key. "Enough, I should say. I unpacked part of my things, then finished reading a dandy mystery story I'd begun on the train. About four o'clock Mrs. Weatherbee sailed in here and made me give up the room."

"What did she say?" was the concerted question.

"She said there'd been a misunderstanding about Miss Allen's coming back to the Hall. That Miss Allen was not to blame and so must have her own room. I said I wouldn't give it up⁷⁵ and she said it was not for me, but her, to decide that. She said I could have the other room if I wanted it. If I didn't then she had nothing else to offer me. I said I'd go to the registrar about it. She just looked superior and said, 'As you please.' I knew I was beaten. If I went to the registrar, then Mrs. Weatherbee would have a chance to show her that letter. If I gave in, very likely she'd let the whole thing drop. As long as she'd offered me another room here, I thought it was best to take it."

"I didn't think it would turn out like that," frowned Marian. "Weatherbee couldn't bear Jane Allen last year. I was sure she'd be only too glad to get rid of her. That letter was meant to make her furious, enough so that she wouldn't let this Allen girl into the Hall again. Something remarkable must have happened."

"Weatherbee didn't suspect you, anyway," chimed in Maizie. "She was all smiles when we went into her office."

"Yes, she was sweet as cream. She could never trace it to me anyway. I took good care of that."

"Who wrote it for you?" asked Elsie curiously.

"That's my affair," rudely returned Marian.⁷⁶ "If I told you all my business you'd know as much as I do. I'm sorry the scheme didn't work, but, at least, you got into the Hall. I'm certainly glad that girl failed in her exams. As for Jane Allen—well, I'm not through with her yet. Who is your roommate?"

"A Miss Reynolds. She's a soph——"

"*Alicia Reynolds!*" chorused two interrupting voices.

"Well of all things!" Marian's pale eyes widened with surprise. "What do you think of that, Maiz?"

"You're in luck, Marian," Maizie averred with a slow smile. "You stand a better chance of getting in with Alicia again. Elsie can help you if she doesn't go to work and fuss with Alicia the first thing."

"What are you talking about? Who is this Alicia Reynolds?" inquired Elsie curiously.

"Oh, we chummed with her last year. She didn't like this Jane Allen any better than we did. Then last spring she went riding and fell off her horse and our dear Miss Allen picked her up and brought her home on her own horse. Alicia wasn't hurt. She thought she was and that the Allen girl was a heroine," glibly related Marian. "She listened to a lot of lies Jane Allen⁷⁷

told her about us and now she won't speak to either of us. It's too bad, because we are really her friends and this Allen person isn't. Some day we hope to prove it to her."

"This Jane Allen must be a terrible mischief-maker," was Elsie's opinion. "I told her what I thought of her the afternoon she came."

"You did?" exclaimed Marian.

"Yes, sirree. I went straight to her room and spoke my mind. I was so furious with her. The very next morning Mrs. Weatherbee put me at the same table with her. It was my first meal at the Hall. I went to Rutherford Inn for luncheon and dinner. I was hungry and thought maybe the meals wouldn't suit me. They're all right, though. When I saw her at the table I was going to balk about sitting there, then I changed my mind. I had as much right to be there as she. I told her that, too."

"Some little scrapper," murmured Maizie.

There was cunning significance, however, in the slow glance she cast at Marian.

"What did she say to you?"

Marian had returned Maizie's glance with one of equal meaning.

"Not much of anything. I didn't give her a chance," boasted Elsie. "That little French girl snapped me up in a hurry. She's awfully pretty, isn't she?"

"She's a little cat," retorted Marian. "Look out for her. She's too clever for you. Her mother's Eloise Dupree, the dancer. She dances too. They're friends of President Blakesly's. She's awfully popular here and afraid of nobody. She's devoted to Jane Allen, though, so that settles her with me."

"Is Dorothy Martin at your table?" asked Maizie.

"Yes. I don't like her."

"She's a prig," shrugged Maizie.

"Edith Hammond used to sit there. Do you know her?" queried Marian of Elsie.

"She's not here any more. She's going to be married. I heard this Dorothy talking about her yesterday to Miss Dupree."

"Glad's she's gone. She was another turncoat. Hated Jane Allen and then started to be nice to her all of a sudden."

"This Jane Allen seems to have a lot of friends for all you girls say about her," Elsie asserted almost defiantly. "I detest her, but I notice she's never alone. The first night she came there was a crowd of girls in her room. I heard them laughing and singing."79

"They didn't come to *see her*," informed Marian scornfully. "It's Judith Stearns that draws them. She's very popular at Wellington. Can't see why, I'm sure. Anyway Jane Allen has pulled the wool over her eyes until she thinks she has a wonderful roommate."

"Jane Allen hasn't so many friends," broke in Maizie. "Dorothy Martin, Judith, Adrienne Dupree, Ethel Lacey, she's Adrienne's roommate, and Norma Bennett. That's all. Lots of girls in the sophomore class don't like her."

"Yes, and who's Norma Bennett," sneered Marian. "She used to be a kitchen maid; now she's a third-rate actress. She's a pet of Adrienne's and Jane Allen's. I think we ought to make a fuss about having her here at the Hall. If we could get most of the girls to sign a petition asking Mrs. Weatherbee to take it up it would be a good thing."

"But would she do it?" was Maizie's skeptical query.

"She might if we worked it cleverly," answered Marian. "Adrienne and her crowd would probably go to President Blakesly. We'd have to work it in such a way that Norma wouldn't let her. This Bennett girl is one of the sensitive sort. False pride, you know. Beggars are usually⁸⁰ like that. Of course, I don't say positively that we can do it. We'll have to wait and see. Some good chance may come."

"It would be a splendid way to get even with Jane Allen and Adrienne Dupree, too," approved Maizie. "They would have spasms if their darling Norma had to leave Madison Hall and they couldn't help themselves."

"I think it would be rather hard on this Norma," declared Elsie bluntly.

She had pricked up her ears at the word "actress." Unbeknown to anyone save herself she was desperately stage struck. The idea of having a real actress at the Hall was decidedly alluring.

"You don't know what you're talking about," angrily rebuked Marian. "It's hard on the girls of really good families to have to countenance such a person. I've lived at Madison Hall a year longer than you have. Just remember that."

"What we ought to do is to get as many girls as we can on our side," suggested crafty Maizie. "There are forty-eight girls at the Hall, most of them sophs. Last year we let them alone, because they weren't of our class. This year we'll have to make a fuss over them. Lunch them and take them to ride in our cars and all that.⁸¹ It will be a bore, but it will pay in the end. Once we get a stand-in with them, we can run things here to suit ourselves."

"That's a good idea," lauded Marian. "We'll begin this very day."

So it was that while Jane Allen and her little coterie of loyal friends entered upon their college year with high aspirations to do well, under the same roof with them, three girls sat and plotted to overthrow Wellington's most sacred tradition: "And this is my command unto you that ye love one another."

CHAPTER X

A VAGUE REGRET

"WELL, Jane, it's our turn to do the inviting this year," announced Judith Stearns, as she pranced jubilantly into the room where Jane sat hard at work on her Horace for next day's recitation.

"When is it to be?"

Jane looked up eagerly from her book.

"A week from to-night. The notice just appeared on the bulletin board. You know my fond affection for the bulletin board."

Judith boyishly tossed up her soft blue walking hat and caught it on one finger, loudly expressing her opinion of her own dexterity.

"Sit down, oh, vainglorious hat-thrower, and tell me about it," commanded Jane, laughing.

"That's all I know. It's to be next Wednesday night. I suppose our august soph committee⁸³ has met and decided the great question. It's the usual getting-acquainted-with-our-freshman-sisters affair. After that comes class meeting, and after that——"

Judith plumped down on her couch bed and beamed knowingly at Jane.

"Guess what comes after that," she finished.

"Basket-ball."

Jane gave a long sigh of pure satisfaction. There was a pleasant light in her eyes as she made the guess. She was anxiously looking forward to making the sophomore team.

"Yes, *basket-ball*."

Judith echoed the sigh. She also hoped to make the team.

"We'll have to get busy and invite our freshmen to the dance," she said wagging her brown head. "The freshman class is large this year; about a third larger than last year's class. That means some of the juniors and seniors will have to help out. I'm glad of it. It will give Norma a chance to go too."

"There are only four freshmen in this house," stated Jane. "One of them is out of the question for us."

"I get you," returned Judith slangily. "Undoubtedly you refer to the ignoble Miss Noble.⁸⁴ Noble by name but not by nature," she added with a chuckle.

Jane smiled, then frowned.

"Honestly, Judy, I'd give almost anything if she weren't at our table. I don't mind her not speaking to any of us. But she always listens to every word we say and acts as if she was storing it up for future reference. Even Dorothy feels the strain."

"It's too bad," sympathized Judith. "There's only one consolation. When it gets too much on your nerves you can always fall back on Rutherford Inn."

"I'm going to fall back on it to-night," decided Jane suddenly. "Let's have a dinner party."

"Can't go. I am the proud possessor of one dollar and two cents," Judith ruefully admitted.

"This is to be *my* party," emphasized Jane. "I haven't touched my last check yet. I've been too busy studying to partify. Now don't be a quitter, Judy. I want to do this."

Jane had observed signs of objection on Judith's good-humored face.

"All right," yielded Judith. "Go ahead. I'll give a blow-out when my check comes. It'll be here next week."

"We'll invite Norma, Dorothy, Adrienne, 85 Ethel, Mary, Christine Ellis, Barbara Temple, and oh, yes—Alicia Reynolds. We mustn't forget Alicia."

"Yes, she needs a little recreation," grinned Judith. "Chained to the ignoble Noble! What a fate for a good little soph! Some roommate!"

"You'd better be careful about the pet name you're so fond of giving that girl," warned Jane, laughing a little in spite of her admonition. "You know your failing. You'll say it some time to someone without thinking. Then little Judy will be sorry."

"Oh, I only say it to you and Imp," averred Judith cheerfully. "You're both to be trusted."

"If we're going to have the party to-night we'll have to hurry up about it. How are we going to get word to Alicia? I hate to go to her room on account of Miss Noble. And what about Christine and Barbara?"

Jane laid down her book and rose from her chair.

"I'll go over to Argyle Hall and invite them. Tell Ethel to go in and invite Alicia," suggested Judith. "She's almost as obliging as I am. She rooms next to Alicia and our noble friend. It will be only a step for her. She won't mind doing it." 86

"I guess I'd better. Tell Christine and Barbara to be at the Inn by six-thirty."

Jane turned and left the room. Walking down the long hall she passed Alicia's door. It was open a trifle. She was tempted to peep in and see if Alicia might perhaps be within and alone. Second thought prompted her to go on without investigating.

Rapping smartly on Ethel's door, her knock was followed by the sound of approaching footfalls from within. Nor was she aware that through the slight opening in Alicia's door a pair of sharp black eyes peered out at her.

"Why, hello, Jane!" greeted Ethel. "Come in."

"Can't stop but a minute."

Jane stepped into the room, careful to close the door behind her.

"I'm giving a dinner party at Rutherford Inn to-night," she briskly began. "All of our crowd are going, I hope. I'm just starting out to invite them. Where's Imp?"

"Downstairs on the trail of her laundry," laughed Ethel. "It went out white linen skirts and silk blouses. It came back sheets and pillow cases. You should have seen her face when she opened the package. She threw up her hands⁸⁷ and said: 'What stupidity! Must I then appear in my classes draped like the ghost?'"

Jane joined in Ethel's merry laughter. She had a vision of petite Adrienne trailing into classes thus spectrally attired.

"I want you to do something for me, Ethel." Jane had grown suddenly serious. "Will you go to Alicia and invite her to the party? I'd rather not go myself. You understand why. But it's really necessary to invite her. She might feel hurt if she were left out. I wouldn't have that happen for worlds. Not after what she did for me about basket-ball. She was dining out the night we had the spread so I couldn't invite her to that. I told her so afterward for fear she might have been offended."

"Surely I'll tell her," nodded Ethel. "I don't think she's in now, though. I met her going down the walk as I came up it. She said she had to go to the library for a book she needed. I imagine she'll be back soon."

"Be sure to tell her," Jane impressed upon Ethel. "Thank you ever so much. Tell Adrienne, too. Don't dress up. It's a strictly informal party. Meet me in the living-room at six."

With this Jane departed to go on to Dorothy's⁸⁸ room. Passing the door of Alicia's room she noted that it was now closed. As Alicia was out she guessed that Elsie Noble was in. She was now not sorry that she had refrained from approaching it. Undoubtedly she would have met with an unpleasant reception.

Finding her other friends at home, Jane quickly made the rounds and hurried back to her own room.

Judith appeared soon afterward with the information that Christine and Barbara had joyfully accepted and would be on hand at the Inn.

When at six o'clock the party from the Hall gathered in the living-room, first glance about showed her that Alicia was missing.

Going over to where Ethel stood, Jane anxiously asked: "Did you see Alicia, Ethel?"

"Yes. She isn't coming. She said to tell you it was impossible for her to accept. I went to her room a few minutes after you left. I knocked until I was tired but no one answered. So I went

back to my room. After a while I tried again and while I was standing at her door she came down the hall with Miss Noble. I asked her to come into my room a minute and told her."

"Funny she didn't give you any reason why⁸⁹ she couldn't come," pondered Jane with drawn brows.

"She looked as though she'd been crying," returned Ethel. "I thought maybe she'd had bad news or something so I didn't urge her. She wasn't a bit snippy. She just looked white and a little bit sad."

"I wonder if I ought to run up and see her."

Jane stared at Ethel, her eyes full of active concern.

"Better wait until to-morrow," advised Ethel. "Whatever's the matter with her, she may feel like being alone. You know how it is sometimes with one."

"Yes, I know."

Jane knew only too well how it felt to be sought out by even her friends when occasional black moods descended upon her.

"We may as well start," she said slowly. "As hostess I mustn't neglect my guests. I'll surely make it a point to see Alicia in the morning."

Nevertheless as the bevy of light-hearted diners left Madison Hall and strolled bare-headed in the sunset toward Rutherford Inn, a vague uneasiness took hold of Jane. She regretted that she had not gone upstairs to see Alicia. Nor did it leave her until after she had⁹⁰ reached the Inn, where for the time being the lively chatter of her companions served to drive it from her mind.

CHAPTER XI

REJECTED CAVALIERS

One glaring result of Jane's dinner party was the ignoring of the ten-thirty rule that night.

It was eight o'clock when the congenial diners finished an elaborate dessert and strolled gaily out of the Inn. The beauty of the night induced the will to loiter. Some one proposed a walk into Chesterford and a visit to a moving-picture theatre.

When they emerged from it it was half-past nine, thus necessitating a quick hike to the campus. Jane and Judith made port in their room at exactly twenty-five minutes past ten.

Visions of unprepared lessons looming up large, they decided that for once "lights out" should not be the order of things.

As a consequence of retiring at eleven-thirty,⁹² both overslept the next morning and dashed wildly off to chapel without breakfast.

Occupied from then on with classes, it was not until she had finished her last recitation of the morning and was on her way to Madison Hall that Jane remembered her resolve to see Alicia.

Determined to lose no more time in putting it into execution, she quickened her pace. Coming to the stone walk leading up to the steps of the Hall, Jane uttered a little cluck of satisfaction. She had spied Alicia seated in a rocker on the veranda, engaged in reading a letter.

"Oh, Alicia!" she called as she reached the foot of the steps. "You're the very person I most want to see!"

Sound of Jane's voice caused Alicia to glance up in startled fashion. She had been faintly smiling over her letter when first Jane glimpsed her. Now her pale face underwent a swift, ominous change. She hastily rose.

"I didn't wish to see *you*," she said stiffly, and marched into the house.

Jane's primary impulse was to follow her and demand an explanation. The rebuff, however, had stirred again into life the old, rebellious pride which had formerly caused her so much unhappiness.⁹³

For a moment she stood still, hands clenched, cheeks flaming with mortification. Then with a bitter smile she walked slowly up the steps and into the house. After that affront Alicia would wait a long time before she, Jane Allen, would seek an explanation.

"Well, it has come," she said sullenly, as she entered her room where Judith sat at the dressing table, recoiling her long brown hair.

"What's come? By 'it' do you mean yourself?"

Judith turned in her chair with a boyish grin.

"No," Jane answered shortly. "Alicia Reynolds has gone back to her old chums."

"You don't mean it!"

Judith's hands dropped from her hair. In her surprise she let go of half a dozen hair pins she had been holding in one hand.

"Now see what you made me do," she laughingly accused. "Get down and help me pick them up."

"Oh, bother your old hairpins!" exclaimed Jane savagely. "I'm awfully upset about this, Judy. I felt last night as if I should have gone to Alicia and asked her what was the matter. This is some of Marian Seaton's work."

"Of course it is," calmly concurred Judith. "I94 haven't the least idea of what it's all about, but I agree with you just the same. I'll agree even harder when I do find out."

In a few jerky sentences Jane enlightened Judith.

"So that's the way the land lies," commented Judith. "Well, I'm not surprised. Take my word for it the ignoble Noble has had a hand in this. Just the same I don't believe Alicia has gone back to Marion Seaton. She's merely hurt over some yarn that's been told her. You'd better see her, Jane, and have it out with her."

"I won't do it." Jane shook an obstinate head. "Alicia ought to know better than listen to those girls. She knows how badly Marian Seaton behaved last year about basket-ball. She knows that Marian is untruthful and dishonorable. If she chooses to believe in a person of that stamp then she will have to abide by her choice."

It was the stubborn, embittered Jane Allen of earlier days at Wellington who now spoke.

"Only the other day I said to Dorothy that I didn't hate Marian Seaton any longer; that I felt only sorry for her. I said, too, that there must be some good in her if one could only find it. What a simpleton I was!"

The sarcastic smile that hovered about Jane's95 red lips, fully indicated her contempt of her own mistaken sentiments.

"Adrienne was right," she said after a brief pause. "She said she could never forget nor forgive an injury. I thought I could, but I can't. I mean I don't want to."

Her brows meeting in the old disfiguring scowl, Jane began pacing the room in what Judith had termed her "caged lion" fashion.

"Oh, forget it," counseled Judith, casting a worried glance at Jane's gloomy, storm-ridden face. "Don't let Marian Seaton's hatefulness upset you, Jane. You behaved like a brick about your room and that letter. This isn't half as bad as that mix-up was. You said your own self that you were going to ignore anything she tried to do against you. Now go ahead and keep your word. You've lots of good friends. You should worry."

"I haven't so many," Jane sharply contradicted. "I can count them on my fingers. I don't make friends as easily as you do, Judy."

"Just the same a lot of fuss was made over you last spring when you won the big game for our team," Judith sturdily reminded.

"That's not friendship. That was only admiration of the moment. The same girls who96 cheered me then would probably be just as ready to turn against me if they happened to feel like it," pointed out Jane skeptically. "No wonder I used to hate girls. Very few of them know what loyalty and friendship mean."

"You're hopeless." Judith made a gesture of resignation.

With a chuckle she added: "Why not challenge Marian Seaton to a duel and demolish her? Umbrellas would be splendid weapons. I have one with a lovely crooked handle. You could practice hooking it around my neck and when the fateful hour came you could bring the double-dyed villain to her knees with one swoop. Wouldn't that be nice?"

"You're a ridiculous girl, Judy Stearns."

Jane was forced to laugh a little at Judith's nonsense.

"*You're* a goose yourself to get all worked up over nothing," grinned Judith. "I can't say I blame you for throwing up the stupendous labor of hunting out Marian's good qualities. In my opinion 'There ain't no such animal.' But you're a very large-sized goose if you allow her to spoil your sophomore year for you."

"I don't intend she shall spoil it," Jane grimly assured. "I've stood a good deal from her without⁹⁷ ever even once trying to strike back. I'm not sure that I've done right in allowing her to torment me as she has without ever asserting myself. There's a limit to forbearance. I may feel some day that I've reached it."

Judith smiled but said nothing. She had too high an opinion of Jane to believe that her proud-spirited roommate would ever descend to the level of her enemies. Given an opportunity for revenge, she believed that Jane would scorn to seize it.

"Have you invited your freshman yet?" she asked with sudden irrelevancy.

"No, I haven't had time to see any one of them yet," Jane answered.

"I asked Miss Lorimer, a cute little girl from Creston Hall, this morning after chapel, but she said she'd already been invited," informed Judith. "I must find out if the three eligible freshmen here have escorts yet. I suppose they have, with so many sophs in the house. The ignoble Noble's not an eligible."

The luncheon bell now interrupted the talk. It seemed to Jane as she took her place at table that spiteful triumph lurked in the sharp glance Elsie Noble flashed at her.

The conversation carried on by herself, Adrienne⁹⁸ and Dorothy, centered almost entirely on the coming dance. From Adrienne, Jane learned that the Hall's three freshmen had already received invitations.

When the little French girl announced this, Jane again fancied that she read satisfaction in the sharp features of the quarrelsome freshman.

Though the latter had not addressed a word to her tablemates since her advent among them, she never missed a word they said. All three were well aware of this and it annoyed them not a little.

When just before dinner that evening Judith and Jane compared notes, it was to discover the same thing. Neither had been successful in securing a freshman to escort to the dance.

"I've asked five girls and every one of them turned me down," Judith ruefully acknowledged. "I thought I'd start early, but it seems others started earlier."

"I've asked two different girls, but both have escorts," frowned Jane. "I sha'n't ask any more. I thought Miss Harper, the second girl I asked, refused me rather coolly. I want to do my duty as a soph, but I won't stand being snubbed."

"Let's go and see what luck Ethel and Adrienne have had," proposed Judith.⁹⁹

Indifferently assenting, Jane accompanied Judith to her friends' room.

"Ah, do not ask me!" was Adrienne's disgusted outburst, "These freshmen are, of a truth, too popular. Four this day I have invited, but to no purpose."

"I'm going to take Miss Simmons, a Barclay Hall girl, to the dance," informed Ethel. "I asked her this morning and she accepted."

"Well, we seem out of luck," sighed Judith. "Do you know whether Mary and Norma have invited their freshmen?"

"Mary's going to take Miss Thomas, an Argyle Hall girl. Norma hasn't asked any one yet," was Ethel's prompt reply. "You girls just happened to ask the wrong ones, I guess. Try again to-morrow. There are more than enough freshies to go round this year."

After a little further talk, Jane and Judith went back to their room.

"What do you think about it?" Judith asked abruptly the instant they were behind their own door.

"I don't know. It's probably as Ethel says, 'a happen-so.' I can't think of any other reason, unless——"

Jane stopped and eyed Judith steadily.¹⁰⁰

"Unless some one in the freshman class has set the freshmen against us," quickly supplemented Judith.

"Yes, that's what I was thinking. It doesn't seem possible in so large a class. Still one girl can sometimes do a good deal of mischief."

"You mean Miss Noble?"

Judith was too much in earnest to use the derisive name she had given the disagreeable freshman.

"Yes," affirmed Jane. "If she helped to turn Alicia against me, she is quite capable of going further. So far as we know, you and Adrienne and I are the only sophs who've been turned down all around. Norma hasn't asked any one yet. Anyway, she's a junior."

"It looks rather queer, so queer that I'm going to make it my business to ask a few questions to-morrow. If there's really anything spiteful back of this, believe me, little Judy will find it out."

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CHAPTER XII

NORMA'S "FIND"

The end of the next day was productive of no better results so far as Adrienne, Judith and Jane were concerned. Playing escort to their freshman sisters seemed not for them.

That evening a quintette of girls gathered in Ethel's room to discuss the peculiar situation. The quintette consisted of Ethel, Adrienne, Jane, Judith and Norma Bennett.

"There's something not right about it," Judith emphatically declared. "I've tried all day to get a clue to the mystery, but nothing doing. Nobody seems to want the pleasure of our company to the dance. What luck have you had, Norma?"

"Oh, I invited a little girl named Freda Marsh. She lives away off the campus," replied Norma. "She and three other girls have rented the second102 floor of a house and do their own cooking. They are all poor and very determined to put themselves through college."

"When did you discover this find?" Judith showed signs of active interest.

"Miss Marsh sits next to me at chapel," replied Norma. "After chapel this morning I asked her to go to the dance. She seemed awfully pleased. Then she told me where she lived and about herself and her chums. They all hail from a little town in the northern part of New York State."

"Wicked one, why did you not tell me this before?" playfully demanded Adrienne.

"I haven't had a chance, Imp, until now," smiled Norma. "This is the first time I've seen you to-day except at a distance."

"Ah, yes, it is true!" loudly sighed Adrienne. "This noon I came late from the laboratory after a most stupid chemistry lesson. Such hands! They were the sight! I feared I should wash them away before they became presentable. After the classes this afternoon I must of a necessity go to the library. So it was dinner time when I returned, and thus passed the time."

"You're forgiven."

Her blue eyes full of affection, Norma laid an103 arm over Adrienne's shoulder. She had every reason to adore the impulsive, warm-hearted little girl.

"Norma, do you suppose Miss Marsh's friends have received invitations to the dance?" Jane broke in eagerly.

"I don't know, Jane. I can find out for you in the morning at chapel."

"I wish you would. If they haven't, tell Miss Marsh that we would love to be their escorts and that we'll call on them to-morrow evening. How about it, girls?"

Jane turned questioning eyes from Judith to Adrienne.

"It's a fine idea!" glowed Judith. "I'm sorry I didn't know about them before. The freshman class is so large this year. I know only a few of the girls as yet."

"I am indeed well suited." Adrienne waved an approving hand. "Shall we not go to make the call soon after dinner to-morrow night?"

"Yes, as early as we can," acquiesced Judith. "That is, provided these three girls haven't been asked."

"It would be nice to go and see them anyway," declared Ethel. "We ought to get acquainted with them. Where do they live, Norma?"¹⁰⁴

"At 605 Bridge Street. It's almost a mile from here. So Miss Marsh said."

"To go back to what you said a while ago, Judy, what makes you think there is any special reason for the girls' refusing you and Adrienne and Jane as escorts?" questioned Norma concernedly.

"Jane and I just think so. That's all. We think some one's to blame for it."

"To blame. Who then is to blame?"

A swift flash of suspicion had leaped into Adrienne's big black eyes.

"Some one not far away, perhaps," replied Judith significantly. "That's the way it looks to me."

"But could it be? She is but one among many," reminded Adrienne.

She understood quite well whom Judith meant.

"She's the only freshman who would be interested in making trouble," argued Judith. "She has probably been egged on by others who are *not* freshmen."

"Still it's not fair to lay it to her when we don't know anything definite," remarked Ethel.

"I'm only supposing," explained Judith. "I'm not saying positively that I think she's guilty. I'm only saying that it seems probable."¹⁰⁵

"I doubt it." Ethel shook a dubious head.

"I may be wrong," Judith admitted. "Anyway, it won't matter, if these three girls accept our invitation. It will show the plotters, if there really are any, that they haven't bothered us a bit."

"I'm sorry, girls, but I'll have to go." Norma rose from her chair. "I haven't looked at my books yet and I must study to-night."

"You're not the only one," cheerfully commented Judith, getting to her feet. "Come on, Jane. We have our own troubles in the study line."

With this the talking-bee broke up, Norma promising faithfully to be sure to deliver next morning the message intrusted to her.

Directly after dinner the following evening the five friends set out for 605 Bridge Street. Greatly to the delight of the three most interested parties, Norma had given out the pleasant news that the trio of girls they were to call upon were without special invitations to the coming dance.

The beauty of the soft autumn night made walking a pleasure. Five abreast, the callers strolled through the twilight, making the still air ring with their fresh voices and light, happy laughter. 106

The house where the four freshmen lived was an unpretentious dwelling, built of wood and painted a dull gray. A straggling bit of uneven lawn in front by no means added to its appearance. Even in the concealing twilight it had a neglected look. It was in glaring contrast to stately Madison Hall with its green, close-clipped lawns and wide verandas.

"What cheerlessness!" exclaimed Adrienne under her breath.

Grouped about the door, Norma rang the bell. A tired-eyed, middle-aged woman answered it. Yes, Miss Marsh was in, she declared listlessly.

A clear, pleasant voice from above stairs affirmed that information. Next instant a sweet-faced, brown-eyed girl had reached the landing and was greeting her callers with a pretty cordiality that was infinitely pleasing.

"Do come upstairs to our house," she invited. "It's a very unpretentious place, but home-like, we think."

Norma introducing her friends to Miss Marsh, the five girls followed their hostess up the narrow stairway and were ushered into a good-sized living-room. A rag rug covered a floor, stained dark at the edges. An old-fashioned library table, a quaint walnut desk with many pigeonholes, a horse-hair covered settee and a few nondescript, but comfortable-looking chairs completed the furniture.

On the table, strewn with books, a reading lamp gave forth a mellow light. The walls, papered in tan with a deep brown border, were dotted with passe-partouted prints, both in color and black and white. The whole effect, though homely, was that of a room which might indeed be called a living room.

"Please help yourselves to seats," hospitably urged their winsome hostess. "Excuse me for a moment while I call the girls. They are just finishing the washing of the supper dishes and getting things in shape for breakfast. We get everything ready the night before so as not to be late in the morning," she explained. Then, with a smiling nod, she left her guests.

"It's a comfy old room, isn't it?" was Judith's guarded observation. "This house-keeping idea of theirs is a clever one."

"That Miss Marsh is a dear," murmured Ethel. "I've seen her once or twice before on the campus, I think."

"I have the feeling that we shall like these girls," commented Adrienne. "This Miss Marsh has the sweet face and the courteous ways."¹⁰⁸

The entrance of their hostess and her chums prevented further exchange of opinion.

"These are my pals, Ida Leonard, Marie Benham and Kathie Meddart," smiled Freda, going on to name each of her callers as she performed the introduction. "You see I remembered all your names and to whom they belonged."

When a number of girls have the will to become acquainted it does not take them long to do so. Almost immediately a buzz of animated impersonal conversation began.

"We came here to deliver our invitations in person," Jane finally said with a smile. "Miss Leonard, I'd love to be your cavalier for the freshman frolic."

"Thank you. I'd love to go to it with you, I'm sure," accepted Ida Leonard, a tall, thin girl with fair hair and a plain, but interesting face.

Jane having set the ball rolling, Adrienne promptly invited Marie Benham, a slim little girl with an eager, boyish face, framed in curly brown hair.

This left Kathie Meddart, an extremely pretty girl of pure blonde type, to Judith.

Considerable merriment arose over the extending and acceptance of the invitations. Poverty had not robbed the four young hostesses of a¹⁰⁹ cheery, happy-go-lucky air that charmed their more affluent guests.

For an hour the congenial company talked and laughed as only girls can. Kathie finally excusing herself, disappeared kitchenward, presently returning with a huge, brown pitcher of lemonade and a plate piled high with crisp little cakes, which she assured were of her own making.

Needless to say, they disappeared with amazing rapidity, the guests loudly acclaiming their toothsome merits.

"I'm glad you like them," declared Kathie, pink with pleasant confusion. "I took a course in cookery at a night school at home last year. I often used to make this kind of cakes for parties. I had lots of orders and made enough money to pay my tuition fees at Wellington for this year."

"How splendid!" approved Jane. Her approval was echoed by the others.

"I'm hoping, after I get acquainted here in college, to do a little of that sort of thing," confided Kathie rather shyly. "I could spare an hour or so a day to do it. Only I don't know how to go about it."

"Would you—could you—would you care to make some for me, some day?" hesitated Jane.¹¹⁰ "They would be simply great if one were giving a spread."

"Why, that's ever so kind in you," glowed Kathie. "When I just spoke of it I wasn't fishing for an order. I mentioned it before I thought."

"It's a good thing you did. I'll order two dozen for my own special benefit the minute my check comes," laughed Judith. "I sha'n't give Jane Allen one. I'll sit in a corner of our room and gobble them all up."

"I adore those cakes!" Adrienne clasped her small hands. "Would it then be possible that I might have some to-morrow? Perhaps two dozen? Ah, but I am not the greedy one. I will share with my friends, even most selfish Judy."

This provoked a laugh at Judith's expense. So it was, however, that Kathie received her first order which she agreed to deliver the next day.

As a matter of fact, she had been the only one to demur when Freda had announced that the Madison Hall girls were coming there that evening. She had advanced the argument that "those rich Madison Hall girls won't care to ask us to the dance when they see how poor we are." Now she wondered how she could ever have so misjudged such a delightful lot of girls.

CHAPTER XIII

THE EXPLANATION

When at length the quintette of callers regretfully agreed that they must be getting back to the Hall, Freda said rather nervously:

"Please don't go just yet. I—we—there is something we think we ought to tell you."

"Very well, tell us," invited Judith gaily.

She had an idea that the something might relate to the all-important question of gowns. If Freda were worrying over that, Judith proposed to dismiss the subject lightly. Precisely the same thought had occurred to Jane, who noted Freda's sudden flush and evident confusion.

"Something—well—not very pleasant happened this afternoon," Freda continued. "A—we had a caller—a girl—Why shouldn't I be frank? This girl was of the freshman class.

We¹² saw her at class meeting the other day, but we have never been introduced to her. She brought a paper with her and asked us to sign it. It was about three of you girls; Miss Allen, Miss Dupree and Miss Stearns, and——"

"About us?" chorused a trio of astonished voices.

"Yes," nodded Freda, her color heightening. "It began, 'We, the undersigned,' I can't recall the exact words, but it was an agreement not to accept an invitation from any one of you to the dance or to notice you throughout the year, because of the discourteous and hateful way you had treated a member of the freshman class. There were——"

"How perfectly disgraceful!" burst indignantly from Judith. "What did I tell you, girls? I knew there was something wrong. We didn't expect to find it out in this strange way, though. Well, 'murder will out,' as the saying goes."

"You said the paper began, 'We, the undersigned'?" questioned Jane in a clear, hard voice. "How many names were signed to it?"

"I can't say positively." Freda looked distressed. "You see, it made me so disgusted that I handed it back the instant I had read it. The girl offered it to my chums, too, but they wouldn't¹³ look at it. She said that nearly all the members of the class had signed it. I know better. I believe not half the class had signed."

"Would you object to telling us the name of the girl who brought you the paper to sign?" steadily pursued Jane.

"I wouldn't object; no. Why should I? A girl like that deserves no clemency," Freda returned spiritedly. "The trouble is, I don't know her name. She is small and dark, with sharp black eyes and a pointed chin. She's very homely, but dresses beautifully. She——"

"Thank you. We know who she is," interrupted Judith. "Her name is Elsie Noble, and she lives at Madison Hall."

"Ah, but she is the hateful one," sputtered Adrienne. "It was most kind in you, Miss Marsh, and your friends also, to thus refuse to sign this hideously untruthful paper. We have done this girl no harm. Rather, it is she who would harm us because we have respected our own rights."

"I suspected it to be a case of spite work," asserted Freda. "It is not usual for a class in college to adopt such harsh measures."

"We were rather surprised at her coming to us with the paper," put in Kathie. "We've seen¹⁴ her with a crowd of girls who don't appear to know that we are on the map. She said she understood that you girls were going to invite us to the dance and felt it her duty to call on us and object to our accepting your invitations."

"But how could she possibly know that?" cried out Ethel Lacey. "No one except the five of us knew it until Norma told you this morning."

"I hope you don't think——" began Freda.

A hurt look had crept into her soft, brown eyes.

"How could we possibly think such a thing?" cut in Jane assuringly. "We can readily understand that Miss Noble's call must have been a complete surprise to you. On the contrary, we are very grateful to you and your friends for not signing the paper."

"Yes, indeed," nodded Judith. "Frankly, we suspected that something unpleasant was in the wind. When first we heard about the dance, we each invited freshmen whom we knew. Every one of them turned us down. We didn't think anything of that in the beginning. We supposed we had just happened to invite the wrong ones. Afterward we thought differently."

"I am sorry we didn't make it our business to get acquainted earlier with you girls. We really should have, you know," Judith apologized. "We were so busy getting started in our classes that we hadn't had time yet to be sociable. Jane and I had both agreed to try to know every girl in the freshman class this year. I'm glad it has turned out like this. I'm sure we'll all have a splendid time at the dance, no matter whether some people like it or not."

"I'm very sure of it, too," declared Kathie Meddart. "I can't understand how a girl could be so contemptible as to deliberately set out to injure others."

"Oh, well, she hasn't succeeded," reminded Judith, "so why should we care? We've invited our freshmen in spite of her."

"What are you going to do about that paper?" Ida Leonard asked a trifle curiously. "If I were you girls, I think I would make a fuss about it. We'll stand by you if you do."

"Indeed we will," echoed Marie Benham. "I wouldn't allow such a document to travel about college."

"It's hard to decide what to do," Jane said gravely. "It might be wiser to ignore the whole thing. I don't know. We'll have to think it over, I guess. I thank you girls for your offer to stand by us."¹¹⁶

Aside from Freda's opinion that spite had actuated the circulation of the damaging paper, she and her chums had exhibited an admirable restraint concerning it. They had evidently accepted Adrienne's sketchy explanation of it at its face value.

This courteous disinclination to pry had been especially noted and approved by Jane. It added to the high opinion she already cherished of the four freshmen. They had been moved solely by a sense of duty to inform herself and her companions of the outrageous paper.

Jane felt strongly that an explanation was due them, yet she hated to make it. It would be too much like gossiping, she thought.

"Adrienne told you, a little while ago, that we had done Miss Noble no harm," she said slowly. "That is really all that I think ought to be said about this affair. Are you satisfied to leave it so?"

"Perfectly," replied Freda. "I'd rather it would be that way. I can see no good in dragging up unpleasant things. We'd rather not hear about them."

"The paper itself speaks for those who drew it up," smiled Marie. "It's easy to place the blame where it belongs." 117

Ida and Kathie's warmly expressed opinion coincided with that of their companion.

"Shall we not speak of more pleasant things? What of the dance? At what time shall we come for you?"

Adrienne had addressed herself to Freda.

Glad to get away from the distasteful topic they had been discussing, the girls began to make their arrangements for the freshman frolic. After a little further talk, the five callers took their leave.

"Well, what are we going to do about it?" demanded Judith, the moment they had reached the street. "I agree with that nice Miss Benham. We can't afford to have a paper like that going the rounds of the college."

"I will of my own accord go to the Prexy. He is of *mon père* the old friend. He will not allow that such mischief should be done."

Adrienne threateningly wagged her curly head, as she made this vengeful announcement.

"Good for you, Imp!" lauded Judith.

"I think either Prexy or Miss Rutledge ought to be told," concurred Ethel. "It would nip the whole business in the bud. There'll be more of this sort of thing if it isn't stopped right away."

"Did you hear what I said, Jane?" she questioned 118 over her shoulder to Jane, who was walking behind her with Norma. Ethel, Adrienne and Judith had taken the lead.

"Yes, I heard. Let's wait until we get back to the Hall to talk this over," Jane grimly proposed. "We'll have time to settle it before the ten-thirty bell."

"Come on, then. Forward march!" ordered Judith. "The sooner we get there the longer we'll have to talk."

This important point settled, a brisk hike to the Hall became the order.

"Don't stop to talk to anyone," commanded Judith, as they scampered up the front steps. "Make a bee-line for our room. I'll hang out a 'Busy' sign, so that we won't be disturbed."

Five minutes later the "Busy" sign was in place and the key turned in the lock.

"Three of us can sit on my couch. That means you, Imp and Ethel. Now, Jane and Norma, draw up your chairs. Ahem!" Judith giggled. "What is the pleasure of this indignation meeting? You know what we think, Jane. Let's hear from you and Norma."

"Oh, I haven't any voice in the matter," smiled Norma. "That is, I've no right to decide anything." 119

"Neither have I, but I'm speaking just the same," laughed Ethel. "I say, 'On to Prexy with the horrible tale.'"

"I think we'd best handle this affair if we can without the faculty's help," Jane said quietly. "If we went to anyone it ought to be Miss Rutledge. I'd rather not tell even her. I hate telling tales."

"I don't," disagreed Judith. "If we let it go without saying a word, we'll have trouble right along. It ought to be stamped out *now*."

"I intend that it shall be," Jane tersely assured.

"How?"

Judith's query rang with skepticism.

"By going straight to Miss Noble and ordering her to stop it," was Jane's determined reply. "I shall ask her to give me that paper."

"A lot of good that will do." Judith gave a short laugh. "You might as well tell the wind to stop blowing."

"It will do this much good," retorted Jane. "We shall give Miss Noble her choice between giving up that paper or being reported to the faculty."

"Who's going to tell her all this?" demanded Judith in a slightly ruffled tone.¹²⁰

"I am," returned Jane composedly.

"And I. I shall be there also," instantly supported Adrienne.

"Very fine. It looks as though I'd be there myself."

Judith's annoyed expression vanished in a wide grin.

"When do we do this valiant stunt?" she inquired facetiously. "When does the great offensive take place?"

"We'll have to put it off until to-morrow," Jane answered. "It's too late to do it to-night. We'll go to her just before dinner, or else right after. There won't be time enough in the morning or at noon."

"Suppose she won't let us inside her room?" argued Judith.

"She isn't rooming alone," was Jane's reminder. "I intend to see Alicia Reynolds to-morrow and find out just why she wouldn't talk to me the other day. I promised myself that I'd never ask her. But something I saw to-day makes me feel that I must. This Miss Noble has been making trouble between us. I'm convinced of that. It can't go on. The tangle between Alicia and me must be straightened out by a frank understanding of what caused it.¹²¹ Once that is done, Alicia will stand by us, I believe."

"But you said yourself that she'd gone back to Marian Seaton."

Judith looked amazement of Jane's sudden change of opinion.

"So I thought," admitted Jane, "until I saw her pass Marian on the campus to-day without speaking. It came to me right then that only Miss Noble was to blame for the snub Alicia gave me. But I was too proud to run after Alicia and have it out with her. Now I'm going to do it."

CHAPTER XIV

OPENLY AND ABOVEBOARD

When Jane awoke the next morning her first thought crystalized into a determination to interview Alicia Reynolds before the day was over. Speculating as to her best opportunity, she decided that it should be at the end of the morning recitations.

For once she would cut her recitation in Horace, which came the last hour in the morning. Alicia had no recitation at that hour. She would probably be in her room and alone. Jane also knew that Elsie Noble was occupied with a class at that time.

If looks could have killed, Jane and Adrienne would undoubtedly have been carried lifeless from the dining room that morning. At breakfast Elsie Noble's thin face wore an expression of spiteful resentment, which she made no effort to conceal. She was inwardly furious over her failure to rally the four Bridge Street freshmen to her standard. In consequence, she was more bitter against Jane and Adrienne than ever.

It further increased her rancor to hear Adrienne prattling with child-like innocence to Dorothy Martin of the coming dance.

Knowing very well what she was about, the little girl kept up a tantalizing chatter that was maddening in the extreme to the defeated plotter.

Unacquainted with the true state of affairs, Dorothy's genuinely expressed interest in the Bridge Street girls merely added fuel to the fire.

"Ah, but they are indeed delightful!" Adrienne wickedly assured, her black eyes dancing with mischief. "We shall be proud of our freshmen, when we escort them to the dance. Shall we not, Jeanne?"

"Yes, indeed. You must meet them, Dorothy. You'll like them all immensely. They're a splendid, high-principled lot of girls."

Signally amused by Adrienne's tactics, Jane could not resist this one little fling at her discomfited tablemate. She hoped it would serve to enlighten the latter in regard to at least one thing.

Her second recitation, spherical trigonometry, over, Jane hurried across the campus toward the 124 Hall, keeping a sharp lookout for Alicia. It was just possible she might meet the latter on the campus.

Reaching the veranda, Jane lingered there. If she could waylay Alicia as she came in, so much the better. With this idea paramount, she sat down in a high-backed porch rocker and waited.

She could not help reflecting a trifle sadly that thus far her sophomore year had run anything but smoothly. She had looked forward to peace, whereas she was in the midst of strife. And all because Marian Seaton did not like her. That dislike dated back to her initial journey across the continent to Wellington. If she had not antagonized Marian then, she wondered if she and Marian would have become enemies. She decided that they must have. They had nothing whatever in common.

Light, hurrying feet on the walk brought Jane's retrospective musings to an end. She saw Alicia a second before the latter saw her. Promptly rising, she headed Alicia off neatly as she gained the steps.

"I want to speak to you, Alicia," she greeted evenly. "You must listen to me."

"I have nothing to say to you. Please let me alone." 125

A dull flush mantled Alicia's pale cheeks as she thus spoke. Her tones indicated injury rather than anger.

"But I have something to say to you," persisted Jane. "I must know positively why you have turned against me. It's not fair in you to keep me in the dark. Do you think it is? What have I done to deserve such treatment?"

Stopping on the step below Jane, Alicia stared hard at the quiet, purposeful face looking down on her.

"I believed in you, Jane," she said sadly, with a little catch of breath. "You made me admire you. Then you spoiled it all. It hurt me so. I—I—don't want to talk about it."

She took an undecided step to the right, as though to pass Jane and flee into the house.

"Don't go, Alicia. Let's get together and straighten things out." Jane laid a gentle hand on the other girl's arm. "I'm sure we can. You promised last year to be my friend. Have you forgotten that?"

"How can I be the friend of a girl who talks about me?" Alicia cried out bitterly. "A girl who only pretends friendship?"

"So, that's it. I thought as much. Now tell me what I said about you." 126

Something in Jane's steady glance caused Alicia's eyes to waver.

"You told Ethel Lacey that you wished you didn't have to invite me to go with you girls to the Inn the other night, but you felt that you could hardly get out of it. That I expected you to do it. You know that's not true. I'd never intrude where I wasn't wanted."

"Did Ethel tell you this?" Jane asked composedly.

"No. Someone else overheard you say it," retorted Alicia.

"And that 'someone else'?"

"I won't tell you. I promised I wouldn't."

"You don't need to tell me, because I *know*." Jane emphasized the *know*. "It's not true. I didn't say that. This is what I said."

As well as she could recall it, she repeated the conversation that had taken place between herself and Ethel.

"I asked Ethel to invite you because I didn't want you to go to your room," she explained. "Miss Noble and I are not on speaking terms. Did you know that?"

"Yes, I knew it," Alicia admitted. "I was told it was your fault. I didn't believe it until——"
"127

She paused, uncertainty written large on every feature. She had begun to glimpse the unworthiness of her doubts.

"Until Miss Noble came to you with this untruthful tale about me," finished Jane.

Alicia was silent. She could not truthfully contradict this pertinent statement.

"Which of us do you believe, Alicia?"

Jane put the question with business-like directness.

Alicia mutely studied Jane's resolute face. Honesty of purpose looked out from the long-lashed, gray eyes. She mentally contrasted it with another face; dark, spiteful and furtive.

"I believe you. Forgive me, Jane."

Her lips quivering, Alicia stretched forth a penitent hand.

"There's nothing to forgive."

Jane was quick to grasp the hand Alicia proffered.

"I ought to have come straight to you," quavered the penitent.

"I wish you had. Thank goodness, it's all right now. Let's sit down in the porch swing, Alicia. There are several things yet to be said and this is the time to say them."

Her hand still in Alicia's, Jane gently pulled¹²⁸ her toward the swing. When they had seated themselves, she continued:

"I don't like to say things behind anyone's back, but in this case it's necessary. Miss Noble has started her freshman year as a trouble maker. She is very bitter against me for several reasons. When I came back to college, I found that Mrs. Weatherbee had given her my room. She understood that I was not coming to Madison Hall this year. I'm telling you this because I suspect that it is news to you."

"It certainly *is*." Alicia showed evident surprise. "I supposed Elsie Noble had been assigned to room with me from the start. She never said a word about it to me."

"She didn't want you to know it. I don't wish to explain why. I'll simply say that Mrs. Weatherbee decided I had first right to the room. It made Miss Noble very angry. She came back to the room after she had left it. Adrienne, Judith and I were there. She made quite a scene. I hoped it would end there, but it hasn't. Since then she has tried to set not only you against me, but others also. She has circulated a paper among the freshmen against Judith, Adrienne and I which some of them have signed."

"How perfectly terrible!" was Alicia's shocked¹²⁹ exclamation. "She certainly has kept very quiet about it to me. I never suspected such a thing."

"I can't see that it has done us much harm," Jane dryly responded. "It's come to a point, however, where we feel that we ought to assert ourselves. We are here for study, not to quarrel, but we won't stand everything tamely."

"I don't blame you. I wouldn't, either. I'm sure Marian Seaton is behind all this," declared Alicia hotly. "Ever since I came back to the Hall she's been trying to talk to me. Small good it will do her. When I broke friendship with her last year it was for good and all."

"When you wouldn't speak to me the other day, I thought you had gone back to her," confessed Jane. "Just a little before that Dorothy and I had been saying that we thought we ought to try to make Marian see things differently. Afterward I was so angry I gave up the thought as hopeless. It may not be right to say to you, 'Let Marian alone,' when one looks at it from one angle. The Bible says, 'Love your enemies.' On the other hand, it seems wiser to steer clear of malicious persons. Marian *is* malicious. She's proved that over and over again. No one but herself can make her different."

"I *know* it's best for me to keep away from¹³⁰ her," asserted Alicia. "My influence wouldn't be one, two, three with her. Whenever I tried last year to be honest with myself she just sneered at me. It's either be like her or let her alone, in my case. There's no happy medium. So I choose to let her alone."

"We all have to decide such things for ourselves," Jane said reflectively. "It seems too bad that Marian's so determined to be always on the wrong side. I've decided to let her stay there for the present. If this affair of the paper involved only myself, I'd probably do nothing about

it. But it's not right to let Judith and Adrienne suffer for something that's really meant for me."

"What are you going to do?" inquired Alicia.

"That's what I've been leading up to. With your permission I intend to have a reckoning with Miss Noble in your room. I'd like you to be there when it happens. Judith and Adrienne will be with me. Are you willing that it should be so?"

"Yes, indeed," promptly answered Alicia. "When is the grand reckoning to be?"

"This afternoon just before dinner. I can say my say in short order. Of course if she's not in, I'll have to postpone it until later." 131

"I can let you know as soon as she comes in from her last class," volunteered Alicia.

"No, I'd rather not have it that way." Jane smiled whimsically. "It's had enough to have to go to work and deliberately plan this hateful business. It has to be gone through with. That's certain. We'll just take our chance of finding her in. When you hear us knock, I wish you'd open the door. It's all horrid, isn't it? I feel like a conspirator."

Jane made a gesture indicative of utter distaste for the purposed program.

"It's honest, anyhow. It's not backbiting and underhandedness," Alicia stoutly pointed out.

"No, it isn't," Jane soberly agreed. "That's the only thing that reconciles me to do it. It's dealing openly and aboveboard with treachery and spite."

CHAPTER XV

THE RECKONING

"*Voila!* We are ready. Let us advance!" proclaimed Adrienne with a smothered chuckle, when at ten minutes to six a determined trio left Adrienne's room on the fateful errand to the room next door.

"Don't you dare giggle when we get in there," warned Judith in a whisper, as Jane rapped sharply on the door. "We must make an imposing appearance if we can," she added with a grin. "Who knows? I may giggle myself."

True to her word, it was Alicia who admitted them with, "Hello, girls! Come in."

As the three entered, a figure lolling in a Morris chair by the window sprang up with an angry exclamation.

"I will not have these people in my room, Alicia Reynolds! Do you hear me? I won't!"¹³³

Elsie Noble had turned on Alicia, her small black eyes snapping.

"Half this room happens to be mine," tranquilly reminded Alicia. "Have a seat, girls."

"No, thank you. We won't stay long enough for that." Jane's tone was equally composed. "We came to see *you*, Miss Noble."

"I won't stay," shrieked the enraged girl, and started for the door.

Alicia reached it ahead of her. Calmly turning the key, she dropped it into her blouse pocket.

"Yes; you will stay, Elsie," she said with quiet decision. "You tried to make trouble between Jane and me. We've found you out. Now, you'll listen to what Jane has to say to you. If you don't, you may be sorry."

Her back against the locked door, Elsie Noble glared at her captors for an instant in speechless fury. Then she found her voice again.

"I'll report every one of you for this! It's an outrage!" she shrilled.

The threat lacked strength, however. A coward at heart, she already stood in fear of the accusing quartette which confronted her.

"Just a moment, Miss Noble. We have no desire to detain you any longer than we can help." Jane's intonation was faintly satirical.¹³⁴ "We came here for two purposes. One is to tell you that you must stop making trouble for us among your classmates. You know what you have done. So do we. Don't do it again. I will also trouble you for that paper you have been circulating among the freshmen."

"I don't know what you're talking about," hotly denied the culprit. Her eyes, however, shifted uneasily from those of her accusers.

"Oh, yes you do." Judith now took a hand. "You ought to know. Don't you remember? You began it, 'We the undersigned,' and ended your little stunt with the names of as many freshmen as were foolish enough to listen to you."

"You seem to think you know a whole lot," sneered Elsie. "I'm very sure not one of you ever saw such a paper as you describe."

"We did not see it, but we know four girls who did," Jane informed with quiet significance. "They were asked to sign it and refused. They are quite willing to testify to this should we see fit to take the matter to President Blakesly or Miss Rutledge."

"You wouldn't dare do such a thing!" the cornered plotter cried out defiantly. "He—you—he wouldn't listen to such a—a—story as you're trying to tell. He has something better to do¹³⁵ than listen to gossiping sophomores. Miss Rutledge wouldn't listen, either."

"I don't think either President Blakesly or Miss Rutledge would refuse to listen to anything that had to do with one student's attempt to injure another," was Jane's grave response.

"However, that is not the point. You must make up your mind either to give me that paper and your promise to stop your mischief-making, or else defend yourself as best you can to the faculty. Naturally, we would prefer to settle the matter here and without publicity. If it is carried higher, it will involve not only you, but all the others who signed the paper. If this concerned me alone, I would not be here. But I cannot allow my friends to suffer, simply because they are my friends."

Jane delivered her ultimatum with a tense forcefulness that admitted of no further trifling.

"I can't—I won't—I——" floundered Elsie, now more afraid than angry. "How do I know that you wouldn't take it to President Blakesly if I gave it to you?" she demanded desperately.

"Ah! She admits that she has it!" exclaimed Adrienne triumphantly. The little girl had hitherto kept silent, content to let Jane do the talking. "She is of a truth quite droll." 136

"Yes, I have it!" Elsie fiercely addressed Adrienne. "I'm going to keep it, too, you horrid little torment."

It was Jane who now spoke, and with a finality.

"A moment more, please. I want to ask you two questions, Miss Noble. The first is: 'How did you happen to overhear the private conversation between Miss Lacey and myself that you repeated so incorrectly to Alicia?' The second is: 'How did you know that we intended to invite the Bridge Street girls to the freshman frolic?' We had mentioned it to no one outside, except Miss Marsh, who certainly did not tell you."

"I won't answer either question," sputtered Elsie. "You can't make me tell you. You'll never know from me."

"I was sure you wouldn't answer." Jane smiled scornfully. "I asked you merely because I wanted to call your attention to both instances. That's all. I'm sorry we can not settle this affair quietly. If you will kindly stand aside, Alicia will unlock the door."

"I—you mustn't tell President Blakesly!"

There was a hint of pleading in the protesting cry. Thoroughly cowed by the fell prospect she was now facing, Elsie crumpled.

"You're mean, too—mean—for—anything!" 137 she wailed, and burst into tears. "You—ought to be—ashamed—to—come—here—and—bully me—like—this. I'll give you—the—paper—but—I'll hate you as long as I live, Jane Allen!"

Sheer intensity of emotion steadied her voice on this last passionate avowal.

Handkerchief to her eyes, she stumbled across the room to the chiffonier. Jerking open the top drawer, she groped within and drew forth a folded paper. Turning, she threw it at Jane with vicious force. It fluttered to the floor a few feet from where she stood.

Very calmly Jane marched over and picked it up. Unfolding it, she glanced it over.

"Please read it, girls," she directed, handing it to Judith.

The latter silently complied and passed it to Adrienne, who in turn gave it to Alicia.

Alicia's face grew dark as she perused it. An angry spot of color appeared on each cheek.

"How could you?" she said, her eyes resting on her roommate in immeasurable contempt.

"You did perfectly right in coming here, Jane," she commented, as she returned the paper to the latter. "I am ashamed to think I ever allowed this girl's spite to come between us. I should have known better." 138

"It's all past. It won't happen again, Alicia. Now——"

With a purposeful hand Jane tore the offending paper to bits. Stepping over to the waste basket she dropped them into it.

"This incident is closed," she sternly announced to the sullen-faced author of the mischief. "You understand that there are to be no more of a similar nature involving us or any other girls here at Wellington?"

"Yes," muttered Elsie.

"Thank you."

Jane had intended the "Thank you" to be her last word. Something in the expression of abject defeat that looked out from that lowering face stirred her to sudden pity.

"I'm sorry this had to happen, Miss Noble," she said, almost gently. "There's only one thing to do; forget it. We intend to. Won't you? I'm willing to begin over again and——"

"Don't preach to me! I hate you! I'll never forgive you!"

Out of defeat, resentment flared afresh. Darting past the group of girls, Elsie Noble gained the door which was now unlocked. She flashed from the room slamming the door behind her with a force that threatened to shake it from its hinges. 139

"Some little tempest," cheerfully averred Judith. "Jane, let me congratulate you. You did the deed."

"Don't congratulate me." Jane scowled fiercely. "I feel like—well, just what she said I was—a bully. She's not so much to blame. She's a poor little cat's-paw for Marian Seaton."

"She's to blame for letting herself be influenced by Marian," disagreed Judith. "How do you suppose she found out about our going to invite the Bridge Street freshmen to the dance?"

"She must have, of a certainty, listened at our door," declared Adrienne.

"I don't believe she could hear a thing that way," disagreed Judith. "These doors are heavy. The sound doesn't go through them. Besides, she couldn't stand outside and eavesdrop long without being noticed by some one passing through the hall. Girls are always coming and going, you know."

"Yet how could she otherwise know these things?" insisted Adrienne.

"Give it up." Judith shook her head. "It's a mystery. She knew them. Maybe some day we'll know how she learned. We'll probably find out when we least expect to. Just stumble upon it long after we've forgotten all about it."

CHAPTER XVI

PLAYING CAVALIER

That evening after dinner, Jane indulged in one of her dark, floor-tramping moods. The disagreeable interview of the afternoon had left a bad taste in her mouth. She had done what she had deemed necessary, but at heart she was intensely disgusted with herself.

She wondered what Dorothy Martin would have done, given the same circumstances. She longed to tell Dorothy all about it, yet she felt that it belonged only to those whom it directly concerned.

"Do sit down and behave, Jane," admonished Judith. "You make me nervous. Your tramp, tramp, tramp gets into my head and I can't study. You act as though you'd committed a murder and hidden the body in the top drawer of the chiffonier."141

"Excuse me, Judy. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to disturb you. I guess the whole affair has gotten on my nerves."

With this apology, Jane sought a chair and made a half-hearted attempt at study. Gradually she drew her mind from unpleasant thoughts and proceeded to concentrate it upon her lessons for the next day.

It was not until she and Judith were preparing for bed that the latter re-opened the subject.

"Adrienne and I tried a little stunt of our own after dinner to-night," she confessed somewhat sheepishly. "Imp went into her room and I stood outside the door. She read a paragraph out loud from a book, but I couldn't understand a word she said. I could just catch the sound of her voice and that was all."

"Humph!" was Jane's sole reply.

"Yes, 'humph' if you want to. It goes to show that the ignoble Noble never got her information that way. The question is, 'How did she get it?'"

"I don't know and I don't care," returned Jane wearily. "Please, Judy, I want to forget the whole thing."

"I don't. I'm going to be an investigating investigator and solve the mystery. Watch slipper¹⁴² Judy, the dauntless detective of Madison Hall. Leave it to her to puzzle out the puzzle."

"Better forget it," advised Jane shortly.

"Oh, never! Let me have at least one worthy object in life, won't you?" was Judith's blithe plea. "Never mind, Imp will support and admire my ambition, even if you don't."

Judith was not in the least cast down by the defeat of an unworthy foe. She was glad of it. Brought up among girls, she was too much used to such squabbles to take them to heart.

For the next three days she and Adrienne amused themselves by planning wild schemes to entrap the "ignoble Noble" and wring from her a confession of her nefarious methods. So wild, indeed, were their projects that the mere discussion of them invariably sent them into peals of laughter.

As a matter of fact, neither could devise a plausible scheme by which they might discover what they burned to know. Both were agreed that chance alone would put them in possession of the much desired information.

Wednesday evening of the following week saw Jane, Adrienne, Judith and Norma set off in a taxicab for 605 Bridge Street to escort their new friends to the freshman frolic.¹⁴³

Due to the demand for taxicabs for that evening, they had been able to secure only one, whereas they needed two. They had decided to overcome this difficulty by having the driver make two trips, carrying four girls at each trip.

According to Judith, "We could all squeeze into one taxi, but I have too much respect for my costly apparel to risk it."

The quartette of escorting sophomores made a pretty picture that evening as they trooped down the steps of the Hall to the waiting taxicab.

Jane had chosen a particularly stunning frock of silver tissue, worn over a foundation of dull green satin. In lieu of flowers, a single beautiful spray of English ivy trailed across one white shoulder. The gown was the handsomest she owned and she had originally intended to save it for a later festivity. Realizing that she must inevitably become a target for the displeased eyes of those who disliked her, she had decided that so far as apparel went she would leave no room for criticism.

Adrienne, who loved daring colors, had elected to appear in a chiffon creation, the exact shade of an American Beauty rose. It set off her dark,¹⁴⁴ vivid loveliness to perfection. Designed by herself, it had been fashioned by a French woman who attended to the making of her distinguished mother's gowns. In consequence, it was a triumph of its kind. As a last touch, a cluster of short-stemmed American Beauties nestled against the low-cut bodice of the gown.

Judith looked charming in a white net over apricot taffeta with a bunch of sunset roses tucked into the black velvet ribbon sash that completed the costume.

Norma was wearing the becoming blue and white gown Jane had given her the previous year. Since that first eventful freshman dance, when Jane had played fairy godmother to her, she had worn the exquisite frock only once. Now it looked as fresh and dainty as it had on that immemorial night. Trimmed as it was with clusters of velvet forget-me-nots, Norma wore no natural flowers.

Though she had by her summer's work in the stock company earned immunity from drudgery, she had earned no more than that. With the exception of this one gown, she dressed almost as simply as in the old days. She confined her wardrobe to one or two serviceable one-piece dresses, a coat suit and a quantity of dainty white silk¹⁴⁵ blouses and lingerie. These last were fashioned and laundered by her own clever fingers.

"I hope we're not too fine for our girls," Norma remarked anxiously as the four skipped, one after the other, from the taxicab at the Bridge Street address.

"I thought of that, too, but I decided that they'd like it if we looked our very smartest. They are too independent to feel crushed by a mere matter of fine clothes," was Jane's opinion.

The frank admiration with which the four freshmen exclaimed over their gorgeous escorts served to point to the accuracy of her opinion.

"You're regular birds of Paradise!" laughed Freda. "We are certainly lucky to capture such prizes. We're not a bit splendiferous, ourselves. But then, why should we be? It wouldn't match with our humble status."

"You look sweet, every one of you," praised Judith. "Your gowns are dear. They are wonderfully becoming."

"We made them ourselves last summer," explained Kathie with a little air of pride. "We clubbed together and bought a bolt of this white Persian lawn. Ida crocheted these butterfly medallions set in Freda's gown and mine. Then Marie embroidered the designs on hers and Ida's¹⁴⁶ gowns. Each dress is a little different from the other, yet they all look pretty much alike."

"They are all beautiful," Jane warmly assured.

She could say so in absolute truth. Simple, graceful lines, combined with dainty hand-wrought trimmings had produced four frocks which would have sold at a high price in an exclusive city dress shop.

"Ah, but you are the clever ones!" bubbled Adrienne. "It is we who must be proud of you. I would that *ma mère* could see these frocks. She would, of a certainty, rave with the delight. *Ma mère*, you must know, is the true Frenchwoman who appreciates highly the beautiful handwork such as this."

"You rather take us off our feet," smiled Marie. "We were not expecting it, you know."

The brightness in her own eyes was reflected in that of her chums. Girl-like, they found exquisite happiness in being thus appreciated.

"We'd better be starting," Jane presently proposed. "We could get only one taxi, so four of us will have to go first and four more in a second load."

Jane's anxiety to be starting lay not entirely in her natural impatience of delay. She was not quite easy in mind regarding the reception awaiting them. Marian Seaton had been chosen to stand in the receiving line. That in itself was sufficient to make her believe that the earlier the ordeal of formal greeting could be gone through with the better it would be for all concerned.

She did not doubt that Marian was in full possession of the facts concerning her cousin's recent defeat. It would be exactly like Marian to create a disagreeable scene. If this had to happen, she preferred that it should take place before the majority of the crowd arrived.

She had expressed this fear to Judith who had scouted at the idea on the grounds that Marian "wouldn't be crazy enough to make an idiot of herself before everybody."

"You and Adrienne go first with your ladies, Judy," she continued. "If you don't mind, I wish you'd wait in the corridor for the rest of us. We'll be only a few minutes behind you."

"It's just like this, girls," she turned to the four freshmen. "I'm not borrowing trouble, but if any of the sophs in the receiving line act—well—not very cordial, you needn't be surprised. It will be because of that paper you girls wouldn't sign. I hadn't mentioned it before, but——" Jane paused. "The girl gave it to us. We destroyed it," she added with a briefness that did not invite questioning.

"I'm glad you destroyed it," congratulated Freda.

"So am I," came in concert from her three chums.

"We're not a bit sensitive," lightly assured Ida Leonard. "We aren't going to let a few snubs spoil our good time."

"I guess we'll be sufficient unto ourselves," predicted Kathie optimistically. "Now we'd better get our flowers, pals, so as not to keep our distinguished cavaliers waiting."

Excusing themselves, the quartette of freshmen repaired to the tiny back porch, where the four bouquets of roses sent them by their escorts had been carefully placed in water to keep them fresh against the time of use.

"They are awfully thoroughbred, aren't they?" commented Judith in an undertone. "Never a question about that ignoble Noble mix-up. Honestly, Jane, do you think Marian will behave like a donkey?"

Laughter greeted this inquiry. Jane immediately grew grave.

"It wouldn't surprise me," she shrugged. "We can't expect, naturally, that she will notice us as we pass her in the receiving line. Certainly we sha'n't notice her. If only she doesn't say something hateful to us that will attract attention. I mean, about our freshmen."

The return into the room of the latter, each laden with a big bouquet of fragrant roses, cut short the conversation.

Half an hour and the eight girls were reunited in the corridor leading to the gymnasium. Each cavalier gallantly offering an arm to the freshman of her choice, they walked two by two into the gymnasium, which had been transformed for the night into a veritable ball room. It was already fairly well filled with daintily gowned girls, who stood about, or sat in little groups, talking animatedly.

Near the entrance to the room, the reception committee were lined up in all their glory. Jane's quick glance discerned Marian Seaton, resplendent in an elaborate gown of pale blue satin, standing at the far end of the line. Her usually arrogant features wore an expression of fatuous complacency. It took wing the instant she spied Jane and her friends.

"Now it's coming," was Jane's mental conviction, as she noted the swift lowering change in the other girl's face.

Heading the little procession with Ida Leonard, Jane suddenly saw her way clear. She could only hope that the others of her group would take their cue from her.

CHAPTER XVII

THE EAVESDROPPER

Politely responding to the greetings extended to herself and Ida as they advanced down the line, they came at last to the girl who stood next to Marian. The instant Jane had touched hands with the former she drew Ida's arm within her own and turned abruptly away, without giving Marian time to do more than glare angrily after her. Jane realized very well that what she had done was in the nature of a rudeness, yet she felt that under the circumstances it was justifiable.

To her great relief, Judith, Adrienne and Ethel did precisely the same thing.

"Well, we came through with our heads still on," congratulated naughty Judith in Jane's ear, the moment they had won clear of the fateful receiving line. "Clever little Janie. I saw and I heeded. Our dear Marian looked ready to bite. I think she would have snapped anyway, if we'd given her half a chance. Good thing she was on the end. I'm sure nobody noticed."

"I hope no one did," Jane sighed. "I hated to do it. I think, too, she intended to be hateful. I saw it in her face, so I just slid away without giving her a chance. I'm glad that ordeal's over. Now I must find some partners for Ida. The dancing will soon begin."

This proved an easy task. Whatever might be freshman opinion of Jane Allen, she had more friends among the sophomores than she had believed possible. In touch socially with her class for the first time since her return to Wellington, she was amazed at the smiling faces and gay greetings which she met at every turn.

It had a wonderfully cheering effect on her, coming as it did on the heels of the recent freshman demonstration of ill-will. It gave her a thrill of intense happiness. She resolved to put away every vexatious thought and enjoy the frolic with all her might.

That she had successfully put her resolution into effect was evidenced by her bright eyes and laughing lips when, two hours afterward, she and Judith seated themselves on a wicker settee after 153 a one-step which they had danced together for old time's sake.

"I'm having a splendid time!" glowed Judith. "You can see for yourself how much that old paper amounted to. Most of these freshmen have been lovely to me. I've steered clear of the ones who looked doubtful. I've had a few scowls handed to me. It's been easy to pick out the ignoble Noble's satellites by their freezing stares. I wonder who escorted our noble little friend? Cousin Marian, no doubt," she added, with her ever-ready chuckle.

"No doubt," was Jane's dry repetition. "Let's go and get some lemonade, Judy," she proposed irrelevantly. "Just watching that crowd around the punch bowl makes me thirsty."

"I'm in need of a few cups of lemonade myself," concurred Judith amiably.

Attempting to rise, an ominous ripping sound informed Jane that Judith had been unconsciously sitting on a fold of the silver tissue overdress to her gown.

"Oh, what a shame! I didn't know I was sitting on your overskirt, Jane. That's too bad!"

Judith hastily got to her feet to ruefully inspect the amount of damage she had done.

"It's nothing," Jane assured lightly. "Let's 154 drink our lemonade and then go over to the dressing room. I can pin this tear so it will stay, I guess. The gathers are only ripped out a little."

Having drunk two cups of lemonade apiece, they strolled on toward the dressing room. It was the little side room the freshman team had used the previous year when playing basket-ball.

Nor were they aware, as they crossed the wide room, arm in arm, that a certain pair of pale blue eyes jealously watched them. As they disappeared through the dressing-room door, Marian Seaton hurried after them, disagreeable purpose written on her face.

Quite oblivious to the fact that she was one of a welcoming committee, she had fully intended to say something cutting to Jane when the latter should arrive that evening in the gymnasium. Having missed one opportunity she did not propose to miss a second. This time Jane Allen should hear what she had to say.

At the slightly opened door she heard words which brought her to an abrupt halt. It was not the first time she had listened at that selfsame door. Edging close, she turned her back to it.

Facing the big room, her pale eyes roved over it with studied carelessness. Her ears, however, were sharply trained to catch the sound of two voices that drifted plainly out to her.

Meanwhile Judith, unaware of listeners, was gayly remarking as she pinned up the tear in Jane's overdress:

"This reminds me of the tear in the white lace dress that caused such a fuss last year. It was a good thing you were around to help Norma out of that mix-up. If it hadn't been for you, Edith Hammond would have gone straight to Mrs. Weatherbee and told her that it was Norma who stole her dress. I must say, Edith acted splendidly about it afterward. I never thought she had it in her to do as she did."

"Things looked pretty black for poor Norma that day until I made things right with Edith," reminisced Jane. "She was determined to make Norma give back her dress when all the while——"

"It was Judy Stearns who had really stolen it," merrily supplemented Judith.

"I'll never forget Edith's face when I told her I was sorry to say that the real thief was Judith Stearns," laughed Jane.

"I was the thief, all right enough, but only a few people knew it. Alas, my fatal failing!" grinned Judith. "There! I guess that will stay. Let's go. I hear the enlivening strains of a fox trot. That means us."

It also meant to the listener outside that her time of eavesdropping was up. Before the two occupants of the dressing room had reached the door Marian Seaton had hurried away from it, her original intention quite forgotten.

CHAPTER XVIII

DIVIDING THE HONORS

Once the sophomores had done their duty in the way of entertaining their freshmen sisters, they promptly turned to their own affairs.

Following the freshman frolic a busy week of sophomore electioneering set in. It was succeeded by a class meeting that barely escaped being a quarrel.

At least a third of the class had, it appeared, enlisted under Marian Seaton's banner. These ardent supporters who had espoused her cause in the previous year and had been defeated, again came to the front with belligerent energy. Though lacking in numbers, they were strong in disagreeable opposition.

Christine Ellis' nomination of Judith Stearns for president, which was seconded by Alicia Reynolds, caused one after another of Marian's adherents to rise to their feet in hot objection. For five minutes or more the chairman of the nomination committee had her hands full in subduing the rebels.

Stung by the insult, Judith arose, white with righteous wrath, to decline the nomination. Repeated cries of, "Sit down, Judy. We want you for our president!" "What's the matter with Judy? She's *all* right!" and, "Judy Stearns or nobody!" drowned the refusal she strove to utter. In the end she threw up her hands in a gesture of despair and sat down, amid approving cheers from her triumphant supporters.

The nomination of Alicia Reynolds as vice-president was hardly less opposed by the other faction, though it was carried in spite of protest. With deliberate intent to shame, Barbara Temple calmly nominated Maizie Gilbert as treasurer, thereby astounding the objectors to momentary dumbness. They soon rallied, however, and one of their number hastily seconded the nomination, which was carried.

Emboldened to action, Maizie promptly nominated Leila Brookes, one of her friends, for secretary. This nomination was avidly seconded by another of Marian's adherents and also carried.¹⁵⁹ Having won their point against unworthy opposition, the majority could afford to be generous.

The final result of the election found honors equally divided between the two sets of girls, a condition of affairs which promised anything but a peaceful year for 19—.

Gathered at Rutherford Inn that evening for a spread in honor of Judith, given by Christine and Barbara, the latter expressed herself frankly in regard to the afternoon's proceedings.

"That class meeting was as nearly a riot as could be," she declared disgustedly. "I expected to engage in hand-to-hand combat before it ended. I thought the best way to shame that crowd was to give them the chance, they didn't want to give us."

"They snapped at it, too," Christine Ellis said scornfully.

"I'll never forgive you girls for making me president when I didn't want to be," was Judith's rueful assertion.

"We would never have forgiven you if you had backed out," retorted Ethel Lacey.

"I didn't have the least word to say about it. Nobody would listen to me."

Judith's comical air of resignation provoked a laugh.¹⁶⁰

"You should thus be pleased that you are well-liked, Judy," asserted Adrienne. "And Alicia, here, we were delighted with your success, *ma chere*."

"I never dreamed of being nominated." A faint color stole into Alicia's pale face. "I'd much rather it had been one of you girls."

"I'm heartily glad I was out of it all," declared Jane with emphasis. "There's only one thing I really want this year in the way of college honors."

"To make the sophomore team?" asked Christine.

"Yes."

An eager light sprang into Jane's gray eyes.

"You'll make it, Jane," predicted Barbara. "You can outplay us all. Some of us are going to lose out, though. There are five of us here who are going to try for it. Judy, Adrienne, you, Christine and I. Of course we can't all make it. Quite a lot of sophs are going to try for it this year besides us. Marian Seaton will be one of them, I suppose."

"She'll make it, if any of her friends happen to be judges at the try-out," commented Judith sagely. "I hope Dorothy Martin will be chosen as one of the judges. She can be depended upon¹⁶¹ to do the fair thing. Miss Hurley was awfully unfair last year. I wish Dorothy'd be chosen as our manager."

"We ought to do a little practicing, girls," urged Jane. "Let's start in to-morrow afternoon, provided we can have the gym. I understand the freshman team have been monopolizing it ever since their try-out last week."

"Who's on the freshman team?" asked Ethel curiously.

"I don't know. Haven't been over to see them work," Jane replied. "Have any of you?" She glanced about the round table at her friends.

A general shaking of heads revealed the fact that no one had.

"It's queer, but somehow I can't get interested in the freshmen," confided Barbara Temple. "A lot of them acted awfully stand-offish toward me on the night of the dance."

"I noticed the same thing!" exclaimed Christine in surprise. "I thought it was my imagination. Those four girls you folks brought were sweet, though."

"They are dandy girls," interposed Judith hastily, and immediately launched forth in praise of the Bridge Street freshmen.

Though she could have very quickly explained¹⁶² the strained attitude of the freshman class to Christine and Barbara, she held her peace. She decided, however, to have a talk that night with Jane. It was not fair that these two loyal friends should be kept in the dark about what bade fair to affect them unpleasantly.

That she was not alone in her opinion became manifest when, toward nine o'clock, Alicia, Ethel, Adrienne, Jane and herself bade Christine and Barbara good night and went on across the campus toward Madison Hall.

"Jane," began Judith abruptly, "I think we ought to tell Christine and Barbara about that freshman business. I didn't want to say a word until I'd put it up to you girls."

"Yes, I suppose we ought to tell them." Jane spoke almost wearily. "I didn't say anything about it to-night because I hated to drag it all up again. If you see either of the girls to-morrow, Judy, you'd better explain matters. I don't want to. I'm sick of the whole business."

"I'm heartily sick of my roommate. I can tell you that," said Alicia. "If I had known when that girl walked into my room that she was Marian Seaton's cousin I should have refused to room with her. She's completely under Marian's thumb. Whatever Marian tells her to do she¹⁶³ does. You'd think after what happened the other day that she'd be too angry ever to speak to me again. Well, she isn't. She tries to talk to me whenever we're together. She told me yesterday that I had made a terrible mistake in giving up Marian for you girls."

"Marian put her up to that," declared Judith.

"Of course she did," nodded Alicia. "Elsie had the nerve to tell me that Marian felt dreadfully over the horrid way I'd treated her. She blames Jane for it, and says she'll get even with her for it. I blame myself for being so hateful last year. Jane showed me how to be the person I'd always wanted to be, but was too cowardly then to be it."

"Jane is of us all the loyal friend," broke in Adrienne. "Sometimes she wears the fierce scowl and has the look of the lion, yet I am not afraid of her. See, even now she scowls, but she will not eat us. She scowls thus to hide the embarrassment."

The bright moonlight betrayed plainly the deep scowl between Jane's brows to which Adrienne had called attention.

"Imp, you're a rascal." Jane's brows immediately smoothed themselves. "You know altogether too much about me. I was embarrassed.¹⁶⁴ That's a fact. What Alicia said made me feel rather queer because I don't think I deserved it. I can't be the person I want to be myself, let alone showing anybody else. That's what has been bothering me right along. I'd like to be able to rise above caring whether or not Marian Seaton tries to get even with me."

"You can't do it, Jane, and be just to yourself," Alicia said very positively. "I know Marian a great deal better than I wish I did. She'll never stop trying to work against you as long as you're both at Wellington. She'll never let a chance slip to make trouble for you. I'd advise you to be on your guard and the very next time she tries anything hateful, go to Miss Rutledge with the whole story of the way she's treated you ever since you came to college."

"I couldn't do that. Not for myself, I mean. If it were something hateful she'd done to one of you girls, I could. I would have truly gone to Miss Rutledge or even Prexy with that paper, because it was injurious to Judy and Imp; not because of myself."

"Never mind, Jane. I am here to protect you," Judith reminded gaily. "I'd fight for you as quickly as you'd fight for me. Just remember that."¹⁶⁵

Judith began the little speech lightly. She ended with decided purpose.

"I know it, Judy."

Walking as she was beside her roommate, Jane slipped an affectionate hand within Judith's arm.

"If Marian plays on the team with you girls, then look out," further advised Alicia. "She'll do something to stir up trouble, you may depend upon it. I know I'm croaking, but I can't help it."

"Wait till she makes the team," grinned Judith. "She may find herself outplayed at the try-out. If she does, little Judy won't weep. No, indeed. I'll give a grand celebration in honor of the joyful event."

"I, also, will shed few tears," Adrienne drily concurred. "Ah, but I shall look forward to that most grand celebration! So at last this very wicked Marian shall perhaps be the cause of some little pleasure to us."

Jane could not resist joining in the laugh that greeted this naïve assertion. She wished she could feel as little concern about the matter as did Judith and Adrienne. Alicia's warning against Marian had taken hold on her more strongly than she could wish.¹⁶⁶

To Jane it seemed almost in the nature of a prophesy of disaster. She found herself inwardly hoping with her friends that Marian would not make the team. Instantly she put it aside as unworthy of what she, Jane Allen, desired to be. A good pioneer must forge ahead, surmounting one by one each obstacle that rose in the path. Again it came to Jane in that moment, out under the stars, that it could make no difference to her what Marian Seaton did or did not do to her, so long as she, an intrepid pioneer, steadily kept to work at clearing her own bit of college land.

She had earlier expressed this conviction to Dorothy. Later it had been swept away by bitter doubts as to whether she could continue to maintain a lofty indifference toward Marian's spiteful activities. Would she be obliged eventually to descend to Marian's level and fight her with her own weapons? She had more than once, of late, darkly considered the question. Now she knew that so long as Marian's spleen directed itself against her, and her alone, she could never do it. She would fight for her friends, but never for herself.

CHAPTER XIX

RANK INJUSTICE

At half-past four o'clock on the Wednesday following the sophomore class elections, the sophomore basket-ball try-out took place in the gymnasium. Twenty girls of the sophomore class had elected to enter the lists, while the usual number of freshmen and upper class spectators lined the walls of the big room.

Among the ten bloomer-clad girls who were finally picked for the deciding tussle, five wore the dark green uniforms that had identified them the previous year as the official freshman team. They were Judith, Jane, Adrienne, Christine Ellis and Marian Seaton. Among the other five contestants, Barbara Temple and Olive Hurst, both of last year's practice team, had

survived. The other three girls were disappointed aspirants¹⁶⁸ of the previous year's try-out, who had sturdily returned to the lists for a try at making the sophomore team.

When the shrill notes of the whistle sent the ten into deciding action, it became immediately evident that it would be nip and tuck as to the winners. In every girlish heart lived the strong determination to be among the elect. In consequence, the zealous ten treated the spectators to a most spirited exhibition of basket-ball prowess.

When it had ended, the players ran off the floor, breathlessly to await the verdict. With the exception of two of them, opinion was divided. Regarding these two, there was no doubt in the minds of the watchers that Jane Allen and Adrienne Dupree, at least, had made the team. They were distinctly eligible.

Each in her own fashion had shown actual brilliancy of playing. The others had done extremely well. How well was a matter which must be left to the three judges to decide.

While the ten impatiently waited for the decision, over in the judges' corner a spirited discussion was going on between Dorothy Martin and the two seniors who were officiating with her in the capacity of judges. One of them, Selina¹⁶⁹ Brown, had already been appointed as basket-ball manager of the teams for the year.

"I do not agree with you, Miss Brown," Dorothy was protesting, her fine face alive with righteous vexation. "In my opinion, Miss Stearns has completely outplayed Miss Seaton. In fact she has always been the better player of the two. Granted, Miss Seaton is an excellent player, but Miss Stearns outclasses her. I say this in absolute fairness. Try them out again and you will see, even if you don't now."

"I am sorry to be obliged to differ with you regarding Miss Stearns, but Miss Seaton must be my first and last choice. Miss Nelson quite agrees with me. Do you not?"

She turned triumphantly to the third judge for corroboration.

"I—really—yes, I think Miss Seaton is the better player."

The reply, begun hesitatingly, went on to firmness. Laura Nelson had the grace to color slightly, however, as she made it. Indebted to Marian Seaton for several rides in the latter's limousine, as well as hospitable entertainment at Rutherford Inn, she felt compelled to stand by at the critical moment. She had been privately given to understand beforehand that Marian¹⁷⁰ was to make the team, whoever else failed.

"The majority rules, I believe, Miss Martin."

A disagreeable smile hovered about Miss Brown's thin lips as she said this.

"It does, but——" Patent contempt looked out from Dorothy's steady eyes.

"But what?" sharply challenged Selina Brown.

"It is an unfair majority," was the quiet accusation. "As the other four players have been chosen, I will leave you to make the announcement."

So saying, Dorothy turned abruptly and walked away, too greatly incensed to trust herself longer in the company of the pair whom she had flatly accused of unfairness. Straight across the gymnasium she walked to where Judith, Jane, Christine, Barbara and Adrienne stood, an eager group.

"Girls," she said, in a wrathfully impressive voice, "I'm going to stand here beside you. When the announcement of the team is made you'll understand why."

"What's the matter, Dorothy?" anxiously questioned Christine.

Four pairs of eyes riveted themselves wonderingly on Dorothy's flushed, indignant face.¹⁷¹ None of the quartette had ever before seen sweet-tempered Dorothy Martin so manifestly angry. Something of an unusual nature must have happened.

"Don't ask me now. Listen!"

A loud blast from the whistle, held to Selina Brown's lips, was now enjoining silence. Immediately after the sound had died away, a hush fell upon the great room as the senior manager stepped forward and announced:

"For the official sophomore team the following players have been chosen: Adrienne Dupree, Barbara Temple, Christine Ellis, Jane Allen, and Marian Seaton. To act as subs: Olive Hurst and Marjory Upton."

Immediately she went on with a speech, meant to be politely consoling to the defeated contestants.

A faint, concerted gasp arose from the little group collected about Dorothy. This, then, was the explanation of Dorothy's indignation.

"It's an outrage! I'm going to protest!" muttered Jane, her tones thick with wrath. "No, I'm going to refuse to play on the team."

"And I also," echoed Adrienne hotly.

"Let's do it!" urged Christine, catching Barbara by the arm. "Right now, before that Miss¹⁷² Brown gets through with her hypocritical speech."

"No, girls, you mustn't. I—I—don't—want you to," quavered Judith.

"We've got to, Judy! It's rank injustice, piled high!" declared Christine tempestuously.

"If you do—I'll hate all of you!" Judith desperately threatened. "You've got to stay on the team, simply because I'm not on it. I'm not blind and neither are you. One of us had to go to make room for Marian Seaton. It would have been Jane, I'm sure, if she hadn't played so well. They didn't quite dare do it. So I had to take it. We don't know what's back of it. Maybe it's been done on purpose to bring about the very thing you want to do. I say, don't give in to it. Stick to the team."

"Judy's right, girls," interposed Dorothy. "Don't resign. You might only be pleasing a number of persons by doing so."

Further counsel on her part was cut off by a flock of sophomores who had come up to congratulate the winners. The latter were wearing their triumph far from exultantly. Jane was scowling in her most ferocious fashion. Adrienne's piquant features were set and unsmiling. Christine and Barbara appeared constrained and ill at ease. Judith alone had conjured up a brave little smile with which to mask the hurt of her defeat.

"It's a shame you didn't make the team, Judy!" sympathized one tactless sophomore.

"Judy *did* make the team, by rights," Dorothy defended, unflinching purpose in the calm assertion. "I want it distinctly understood that she was *my* choice."

"We thought, too, that she should have been chosen," exclaimed Alice Kirby, another sophomore, with a vigorous nod of her head. "It seems funny——"

"It's anything but funny," Dorothy cut in sharply. "Pardon me, Alice, I didn't intend to be rude to you. I'm dreadfully disgusted over this affair. I'll leave you to guess the reason."

"It's not hard to guess," retorted Alice significantly. "With Judy a better player than Miss Seaton and yet not even chosen to sub, something's twisted at Wellington. I rather think it will stay twisted, too, as long as a certain person has two out of three judges on her side."

Alice had been one of Judith's most ardent supporters at the recent class election.

"Well, I'm glad you have such a clear idea of things," grimly returned Dorothy. "Kindly pass it on. I'm not saying that vindictively, either. I want everybody I know to understand that I consider this an unfair decision and that I absolutely refuse to countenance it. Miss Brown recently asked me to act as referee in the games this year. I accepted. Now I'm going straight to my room to write her my resignation."

"You mustn't do that, Dorothy," Judith again protested. "It's dear in you. I surely appreciate it. Really, I don't mind so very——"

Judith stopped, the wistfulness in her blue eyes contradicting her unfinished denial.

"But if you resign, Dorothy, there'll be no one to stand by us later," reminded Christine gloomily.

"I've thought of that, too, but it doesn't sway me. This is a matter of principle. I could not be Judith's friend if I accepted this injustice to her."

"It is indeed wise that Dorothy should do this," Adrienne sagely wagged her curly head. "First, it is but fair to you, Judy. Again we shall gain rather than lose for this reason. Soon all must know why Dorothy has thus resigned. She wishes it to be no secret. *Voila!* For the rest of the year these two most unfair seniors must have a care. The eyes of many will be upon them. The pitcher may go once too often to the well. *N'est ce pas?*"

She turned to her listeners for corroboration. Wily child that she was, she had decided to impress this view on those present, knowing that it would be accepted and remembered.

"We had thought, the four of us," she impressively continued, including her three teammates and herself in a sweeping gesture, "to resign from the team. Because Judy does not desire it, we shall remain only to please her. Judy has the great heart and the broad mind. She has not the narrow soul of some persons of whom I might speak, only that these names leave the bad taste in my mouth."

"Hurrah for Judy! Three cheers for Adrienne!" enthusiastically proposed one of the highly impressed sophomores.

The hearty burst of acclamation which suddenly rent the air was anything but welcome to a number of girls still lingering in the gymnasium.

Surrounded by a coterie of her own adherents, which included Leila Brooks, Elsie Noble, Maizie Gilbert, and a number of upper class girls, Marian Seaton's pale eyes darted a spiteful glance at the noisy worshippers of the girls she detested.

"Boisterous things!" she exclaimed disdainfully. "The idea of their setting up such a howl about that Judy Stearns when she didn't even make sub, let alone making the team. If they knew what I know about her, not one of those sops outside of her own crowd would ever speak to her again."

"What do you know about her? Don't be stingy, Marian." "Why not let us into the know?" were some of the cries that greeted Marian's dark insinuation.

"I'll keep what I know to myself for the present. I am too charitable to make trouble for that girl, even if she has done her utmost to injure me. I'll never tell anyone unless there comes a time when I feel it necessary to speak."

Marian assumed an air of virtuous tolerance that caused Maizie Gilbert to eye her with reluctant admiration. She alone knew what her roommate was driving at.

"I'm really relieved because you girls haven't carried on like wild Indians about my making the team," she continued sweetly. "I hate being made conspicuous."

She was inwardly furious because her supporters¹⁷⁷ had failed to become wildly jubilant over her success.

"Three cheers for Marian!" hastily proposed Elsie, realizing that it was not yet too late to save herself from Marian's private displeasure.

Far from being disgusted with the belated mead of praise, for which she had fished, Marian beamed patronizingly as the cheers were given.

These sounds of requisitioned acclamation were wafted to the ears of Selina Brown and Laura Nelson, who were in the act of leaving the gymnasium.

"Well, she partly got what she wanted," remarked Selina Brown grimly as they left the building and set off for Creston Hall where both lived.

"I expect that she'll be peeved because things didn't go entirely her way. I made a fatal mistake in asking Dorothy Martin to be one of the judges," pursued Selina. "I had forgotten about her being so thick with that Allen girl. Marian never mentioned it, either, until afterward. Then she made a big fuss, but it was too late to renege. Last year I let basket-ball alone. I'd had enough of it the first two years here at Wellington. I wasn't in touch with these girls that Marian's so down on. Roberta Hurley was managing the 178 teams then, you know. She recommended me to Miss Rutledge as her successor. I wish now I'd refused to act as manager."

"I'm sorry *I* had anything to do with it," regretted Laura Nelson. "Of course, Marian has been lovely to both of us. I was stupid enough to mistake it for real friendship until she came right out the other night and asked us to keep those three girls off the team. Then I knew she'd only been getting an axe ready for us to grind."

"Oh, I saw through her from the first, but I thought I'd humor her. We've had a good many rides and dinners at her expense. I supposed it would be easy enough to keep those three off the team. When I saw them play I knew differently. That Jane Allen is a wonder with the ball; the little French girl, too. If I had dropped either of them the sophs would have raised the roof. I had to save my own reputation. It didn't matter so much about the Stearns girl. She and Marian were pretty evenly matched."

"She's a better player than Marian," frankly disagreed Laura. "As it is, I think we are in for trouble. We've antagonized Dorothy Martin. You heard what she said to us. She won't hesitate to say it to anyone else who claims Miss Stearns ought to have made the team. Dorothy's 179 always stood high at Wellington. She has lots of friends."

"Oh, she'll calm down," predicted Selina. "She hates to be crossed. Personally, I don't admire her. She poses too much. She's either a prig or a hypocrite. A little of both, I guess. When Marian raged about my asking her to act as judge she said she knew for a fact that Dorothy's father had lost all his money and that Dorothy was hanging on to Jane Allen and this French girl, I never can remember her name, because they took her around with them and spent lots of money on luncheons and dinners."

"Then she's no better than we are!" exclaimed Laura, looking relief at this piece of news.

"Of course she isn't," retorted Selina. "As nearly as I can make out it's nip and tuck between Marian and this Jane Allen as to which of them will run the sophomore class. One has about as much principle as the other. Marian has been nice to us. The Allen girl has never bothered herself to get acquainted with us. I understand she's very haughty. I should have really enjoyed keeping her off the team, but I didn't dare do it."

"Then you think we ought to stick to Marian?" Laura asked rather dubiously.¹⁸⁰

"Yes. Why not? So long as it suits us to do it. We can easily handle her if she shows her claws. She won't, though. She knows that I could drop her from the team if I chose. She won't dare say a word because the rest of the team are against her. I'll very quickly remind her of it if she is wrathful about to-day's affair."

"Suppose anything—well—disagreeable for us—should come of it?"

Despite Selina's assurances, Laura was not quite satisfied.

"What do you mean?" queried Selina impatiently.

"Suppose Miss Stearns' friends should take it up and raise a regular riot about it? A lot of sophs went over to her after the try-out. You saw them and heard them cheering her. Dorothy Martin was there with the crowd. She went straight to them from us. I tell you, I don't like it, Selina. I think we were foolish to lay ourselves open to criticism. We're seniors, you know, and so are supposed to set a good example for the other classes."

"Oh, stop worrying about it," roughly advised Selina. "Wait and see what happens. If the sophs start to fuss, I can soon settle them."

"How?" demanded Laura incredulously.¹⁸¹

"By taking Marian off the team and putting the Stearns girls on," promptly informed Selina. "If I lose Marian's friendship by it, I'll gain Dorothy Martin's and Jane Allen's. As I'm not devoted to any of these girls, I'm not particular which side I'm on, so long as it's the side that does the most for me."

CHAPTER XX

THE RISE OF THE FRESHMAN TEAM

Returned to Madison Hall that afternoon, Dorothy Martin went directly to her room to put into effect the spoken resolution she had made in the gymnasium.

The brief note she dashed off in a strong, purposeful hand, read:

"My Dear Miss Brown:

"Kindly appoint someone else in my place as referee for the coming games. I must firmly decline to act in that capacity.

"Yours truly,

"Dorothy Martin."

Deciding to send it through the regular mail channels, she stamped and addressed it, and promptly consigned it to the mail box.¹⁸³

When it presently came into the hands of Selina Brown, it cost the latter some moments of uneasy speculation. She had not reckoned on Dorothy's going thus far.

As it happened the note came as a climax to a trying session she had spent with Marian Seaton on the previous evening. Marian had come over to Creston Hall after dinner with blood in her eye. She was decidedly out of sorts over the partial failure of her scheme and did not hesitate to take Selina to task for it.

Selina, as her elder and a senior, had vast ideas of her own regarding the proper amount of respect due her from a mere sophomore. Armed with a dignity too great to descend to open quarrel, she soon reduced angry Marian to reason.

"You ought to be thankful to me for putting you on the team," she had coldly reminded. "Goodness knows Laura and I have had trouble enough over it already. I proved my friendship for you. Now be good enough to appreciate it and stop criticizing me. I consider it in very bad taste."

After Marian had finally departed in a more chastened frame of mind, Selina pondered darkly concerning the "friendship" she had flaunted in Marian's face. She decided that Marian would¹⁸⁴ have to show more appreciation if she expected any further favors.

Dorothy's note served again to arouse in Selina renewed resentment toward Marian. She was now at odds with one of the most popular girls at Wellington, and what had she gained? A few automobile rides and dinners, bestowed upon her by a girl in whom gratitude was a minus quality. Selina was distinctively aggrieved. She could only hope, as she carefully reduced Dorothy's note to bits and dropped them into the waste basket, that this was the end of the matter. It had all been aggravating in the extreme.

Three days passed and nothing more happened. She had half expected that the four friends of Judith who had made the team might send in their resignations. She wished they would. A new team would be far less likely to give trouble later on.

But no resignations arrived. In fact, a visit to the gymnasium on the third afternoon revealed the sophomore team at practice. She wondered how Marian had the temerity to go calmly to work with four girls whom she detested, and who in turn must heartily detest her.

Aside from Marian, who beamed and nodded to her, no one else on the team appeared to note¹⁸⁵ her presence. It was mortifying, to say the least. But the end was not yet.

Though Dorothy had made no secret of her resignation from basket-ball activities, it took the news several days to reach the ears of the freshman class.

"Too bad Dorothy's given up referee's post this year, isn't it?" was the casual remark that set the ball of reinstatement rolling.

It was made to a member of the freshman team by Alice Kirby. There was a purposeful gleam in her eye despite the apparent carelessness of the comment. It immediately provoked a volley of questions, which Alice answered with prompt alacrity. The effect upon the freshman was electrical. She left Alice post haste to gather up her teammates and hold a council of war.

The very next afternoon the council waited upon Miss Rutledge with a most amazing story. They wanted to play basket-ball that year. Oh, very much indeed! Still, they didn't care to

play without Dorothy Martin as referee. Yes, Dorothy had been appointed by Miss Brown, but she had resigned. No, it was not because she was too busy. Yes, they knew the reason. They could not blame her. Nevertheless they wanted her back. 186

It did not take long after this to explain that Dorothy had resigned because Judith Stearns had been unfairly treated. Everyone who had been at the try-out must know that Judy Stearns had outplayed Marian Seaton. She had not been chosen but Marian had. Dorothy had protested to Miss Brown. It had done no good. So she had resigned.

Miss Rutledge had listened patiently to the tale poured forth by the justice-seeking quintette. When it had ended she quietly promised them that she would look into the matter and see what could be done.

On the following morning, Dorothy, Laura Nelson and Selina each found a note awaiting them in the house bulletin board, requesting them to call on Miss Rutledge at four-thirty that afternoon.

Dorothy was frankly puzzled over her note. Having a clear conscience she could think of no reason for the summons. Selina, however, was apprehensive. Immediately she jumped to the conclusion that Dorothy had reported her to Miss Rutledge. Laura was also of the same opinion.

As the two Creston Hall girls walked dejectedly down a corridor of Wellington Hall to the 187 dean's office that afternoon, sight of Dorothy just ahead of them confirmed their worst fears.

Invited by Miss Rutledge to take seats, the three bowed distantly to one another.

"I sent for you three young women," began Miss Rutledge, "because of a rather peculiar story which has come to my ears concerning the recent basket-ball try-out. The freshman team is up in arms because you have given up referee's post, Miss Martin. They wish you to keep the position. They have requested me to take the matter up with you in their behalf."

Selina and Laura both looked amazement at this statement. It was certainly not what they had expected. Dorothy too showed marked surprise. An amused little smile hovered about her lips.

"It is nice in them to want me," she said gravely. "I appreciate their loyalty. That is all I can say."

"That is hardly enough to satisfy them or me," replied the dean. "I must ask you to tell me why you resigned your post."

"I would rather not answer that," Dorothy said with gentle firmness.

"Very well. I will ask you another question. Did you resign because you considered that Miss 188 Stearns had been unfairly treated at the try-out?"

Dorothy hesitated, then answered with a low, "Yes."

"Please explain in what way she was unfairly treated," relentlessly pursued the dean.

"Miss Stearns made a better showing at the try-out than Miss Seaton. She was one of the five best players. Miss Seaton would have ranked eighth in my opinion. She was chosen instead of Miss Stearns."

"You were one of the judges, I believe?"

"Yes. My choice was Miss Stearns."

"You were also one of the judges, Miss Brown?"

The dean had now turned to Selina.

"Yes."

"And you, Miss Nelson?"

"Yes." A guilty flush dyed Laura's cheeks.

"Two against one in favor of Miss Seaton?" commented Miss Rutledge. "Let me ask you two young women this. Were you both satisfied in your own minds that Miss Seaton was the better player?"

"I was," declared Selina boldly.

"I—I——"

The scrutiny of the dean's steady eyes disconcerted¹⁸⁹ Laura. She could not bring herself to look into them and utter a deliberate untruth.

"I—it was hard to judge between them," she finally faltered. "They—they were almost equally matched in my opinion."

"Still, you must have thought Miss Seaton a little the better player, else you would not have chosen her," asserted Miss Rutledge smoothly.

"We had the right to our opinion," broke in Selina quickly, determined to save Laura from crumpling to the point of blurting forth the truth.

"That is true," agreed the dean, "provided it was a fair opinion. Miss Martin states that it was not."

"Miss Martin has no business to say that," retorted Selina hotly.

"She has, if that is her opinion. She has the same privilege that you have," was the grave reminder. "According to the statement just made by Miss Nelson, she was not at all sure of Miss Seaton's playing superiority over that of Miss Stearns. In that case, why did you not order the game resumed, especially to test out these two players? That would have been the best method of procedure."

"Because it wasn't necessary. Miss Nelson¹⁹⁰ gave her decision at once in favor of Miss Seaton."

"She seemed decidedly uncertain just now about it," said the dean dryly. "As it happens, the members of the freshman team are of the same opinion as Miss Martin. They claim that Miss Stearns completely outplayed Miss Seaton. That it was too evident to be overlooked. I might investigate this affair more thoroughly, but I do not wish to do so. As seniors, all of you should be above reproach. Each knows best, however, what is in her heart."

Laura wriggled uncomfortably, looking ready to cry. Selina put on an air of studied indifference. Dorothy presented the calm serenity of one whose integrity cannot be assailed.

For a long silent moment the dean's eyes traveled from face to face. Then she said:

"We shall settle this matter by another try-out to-morrow afternoon at half-past four. I shall attend it. When you leave here, Miss Brown, kindly post a notice in the bulletin board calling the sophomore team to practice to-morrow. State that it is by my order. Miss Martin, please notify Miss Stearns that I wish her to be there, also, ready to play. I will appoint two seniors to act with me as judges. I am familiar, as you¹⁹¹ know, with the game. This try-out will not affect the other members of the team. We shall drop one of them temporarily to give Miss Stearns the opportunity of playing against Miss Seaton. I rarely interfere in the matter of college sports, but in this instance I feel compelled to take action."

"I suppose, if Miss Stearns wins, it will mean the loss of my position as senior manager!" exclaimed Selina.

She was too thoroughly disgruntled to realize to whom she was speaking.

"Why should it? You have assured me of your honesty of purpose," flashed back the dean.

Selina's discourteous manner of addressing her she could ignore. The import of the speech was, however, another matter. It contained self-condemnation. Selina herself realized her mistake the instant Miss Rutledge replied. She turned red as a peony.

"I—I—just thought you might wish to appoint someone else," she said lamely.

"If you had admitted to me that you treated Miss Stearns unfairly, it would certainly become necessary to appoint another manager," replied Miss Rutledge. "You have not done so. In fact you have stated quite the opposite. On the contrary,¹⁹² I must also accept Miss Martin's word that she is speaking the truth as she sees it."

"Thank you, Miss Rutledge," was Dorothy's sole comment.

"If Miss Stearns wins against Miss Seaton at the new try-out it will be by pure luck," declared Selina, with a desperate attempt at retrieving her previous incautious remark.

"There will, at least, be no question of unfair treatment involved."

The blunt reply should have warned Selina that she was not bettering her case. Instead, her belated attempt at caution flew away on the wings of anger.

"I think it's very unfair to Marian Seaton to hold another try-out!" she exclaimed. "She won her position on the team fairly enough. This whole affair is nothing but a plot to put Miss Stearns on the team and drop Miss Seaton from it. Miss Stearns has four friends on the sophomore team who have persuaded the freshman team to do what they themselves don't dare do. As Miss Martin has frankly accused both Miss Nelson and myself of unfairness, I will say plainly that I think her a party to the plot. I dare say Miss Stearns knows all about it."

"Miss Brown, you are not here to criticize my¹⁹³ methods," sternly rebuked the dean. "Granted that you are entitled to your own opinion, harsh as it is, you must either be in a position to prove your accusations or else not make them. Can you prove them?"

"No, I can't. Neither can Dorothy Martin prove hers."

"I can obtain the signatures of at least thirty girls who were of the same mind as myself at the try-out."

It had come to a point where Dorothy refused longer to remain mute. Incensed by Selina's bold attempt to malign her friends and herself, she now turned to Miss Rutledge and said:

"I wish you to know, Miss Rutledge, that the four sophomores chosen, besides Miss Seaton, to make the team fully intended to resign from it because of their loyalty to Miss Stearns. She begged them not to do so. She was very brave over the disappointment. I am positive that neither she nor her friends would be guilty of asking the girls of the freshman team to take up the matter. Certainly I would not."

"I know you would not," quietly reassured the dean. "We will drop this discussion where it now stands. It is unbecoming, to say the least. I am greatly annoyed that it should have arisen¹⁹⁴ among members of the senior class. It is ended. Let it be forgotten. The try-out to-morrow will decide the question. I would prefer you not to give up your position as referee, Miss Martin. Will you reconsider your resignation?"

"I will, since you desire it." Dorothy bowed acquiescence.

"Then the matter is settled," was the concluding announcement. "I shall expect all three of you to be present at the try-out to-morrow afternoon."

This was virtually a command. Had Selina dared, she would have coldly declined to obey it. As it was she said nothing. Miss Rutledge's tones indicating that the interview was concluded, she rose, bade the dean a chilly "Good afternoon," and departed, accompanied by Laura.

Dorothy also rose to go, but the dean detained her with a kindly:

"Just a moment, Dorothy. I wish a private word with you. I know you too well to believe you to be at fault in this matter."

"I am not at fault, Miss Rutledge," was the composed answer. "I thank you for believing in me."

"There seems to be a great deal more behind¹⁹⁵ this affair than appears on the surface," the dean said significantly.

"That is true," Dorothy affirmed. "Since the beginning of last year a struggle has been going on here at Wellington between right and wrong. The girl who represents right is too noble to complain. She will fight things out unaided, and she will win."

"You refer to Judith Stearns?" interrogated the dean.

"No; not Judith." Dorothy shook her head. "Judith has merely been used as a scapegoat. I would prefer not to say more. The girl who is in the right would not wish it. She has been advised to come to you, but refuses to do so. She is very determined on that point."

"And you approve of her stand?" The dean eyed Dorothy quizzically.

"Yes." Dorothy's affirmative came unhesitatingly. "I should feel the same under similar circumstances."

"Then you would advise me not to go too deeply into things?"

There was a decided twinkle in the dean's eyes as she said this. She had known Dorothy too long not to feel the utmost confidence in her.

"I can't imagine myself as advising Miss Rutledge,"¹⁹⁶ she said prettily, her sober face lighting into a smile.

The smile, instantly returned, indicated perfect understanding.

"I think you are right, Dorothy. I shall not interfere, except in the matter of a new try-out, unless I am approached by the girl of whom you speak. Frankly, I have no idea of whom she may be. These disagreements among the students at Wellington seldom reach my ears. When they do I always endeavor to see justice done the wronged party."

When Dorothy had presently left her, however, Miss Rutledge sat pondering over the intricacies of girl nature. Hailing from the far West she was inclined to view the world from a man's standpoint. She was, therefore, wholly in sympathy with a girl who could sturdily fight her own battles without asking help of anyone. She could almost wish that the identity of such an one might some day be revealed to her.

REINSTATEMENT

Outside Wellington Hall, Laura and Selina stopped long enough to hold a hurried conversation. As a result they both set their faces toward Madison Hall to inform Marian Seaton of what was in store for her.

"It's simply outrageous!" she stormed, when Selina had gloomily finished relating the dire news. "I won't go to the gym to-morrow. Miss Rutledge has no right to interfere with the teams."

"She seems to think she has," shrugged Selina. "You'll have to do one of two things. Either resign now from the team, or go to the try-out to-morrow and take your chance of winning against Miss Stearns."

"I won't do either," flatly declared Marian.¹⁹⁸ "I made the team and I won't be cheated of my position on it."

"Do you think you can outplay Miss Stearns?" asked Laura anxiously. "You didn't the other day, you know."

"You'd best resign," cut in Selina sharply, without giving Marian time to answer Laura's question. "If you go to the gym to-morrow it's going to create a lot of gossip about Laura and me. Dorothy Martin hasn't made a secret of her opinion of the other try-out. With Miss Rutledge there to-morrow as one of the judges and neither Laura nor I acting with her, it's going to look pretty bad for us."

"I tell you I sha'n't be there to-morrow," snapped Marian.

"Then you'll get yourself into trouble with Miss Rutledge and lose your position anyway," returned Selina with equal asperity. "I've already told you that I have received instructions to post a notice calling the sophomore team to practice by her order. If you resign now, that will end the whole thing. Of course the Stearns girl will get your position on the team. Still you can save your own dignity and ours by pretending in your resignation that you are deeply hurt. You can say, too, that you would have been very¹⁹⁹ willing to give up your position on the team to Miss Stearns if you'd understood that she wanted it so much."

"But I'm not willing to do any such thing," angrily contended Marian. "I'll take my chance against Judith Stearns to-morrow before I'll tamely resign like that. Come to think of it, it would be much more dignified on my part to go to the gym. You, not I, have been accused of unfairness. You put me on the team, you know."

"Yes, and why did I?" flung back Selina hotly. "Because you asked me to do it. Now you think you can hang the unfairness on my shoulders and slip free of it yourself. Well, you can't. I know that Judith Stearns can outplay you. If I thought she couldn't, I'd say go ahead. But she can. As you won't resign of your own accord, I'm going to demand your resignation. If you don't give it to me in writing, I'll go straight back to Miss Rutledge and tell her the whole thing. I'd rather confess to her than have everybody down on Laura and me after to-morrow."

"You wouldn't do that. You can't scare me," sneered Marian.

"Oh, wouldn't I? Wait a little. You'll see."

"You'd be expelled from college. Just remember²⁰⁰ that. You'd find yourself worse off than if you kept still," triumphantly prophesied Marian.

"*We* wouldn't be expelled. *You* probably would be. We'd be severely reprimanded and Miss Rutledge would be down on us for the rest of the year. But you started the whole thing. You're the real offender. It would go hard with you."

"I'm sorry I asked you to help me, Selina Brown!" Marian exclaimed bitterly. "You're a treacherous snake! After all I've done for you, you turn against me like this."

For the next five minutes she continued to express her candid and very uncomplimentary opinion of Selina.

When she paused to take breath, Selina's only retaliation was, "Come on, Laura. We'll have to hurry if we expect to catch Miss Rutledge in her office. I suppose we'd best go to her house and wait for her. We'll be surer of seeing her then."

It had the desired effect. Marian crumpled, shed a few tears of pure rage, but finally wrote the resignation which Selina dictated.

"It worked!" was Selina's relieved exclamation, the moment they were out of Madison Hall.²⁰¹ "She's a great coward, for all her boldness. She gave in more easily than I'd expected. You can imagine me confessing anything like that to Miss Rutledge, now can't you?"

Selina accompanied the query with a derisive laugh. It was echoed by Laura, though rather nervously.

"It was horrid to have to bully her." Laura made a gesture of distaste. "I'm glad we're safely out of it. We'd best keep out of such tangles hereafter, and let the sophs alone."

"I intend to," Selina said with grim decision. "I shall keep the managership of the teams, but I'll steer clear of trouble after this. Now let's hustle home. I must write Miss Rutledge a note and enclose Marian's resignation. I'll ask her to answer, stating whether it is satisfactory and asking what I am to do. I'll pretend that I found the resignation waiting for me at Creston Hall."

Half an hour later, Selina had written her letter and dispatched it to Warburton Hall, the faculty house where Miss Rutledge lived, by the small son of Mrs. Ingram, the matron of Creston Hall.

When the dean had read and re-read the two communications, she looked decidedly grave.²⁰² After a brief interval of thoughtful meditation, she wrote Selina the following reply:

"Dear Miss Brown:

"Kindly write to Miss Seaton and accept her resignation from the sophomore team. Do not post the notice I requested you to post. It will not be necessary. Write to Miss Stearns notifying her that Miss Seaton has resigned from the team and that I wish her to accept the position thus left vacant.

"Yours truly,

"Gertrude Rutledge."

When the next morning's mail brought Judith the amazing news, unwillingly penned by Selina Brown, she was literally dumfounded. The mail arriving while she was at breakfast, she garnered the note from the house bulletin board on her way upstairs from the dining-room.

"For goodness' sake, read this!" she almost shouted, bursting in upon Jane, who was preparing to go to her first recitation. "I don't know what to make of it!"

A slow smile dawned on Jane's lips as she perused the agitating note.

"Marian never resigned by her own accord,"²⁰³ she said. "It looks as though her scheme had somehow proved a boomerang. Someone stood up for you, Judy, mighty loyally. Miss Rutledge's name being mentioned in the note tells me that. Was it Dorothy, I wonder? No; it wasn't. She promised us that she wouldn't go to Miss Rutledge about it."

"It's a mystery to me," declared Judith. "I don't know what to do. I wonder——"

A rapping at the door sent her scurrying to open it.

"Why, Dorothy!" she exclaimed. "How did you know I wanted to see you?"

"I didn't know. I came because I have a special message for you from Miss Rutledge. She sent for me to come to her last night after dinner. I spent the evening with her and arrived here too late to see you. I was dying to tell Jane this morning at breakfast, but couldn't, of course, until I'd seen you. I'm glad you're both here. By the way, Judy, did you receive a note from Selina Brown?"

"I certainly did," emphasized Judith. "What's the answer to all this, Dorothy? I was never more astonished in all my life than when I read her note. What made Marian Seaton resign from the team, and why does Miss Rutledge want²⁰⁴ me to take her place? I'd just about made up my mind to go and ask her, when you came."

"You needn't," smiled Dorothy. "She has asked me to explain things to you in confidence. I'm going to take the liberty of including Jane. I'll explain why presently."

"I won't feel hurt if you don't, Dorothy," Jane said earnestly. "Perhaps you'd really rather tell Judy alone."

"No. I want you to hear the whole thing," Dorothy insisted. Whereupon she recounted what had occurred on the previous afternoon in the dean's office.

"I wanted you to know, Jane, just why I told Miss Rutledge that this affair was a hang-over from last year. I know she has no idea of whom I meant by the girl who was standing up for right. She may suspect Marian as being the other girl. I can't say as to that. I'm glad she knows now that there is such a condition of affairs at Wellington. She will not forget it if anything else comes up. She will be very well able to put two and two together, if need be."

"I'd never go to her of my own accord," Jane said with an emphatic shake of her russet head.

"You might be sent for some day, just as I was yesterday," returned Dorothy.²⁰⁵

"But you haven't yet explained why Marian resigned, Dorothy," reminded Judith. "What did Miss Rutledge say about it?"

"She said that she had received a note from Selina, with Marian's resignation enclosed. Marian's reason for resigning was that she had learned you were dissatisfied over her appointment on the team. She preferred to give you her position rather than have you continue to make trouble about it."

Dorothy's lips curled scornfully as she said this.

"Then I won't accept it!" Judith blazed into sudden anger. "The idea of her writing such things about me! How can Miss Rutledge ask me to replace Marian after that? I won't do it."

"Yes, Judy, you must," Jane declared quietly. "Marian wrote that hoping you'd hear of it and refuse. She knew you'd insist on learning the particulars before you accepted. Miss Rutledge has shown her faith in you by asking you to replace Marian on the team."

"Selina Brown is behind the whole thing," asserted Dorothy.

"I believe it," quickly concurred Jane. "It's easy to see through things. She didn't want another try-out; so she made Marian resign. She²⁰⁶ must have used a pretty strong argument to do it. It was a case of the biter being bitten, I imagine."

"Exactly," Dorothy agreed. "Selina Brown and Laura Nelson ought to have more principle than engage in anything so dishonorable. They've managed to wriggle out of it at Marian's expense, but they have both lost caste by it. Depend upon it, a great many girls here will have their own opinion of the whole affair and it won't be complimentary to Marian, Selina and Laura."

"Someone may say that I am to blame for Marian's resigning," advanced Judith doubtfully.

"Someone undoubtedly will," concurred Jane, "but it won't carry much weight. You have too many friends, Judy, to bother your head about the spiteful minority. You were unfairly dealt with at the try-out. That's generally known. Now you've come into your own through a hitch in Marian's plans. She couldn't get back on the team again under any circumstances. You're not standing in her way. Don't stand in your own."

"I guess I'd better accept," Judith reluctantly conceded. "From now on I shall go armed to the teeth. Marian Seaton is apt to camp on my²⁰⁷ trail," she added with a giggle. "Good gracious, girls! Look at the time! We'll be late to chapel."

Absorbed in conversation, the trio had completely forgotten how swiftly time was scudding along.

"Late to chapel! Chapel will be over before ever we get there if you don't hurry!" exclaimed Jane ruefully.

Accordingly the three made a hasty exit from the room and the Hall, hurrying chapelwards at a most undignified pace.

That afternoon Judith sent her letter of acceptance to Selina Brown. The next day she reported in the gymnasium for practice with her old teammates. It was a joyful reunion, made more conspicuous by the attendance of a goodly number of sophomores, who had got wind of the news and who cheered Judith lustily when she appeared. The freshman team, who had so loyally fought for her, also made it a point to drop in on the practice and offer their congratulations.

The jubilant majority was undoubtedly heart and soul for Judith. Whatever the "spiteful minority," as Jane had put it, thought of her, she quite forgot in the delight of being at last really and truly on the official team.²⁰⁸

"We certainly are a fine combination!" exulted Christine at the end of an hour's spirited work with the ball. "The freshmen will have to look out. And to think they were the ones to give Judy back to us!"

Christine, Adrienne and Barbara were among the few who knew that the freshman team had protested to Miss Rutledge. The five freshmen themselves had kept the matter fairly quiet. They had been sent for and privately informed by Miss Rutledge that Miss Seaton had resigned from the sophomore team of her own accord and that Miss Stearns was entitled to the vacancy.

They had also been gravely charged to let that end all discussion of the subject. Their point gained, they obeyed orders, except for a certain amount of curious speculation among themselves as to how it had come about.

In the end they agreed that Marian must have heard of their visit to Miss Rutledge and resigned out of pure mortification.

Jane, Judith and Dorothy kept the greater knowledge of the affair to themselves. Not even Adrienne knew the true facts. Selina Brown and Laura Nelson also found wisdom in silence. They were not hunting further trouble. They had had enough.²⁰⁹

Selina had been allowed to keep her managership of the teams, and was shrewd enough to appreciate that another slip would be decidedly disastrous to her. Thereafter she became such a stickler for fair play as to prove decidedly amusing to at least three girls.

Marian Seaton found refuge in the "hurt feelings" policy as dictated to her by Selina. To her particular satellites she posed as a martyr and affected a lofty disdain for "certain girls who have no principle."

Inwardly she was seething with resentment against Judith. She confided to Maizie, her standby, that she didn't know which of the two she hated most, Judith Stearns or Jane Allen. She laid her latest defeat, however, at Judith's door. She believed that Judith had been the secret means of inciting the freshman team to protest and she was determined to be even. Furthermore, she confided to Maizie that it would be only a matter of time until Judith Stearns must lose every friend she had.

CHAPTER XXII

MAKING OTHER PEOPLE HAPPY

Following on the heels of Judith's advent into the team came an unheralded and wonderful surprise for Dorothy Martin.

One crisp Saturday afternoon in early November, Jane Allen ran up the steps of Madison Hall, her face radiant. Attired in riding clothes, she had just come from the stable, where she had left Firefly after a long canter across country.

Into the house and up the stairs she dashed at top speed, bound for Dorothy Martin's room.

"Come," called a cheerful voice, in answer to her energetic rapping.

"Oh, Dorothy!" Jane fairly bounced into the room. "Get on your hat and coat and come along. I've something to show you."²¹¹

"What is it? Where is it?" gaily queried Dorothy. "To mend or not to mend, that is also the question. Shall I go on mending my pet blouse that's falling to pieces altogether too fast to suit me, or drop it and go gallivanting off with you?"

"There's no question about it. You must come. If you don't, you'll be sorry all the rest of the year," predicted Jane. "Now sit and mend your old pet blouse if you dare!"

"I dare—not," Dorothy laughed. Rising she laid aside the silk blouse she was darning and went to the wardrobe for her wraps. "I'm a very poor senior these days," she added. "I can't buy a new blouse every day in the week. I have to make my old ones last a long time."

"You always look sweet, Dorothy," praised Jane, "so you don't need to care whether your blouses are old or new. They're never anything but dainty and trim."

"Thank you for those glorious words of praise," was Dorothy's light retort.

"You're welcome, but do hurry," urged Jane.

"Where do we go from here?" quizzed Dorothy as they started down the drive.

"I sha'n't tell you. Wait and see, Miss Impatience. This is a very mysterious journey."212

In this bantering strain the two continued on to the western gate of the campus, passed through and started down the highway.

"I know where we're going!" finally exclaimed Dorothy. "We're going to the stable to see Firefly! Funny I didn't guess it before, with you in riding clothes. You're going to show me some new trick you've taught Firefly. There! Did I guess right?"

"Yes, and no. That's all I'll tell you. Come on. One minute more and you'll see the great sight."

Jane caught Dorothy's hand and rushed her toward the stable. Still keeping firm hold on her friend, she led her straight to the roomy box-stall which accommodated Firefly.

"Oh, Jane!" Dorothy cried out in sudden rapture. "What a beautiful horse. Why, he looks almost enough like Firefly to be his brother. Where did you get him? What in the world are you going to do with two horses?"

"He's not mine," Jane replied. "He is——" She stopped, her gray eyes dancing. "He belongs to a dear friend of mine. Her name is Dorothy Martin."

Dorothy stared, as though wondering if Jane had suddenly taken leave of her senses.213

"Wake up, Dorothy!" Jane laid an affectionate hand on Dorothy's shoulder. "He's yours. Dad sent him to you. He's come all the way from Capitan to see you. Aren't you going to say 'How de do' to him?"

"Jane—I——"

Dorothy turned and hid her head against Jane's shoulder.

"This is a nice way to welcome poor Midnight," laughed Jane, as her arm went round Dorothy. Her own voice was not quite steady.

"I—I—it's too much," quavered Dorothy, raising her head. "I can't believe that beauty is for me. It's too wonderful to be true. I must be dreaming."

"But it *is* true. If you don't believe me, read this."

Jane drew a square, white envelope from the pocket of her riding coat and offered it to Dorothy.

"It's for you, from Dad," she explained. "I've been keeping it until Midnight came. This is the outcome of a plot. A real plot between Dad and me."

Dorothy took the letter, her eyes still misty.

"We'll read it together, Jane," she said.

Arms entwined about each other's waists, the two girls read Henry Allen's letter to his daughter's friend.

"Dear Miss Dorothy," it began. "Jane has written me that Firefly complains a great deal about being lonely. He misses Midnight, an old chum of his. So I decided that Midnight might come East, provided he had someone to look after his welfare. Jane has told me so much about you, and that you resemble one who, though gone from us, grows ever dearer with years.

"Because of this, and because of your many kindnesses to my girl, I hope you will accept Midnight for your own special pet. He is very gentle and, in my opinion, quite as fine a little horse as Firefly. You cannot, of course, expect Jane to say that. I send him to you with my very best wishes and trust that you and Jane will have many long rides together.

"My sister and I look forward to meeting you next summer. Jane tells me that she will surely bring you home with her when college closes next June. We shall be delighted to welcome you to El Capitan. My sister joins me in sending you our kindest regards.

"Yours sincerely,

"Henry Allen."

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"It's just like good old Dad!" Jane cried out enthusiastically. "You'll love Midnight, Dorothy. Come and get acquainted with him. I've a whole pocketful of sugar for him and Firefly."

In a daze of happiness Dorothy followed Jane into the roomy stall and was soon making friendly overtures to Midnight, who responded most amiably.

There was still one more feature of the program, however, which Jane hardly knew how to bring forward.

"Dorothy," she began rather hesitatingly. "I hardly know how to say it, but—well—this stall is large enough for both Midnight and Firefly. They were chums at home and will get along beautifully together. Won't you let me look after them both? You know what I mean?"

"I'm glad you came out frankly with that, Jane." Dorothy's color had heightened. "No, I couldn't let you do that. I shouldn't feel right about it. I've been thinking hard ever since I read your father's letter. I believe it's right for me to accept Midnight, because you both want me to have him and have gone to so much trouble to bring him here. I've thought of a way out of the difficulty. Only yesterday a freshman came to me and asked me to tutor her in trigonometry.²¹⁶ She's been conditioned already and needs help. I told her I'd let her know. I wasn't sure whether I wanted to do it. I've never tutored and I could get along without the extra money. But now, it will come in just beautifully. I can earn enough to pay for Midnight's keep. You understand how I feel about it."

"Yes. I know I'd feel the same," nodded Jane. "That's why I hated to say anything. I want you to do whatever you think best. Anyway, Firefly and Midnight can be in the same stall and that will help some. You must let me do that much."

"It will help a great deal. I'm not sure that I ought to let you do even that," demurred Dorothy.

"Of course you ought," Jane said sturdily. "You must mind Dad, you know. He depends on you to look after Midnight's welfare. This is the largest, nicest stall in the stable. Now you must see your saddle. It's Mexican and almost like mine. I put it in the locker with mine. They're too valuable to be left lying about loose."

Lingering for some little time while Dorothy made further acquaintance with her new possession,²¹⁷ the two girls strolled back to the Hall through the November dusk.

Dorothy was exuberantly joyful over the wonderful thing that had happened to her, and correspondingly grateful to those responsible for it. Jane was also brimming with quiet happiness. She wished every other day of her sophomore year could be as delightful as this one. What splendid rides she and Dorothy would have together!

Jane left Dorothy at the door of the latter's room and went on to her own in a beatific state of mind. It was certainly far more blessed to give than to receive.

"Well, how did the gift party come off?" was Judith's question, as Jane closed the door behind her. Judith was the only one who had been let into the secret.

"Oh, splendidly!" Jane exclaimed. "She fell in love with Midnight the minute she saw him. I wish you rode, Judy. I'd have Dad send you a horse, too."

"Of course you would, generous old thing," was the affectionate reply. "But I'm not to be trusted with a noble steed. Neither would I trust said steed. I can admire Firefly, but at a safe distance. I'd rather stick to the lowly taxi²¹⁸ or my two feet to carry me over the ground. By the way, did you look at the bulletin board on your way upstairs?"

"No; I didn't stop. I saw a couple of the girls reading a notice. What's happened?"

"Our dear Marian has met with a loss." Judith's grin belied her mournful accents. "Not her position on the team. Oh, my, no! She's not advertising *that*. She's lost a valuable diamond ring, and has offered twenty-five dollars reward to the finder. The very idea! Just as if a Wellington girl would accept a reward if she happened to find the ring. I call that an insult."

"It's bad taste, to say the least." Jane looked slightly scornful. "Does the notice state where she believes she lost the ring?"

"Yes; it says, 'Somewhere between Madison Hall and the library, or in Madison Hall.' Between you and me, I wonder if she really did lose a ring? It would be just like her to start this new excitement about herself on purpose to get sympathy. She must be awfully peevish yet over basket-ball. I feel almost like a villain at practice. Still, it certainly wasn't my fault."

"I'm thankful there's no one here at the Hall she could lay suspicion upon," frowned Jane. "Norma's beyond reach of injustice now. I'd²¹⁹ rather hope it was a real loss than a camouflage."

"Well, she might say that I had stolen it. Wouldn't that be a glorious revenge?" Judith jokingly inquired.

"Don't be so ridiculous, Judy Stearns." Jane's frown changed to a smile at this far-fetched supposition on Judith's part.

"Oh, she'll probably find it again one of these days, after everyone's forgotten about it and gone on to some other great piece of news," Judith unfeelingly asserted. "You see how sympathetic I am."

"I see. I also see the clock. It's time I changed these riding togs for a dress. I'll barely have time before the dinner gong sounds."

Jane rose from the chair she had briefly occupied while listening to Judith, and began hurriedly to remove her riding habit.

Quickly rearranging her thick, curling hair, she dived into the closet that held her own and Judith's dresses. Selecting a fur-trimmed frock of dark green broadcloth, she hastily got into it.

As she hooked it a little smile played about her lips. The news of Marian's loss already forgotten, Jane was again thinking of the pleasant little scene enacted in the boarding stable, where Firefly and Midnight now stood side by side.²²⁰

"You must go down to the stable with us to-morrow and look Midnight over, Judy," she suddenly remarked, then went on with an enthusiastic description of Dorothy's new treasure.

While she thus dwelt at length upon Midnight's good points, in a room not far distant two girls were conducting a most confidential session.

"How long do you think we ought to wait before—well, you know?" Marian Seaton was asking.

"Oh, about three weeks, I should say," lazily returned Maizie Gilbert. "We'll have to go slowly. It will take three or four months to do the thing properly. If we rushed it, it wouldn't be half as effective as to take our time. What about Elsie?"

"We'll tell her about the dress business, but no more than that. She mustn't know a word about the rest. She has a frightful temper, you know. If she happened to get good and mad at me, she'd tell everything she knew to the very first person she ran across. She'll be properly shocked when she hears about the dress. We'll tell it to her as a great secret," planned Marian. "I won't say anything outright about the ring.²²¹ I'll leave it to her to draw her own conclusions. She's rabid about Judy Stearns. It seems she has heard that Judy nicknamed her the 'ignoble Noble.'"

"That's a funny one!"

Maizie appeared to derive signal enjoyment from this revelation.

"I fail to see anything funny about it." Marian stiffened perceptibly. "Please remember, Maiz, that Elsie is *my* cousin."

"Oh, I haven't forgotten it. That's a funny nickname, just the same."

Maizie calmly declined to be thus easily suppressed.

"It suits me to know that Elsie heard about it," Marian said, after an instant's vexed silence.

She knew better than to continue to oppose Maizie. For one of her sluggish temperament, Maizie could turn decidedly disagreeable when she chose.

"Yes, it comes in very nicely just now," drawled Maizie. "Elsie needs a spur to keep her going. Keep her in a rage and she's a fine little mischief-maker. Let her calm down and she's likely to crumple. She really has some idea of principle, only she doesn't know it. I wonder if she'll ever find it out."222

"Do you mean to insinuate that *I* haven't?" demanded Marian crossly.

"No; I say it plainly. Neither you nor I have any principle," declared Maizie with her slow smile. "We might as well be honest about it. We never are about anything else, you know. It doesn't worry me. It's rather interesting, I think. Keeping things stirred up relieves the dull monotony. There's always the chance that we may win. We have never won yet, you know. We're still here, though, and that's a consolation. This latest idea of yours ought to amount to something in the long run."

"Really, Maiz, you are the most cold-blooded girl I ever met!" Marian cried out in exasperation. "Sometimes I feel as if I didn't understand you at all."

"I don't pretend to understand myself," returned Maizie tranquilly. "It would be too much trouble to try. Besides, self-analysis might be fatal to my comfort. I might dig up a conscience, and that would be a bore. I'd rather take it easy and smile and be a villain still. Changes are so disagreeable. You'd find that out, if one came over me. You'd be minus a valuable ally."

"Do you mean that as a threat?"223

Marian laughed. There was, however, a note of anxiety in her question. She had no desire to lose so valuable an ally as Maizie.

"A threat? No. Don't be scared. I'm still wandering along under the Seaton banner. I suppose I'm rather fond of you, Marian. Don't know why, I'm sure. You're thoroughly selfish, and we quarrel continually. That's the real reason for it, I suspect. You keep things going. That's your chief charm. Then, too, you've been fair enough with me. Whatever you may do to others isn't my concern. I don't intend that it shall be. If I were to start in the other direction I couldn't stop halfway. I'd keep on going. Then where would you be? As I said before, 'Changes are disagreeable.' So I'm going to stay on your side and, take my word for it, it's a mighty good thing for you."

CHAPTER XXIII

A NEW FRIEND

In spite of the peculiarly sinister talk between Marian Seaton and Maizie Gilbert, nothing unusual occurred during the next few weeks to disturb the peace of either Judith or Jane.

Thanksgiving came and went with the usual round of college gaieties. Four days being too short a holiday to permit the majority of the Wellington girls going home, they remained at college and did much celebrating.

On Thanksgiving Day the first in the series of three basket-ball games was played between the sophomores and the freshmen. The sophomores won, though the freshmen gave them a hard tussle, the score standing 22-18 in favor of the sophs when the hotly contested game ended. Both teams made a fine appearance on the floor. Neither team had adhered to class colors that year in choosing their basket-ball suits. The freshmen wore suits of navy blue, decorated with an old rose "F" on the front of the blouse. A wide rolling sailor collar of the same color further added to the effect. The sophomores had elected to be patriotic, and wore khaki-colored suits, unrelieved by a contrasting color. It was a decided innovation of its kind and they liked it.

Afterward the sophomore team privately agreed that the girls of the freshman team were real thoroughbreds. They accepted their defeat in the most good-humored fashion and heartily congratulated their opponents on their playing.

As Right Guard, Jane proved herself worthy of the position. She played with a dash and skill that was noticeable even above the good work of the other players. Her mind was too fully centered on the contest to realize this until at the end of the game she was mobbed by a crowd of enthusiastic sophs. They marched her in triumph twice around the gymnasium to the cheering, ringing accompaniment of "Who's Jane Allen? Right, right, right Guard!"

Jane never forgot that stirring cry of "Right Guard!" It conveyed to her a higher meaning than mere basket-ball glorification. It fell upon her ears as an admonition to do well. To do right, to be right, and to stay right. It was almost as if she had been elected by her own soul to be a guardian of right.

That night the losing freshman team did something unprecedented in the history of Wellington. They entertained their conquerors at dinner at Rutherford Inn. More, Jane was amazed to find herself the guest of honor and had to respond to the highly complimentary toast, "Right Guard Jane," given by Florence Durham, the freshman captain.

So Jane's Thanksgiving holiday came and went in a blaze of well-earned glory. Happy in this unexpected appreciation of herself, which appeared to be steadily growing, she came to feel that things had at last begun to take an upward turn.

With Christmas rapidly approaching and everything still serene, pleasant immunity from the disagreeable was still hers. Neither had Judith met with anything disturbing to her happiness, beyond an occasional spiteful glance from Marian Seaton when she chanced to encounter the latter in the Hall or on the campus.

"I guess Marian has given up the ghost," Judith²²⁷ suddenly remarked to Jane one evening before dinner, as the two sat in their room going over their long Christmas lists. "I believe I ought to send her a consolation present. A wooden tiger on wheels would be nice. I saw some lovely ones in the Ten-Cent Store at Chesterford. All painted with dashing yellow and black stripes and fixed so that they waggle their heads when you touch 'em."

"Don't mention her," grimaced Jane. "You'll break the spell. We've had absolute peace and rest since her last uprising. I wonder if she ever found her ring?"

"I don't believe so. A girl told me not long ago that she saw Marian take the notice from the bulletin board and tear it up. She overheard her say that she might just as well have not posted it, for all the good it had done. That she had hoped that the reward she offered might count. But evidently it hadn't. Now what did she mean by that?"

"Nothing or everything," shrugged Jane, and again turned her attention to her list of names.

"More likely everything," Judith declared uncharitably. "She probably meant something dark and insinuating. I guess that the only person who could earn the reward would be herself.²²⁸ I can just imagine her returning the ring to herself and paying herself twenty-five dollars reward."

Judith chuckled as she mentally visioned Marian Seaton graciously bestowing a reward upon herself.

Jane smiled a little, also, but made no comment. Engaged in the delightful occupation of planning pleasure for her friends, she did not wish the subject of Marian Seaton to intrude upon it.

"I don't have to worry about my present-buying this year," she presently remarked. "Aunt Mary will buy everything for me that I need. All I have to do is to send her a list of the presents I'm going to give and she will shop for me."

"It was splendid in your father and your aunt to come to New York for the holidays," approved Judith warmly.

"They both knew how disappointed I was last year because I couldn't go home for Christmas," Jane answered. "They are doing this for my special benefit. I surely appreciate it, for Dad loathes the East, and Aunt Mary hates railway traveling. I'm awfully sorry that neither you nor Dorothy can be with us. We'd love to have you, but I know that you want to be with your²²⁹ father, and Dorothy, of course, wants to be at home with her folks."

"Yes, Father wants me at home this year. I'm glad we are to have the full three weeks' vacation. I don't imagine that twelve days business last year worked very well. The girls made such a fuss about it, and a lot of them came back late. I'm going to ask my aunt to give a house party for me at Easter. Then I'll invite all our crowd and we'll have a great old celebration. Christmas is a bad time for a college girl house party. Everyone's anxious to be at home with her own people. Easter's different."

"Yes, that's true," nodded Jane. "What are you going to give our four freshmen, Judy?"

"Long white gloves; a pair apiece," was the prompt reply. "They have none, I know, or they would have worn them at the freshman frolic."

"That will be nice. I know what I'd like to give them. I believe they'd be pleased, too."

"What?" Judith eyed Jane interestedly.

"Furs. Not the most expensive, of course. I wouldn't care to overwhelm them. I thought of black fox muffs and scarfs for Kathie and Freda, and gray squirrel for Ida and Marie. None of them have furs. I have four or five sets and a230 fur coat, too. I feel selfish to have so much, when they have nothing."

"That's perfectly sweet in you, Jane," lauded Judith. "You're always a generous old dear, though."

"Why shouldn't I be generous?" demanded Jane. "Dad wants me to be. He never cares how much money I spend, but he likes to have me think about others. He's a great old giver himself. He says that the only way to take the curse off of having a lot of money is to use it in helping to make the other fellow happy. I wish I could take time to tell you all the kind things he's done with his money. It seems as though the more he gives the more he has."

"If everyone who had money were like him we'd have an ideal world, I guess," declared Judith. "I have quite a lot of money coming to me when I'm twenty-one. I was named for my grandmother and she left it to me. When I get it I shall try to do as much good with it as I can. I don't want to be selfish. I'm afraid I think too much about my own pleasure, though."

Jane smiled at this rueful confession. Judith was generous to a fault. She was always far happier in giving than in receiving.

"You're not selfish, Judy," she assured. "We231 all think a good deal more about our own fun than we should, perhaps. We spend lots of money on spreads and dinners and treats. I've been thinking seriously about it lately. After Christmas, I'm going to invite our crowd to our room some evening and propose something that I believe we might agree to do. You needn't ask me what it is, for I sha'n't tell you."

"All right, don't," grinned Judith. "I've enough on my mind now to keep me busy until after the holidays. I was never curious, even in my infancy. If I was, I don't recall it. In fact, I don't remember much about that particular period of my young life. I was born absent-minded, you know, and have never outgrown it."

"You've done pretty well this year," smiled Jane. "You haven't committed a single crime, so far, along that line."

"Shh!" Judith warned. "Praise is fatal. I'll surely do something now to offset it. I'm on the verge. Only yesterday noon I laid my little leather purse on my wash stand. After classes I met Mary Ashton on the campus and invited her to go to the drugstore with me to have hot chocolate. When I went to pay for it, I took my little silver soap dish out of my coat pocket. I'd grabbed it up and stuffed it in there instead of232 my purse. You can imagine how silly I felt! Mary had to pay for our chocolate. So I know that I'm on the verge. This Christmas rush

has gone to my head. I'm going to make you censor every last package I send. I'm not to be trusted," Judith ended with a deep sigh.

"I'll keep my eye on you," promised Jane, much amused at the affair of the soap dish.

"Thank you; thank you!" Judith responded with exaggerated gratitude. "Now I must leave you. I promised Mrs. Weatherbee to go to her room before dinner. She just finished a perfectly darling white silk sweater she's been knitting for her niece. It has a pale blue collar and it's a dream. She wants to try it on me. I am about the same build as her niece."

With this Judith departed, leaving Jane in rapt contemplation of her Christmas list. She was well satisfied with the selection of gifts she purposed to lay on the altar of friendship. She hoped she had forgotten no one. She decided to write at once to her Aunt Mary, who was already in New York, and enclose a list of the articles she wished her aunt to purchase for her.

Judith presently returned to dwell animatedly on the beauties of the silk sweater.

"It's the sweetest thing ever," she glowed.²³³ "It's awfully becoming to me. It's all finished and after dinner I'm going to take it out to mail for Mrs. Weatherbee. I told her I didn't know whether I could be trusted with it or not. I might run away with it."

"Are you going to take it to the postoffice?" asked Jane. "If you are I have a letter I wish you'd mail there for me. I'd go with you but I have a frightfully long translation in French prose for to-morrow. I can't spare the time."

"Oh, I'm only going as far as the package box at the east end of the campus. Mrs. Weatherbee's going to weigh and stamp the package here and send it special delivery instead of registering it."

"Then you can drop my letter in the post box. That is, if I finish it before the dinner gong rings."

Glancing up at the clock, which showed a quarter to six, Jane hastily resumed her writing. The gong sounding before the letter was completed, Judith obligingly volunteered to "hang around" after dinner until it was ready for mailing.

"Now don't put this letter in your coat pocket, Judy," cautioned Jane, when half an hour after dinner she delivered it into Judith's keeping. "If you do, you'll forget it, mail the package and²³⁴ come marching back to the Hall with my letter still in your pocket. I'm anxious for it to be collected to-night; then Aunt Mary will get it some time to-morrow."

"I'll mail it. Don't you worry," Judith assured. "I'll carry it in my hand every step of the way. It's raining. Did you know it? I hope it will turn to snow by to-morrow. I like the weather good and cold around Christmas time."

"Oh, well, it's over a week until Christmas. We'll probably have plenty of snow by then," Jane commented. "Better take your umbrella."

"Never!" refused Judith. "One package and a letter are about as much as I can safely carry at a time. I might jam the umbrella into the package box and come home with Mrs. Weatherbee's package held over my head. Let well enough alone, Jane. I'll wear my raincoat and run for it."

Slipping on her raincoat and pulling a fur cap over her head, Judith took the letter and started off, stopping in the matron's room for the package she had offered to mail.

"Whew!" was her salutation on reappearing in her room perhaps twenty minutes later. "Maybe it isn't raining, though, and it's as dark²³⁵ as can be. I put your letter and the package under my coat and made a mad dash for the mail box. Got rid of them both in a hurry, and made a still madder dash back home. Another time, I'll consult the weather before I offer my noble services as runner. Any way, your letter is on its way. So is the sweater, and the girl who gets it is lucky."

"I'm ever so much obliged to you, Judy. I hope Aunt Mary sends my stuff right away, so that I'll have it on hand to give before I go to New York. It won't take more than two days to buy it. Allowing three for it to arrive, I'll have it in good season, I guess."

The next few days were fraught with considerable anxiety for Jane, until the arrival of numerous huge express packages, set her doubts at rest. Then a busy season of wrapping and beribboning gifts ensued. The blessed fever of giving was abroad at Wellington and the cheerful bustle and stir of Christmas pervaded every nook and corner of college.

Two evenings before Christmas, Jane and Judith invited their particular chums to their room for a good-bye spread. The party spent a jubilant evening, feasting and exchanging gifts and good wishes. On the next day, Jane and²³⁶ Judith bade each other an affectionate farewell and departed for their respective destinations.

Adrienne and Norma accompanied Jane to New York, there to spend the holidays with the Duprees. Adrienne's distinguished mother was filling a long engagement at a theater there, and the Duprees had opened their home in New York for the time being. Norma expected to fill a two-weeks' engagement in a stock company, obtained for her by Mr. Dupree, and was to be the guest of the kindly Frenchman and his little family.

The three girls were delighted at this state of affairs, as Jane looked forward to meeting the Duprees and Adrienne was equally eager to know Jane's father and aunt. In consequence, the trio had made countless holiday plans which they purposed to carry out.

All in all, it was a red-letter three weeks for the three Wellington girls. Jane found New York a vastly different city when peopled by those dear to her. During her brief shopping trip there the previous winter she had not liked New York. Now she discovered that it was a most wonderful place in which to spend a holiday.

In spite of the constant round of theaters, dinners, luncheons and sight-seeing into which she²³⁷ was whirled, she took time to look sharply about her for those to whom Christmas meant only a name. Accompanied by Mrs. Dupree, she and Adrienne made several visits to poverty-stricken sections of the great city, leaving substantial good cheer behind them.

She also discovered a special protégé in a meek-faced young girl who occupied the position of public stenographer in the hotel where the Allens were staying. Dressed in deep mourning, the girl at once enlisted Jane's sympathy. She promptly made her acquaintance and the two girls became instantly friendly. It needed but the information that Eleanor Lane had recently, lost her mother to strengthen the bond of acquaintance to actual friendship.

Democratic Henry Allen and his sister quite approved of Jane's interest in the lonely little stranger, and Eleanor was invited frequently to dine or lunch with them.

"It seems odd," she said to Jane one afternoon near the end of the blissful holiday as Jane lingered beside her desk, "but your name has sounded familiar to me from the first. I've heard it before but I can't think when or where. I only know it's familiar. It bothers me not to be able to place it."238

"It's awfully aggravating to have a dim recollection of something and not be able to make it come clear," Jane agreed. "My name isn't an uncommon one. There may be dozens of Jane Allens in the world, for all I know."

"Yes, there may be. I hear and see so many names, I wonder that I can ever keep any of them straight in my mind," smiled Eleanor. "Perhaps it will come to me all of a sudden some day. If it does, I'll write you about it."

"Yes, do. You know we are going to correspond. When I come to New York again I shall surely look you up," declared Jane. "And you must come and spend a week-end with me at Wellington."

Girl-fashion, the two had advanced to the "visiting" stage of friendship. Sad little Eleanor regarded Jane as a bright and wonderful star that had suddenly dawned upon her gray horizon.

Jane liked Eleanor for her sweet amiability and pleasant, unassuming manner. She also admired her intensely, because Eleanor was actually engaged in successfully earning her own living. This, in itself, seemed quite marvelous to Jane, who had never earned a penny in her life.

"Girls are really wonderful, after all, Dad,"239 she confided to her father, as the two sat side by side on a big leather davenport in the sitting room of the Allens' private suite, indulging in a confidential talk.

It was the last night of Jane's stay in New York. The next day would find her saying fond farewells to her father and aunt. They intended to remain in New York for a few days after Jane's departure for Wellington College, then make a brief tour of the larger eastern cities before returning to the West.

"It seems queer to me now that I used to dislike them so much," Jane continued, shaking a deprecating head at her former adverse opinion of girls in general. "I wouldn't know what to do now without my girl friends. I seem to be making new ones all the time, too. There's Eleanor, for instance. I've grown ever so fond of her. I think it would be fine to have her make me a visit next summer. She never goes anywhere in particular. She just works hard all

the time. Dorothy thinks she can't come to Capitan until August, so I could have Eleanor there in July."

"Invite whom you please, Janie. The more the merrier. All I want is to see my girl happy," was the affectionate response.

"And I *am* happy, Dad," Jane ardently assured.²⁴⁰ "You and Aunt Mary have given me the finest Christmas I could possibly have. I'll go back to Wellington feeling as if I owned the earth. After such a glorious vacation as this has been, I'll have every reason in the world to be a good pioneer. I'll re-tackle my bit of college land for all I'm worth, and improve it as much as I can through the rest of my sophomore year. It looks a lot better already than it did last year."

Jane spoke with the glowing enthusiasm of perfect happiness. The joy of Christmas had temporarily driven from her mind even the vexatious memory of Marian Seaton and her petty spite.

Quite the contrary, Christmas had not reduced Marian to any such beatific state. She accepted it as a mere matter of course, and spent it in Buffalo, as the guest of Maizie Gilbert. Privately, she wished it over and done with. For once, she was impatient to return to Wellington, there to further a certain enterprise of her own from which she expected to gain decided results.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE LISTENER

Returned to Wellington, Jane and Judith both agreed that in spite of their holiday fun, each had missed the other dreadfully. They had plenty to talk about and much to show each other in the way of beautiful gifts which had fallen to their lot.

Judith was jubilant over the acquisition of a knitted white silk sweater, which she assured Jane was an exact counterpart of the one Mrs. Weatherbee had knitted for her niece.

"My Aunt Jennie made it for me," she explained, as she proudly exhibited it to Jane. "I bought the silk and she did the work. I told her about the one Mrs. Weatherbee made for her niece and dandy Aunt Jennie offered to knit one for me like it. Wasn't that nice in her? I'm going to show it to the girls and then put it away²⁴² until Spring. It will be sweet with a white wash satin skirt. I'm going to have some made just to wear with it. Let's give a spread, Jane, to the crowd. Then we can show them our Christmas presents. It will give you a chance, too, to get that great secret idea of yours off your mind. You see I haven't forgotten about it."

Jane smilingly agreed that it would be a good opportunity and the spread was accordingly planned for the next evening. Christine, Barbara, Dorothy, Norma, Alicia, Adrienne, Ethel and Mary Ashton were the chosen few to be invited.

It was not until the little feast provided by Judith and Jane had been eaten and the ten girls still sat about the makeshift banqueting board, that Jane, urged by Judith to "Speak up, Janie," began rather diffidently to speak of her cherished new idea.

"I don't know whether you'll agree with me or not," she said. "If you don't, please say so frankly, because if we should decide to do what I'm going to propose we'll all have to be united in thinking it a good idea.

"It's like this," she continued. "We all spend a good deal of money on luncheons and dinners and spreads. We feel, of course, that we have a²⁴³ perfect right to do as we please with our allowance checks. So we have. Still, when one stops to think about quite a number of girls at Wellington who are straining every nerve to put themselves through college, it seems a little bit selfish to spend so much on one's own pleasures.

"Suppose we agreed to give only two spreads a month. There are ten of us here. We could each put a dollar a month into a common fund. That would give us ten dollars to spend on the two spreads, five dollars on each. During the month we'd see how much of our allowances we could save. Whatever we had left at the end of the month would go into the common fund. No one of us would be obliged to give any particular sum. Whatever we gave would be a good-will offering. One of us would be treasurer. We'd buy a toy-bank and the treasurer would take charge of it. Whenever one of us wanted to give something we'd go to her and drop the money in the bank. Not even she would know what we gave. The first of every new month she'd take the money out, count it and put it in the Chesterford Trust company for us."

"But suppose we save quite a lot, what would we do with it?" asked Barbara Tennant. "We²⁴⁴ wouldn't need it for ourselves. We'd have to——"

"That's what I'm coming to," interposed Jane. "We'd start a fund to help the poorer Wellington students along. There is no College Aid Society here. I don't know why none has ever been organized. I suppose there haven't been so very many poor girls at Wellington. Until three years ago there were no scholarships offered. There are only two now. There will be three soon. My father has promised me that."

Jane's lips curved in a tender little smile, as she quietly made this announcement. There was no hint of boastful pride in her tones; nothing save becoming modesty and deep sincerity.

"This money we collected would be open to any student to draw upon who made requisition for it," she explained.

"But would the girls who need it ask for it?" questioned Norma. "You see I know how it feels to be very, very poor. If I hadn't found such a splendid way to earn my tuition fees and board, I'm afraid I could never bring myself to ask for help in that way. It would seem like begging."

"Oh, we'd loan the money; not give it," promptly assured Jane. "We'd loan it without interest, to be repaid at convenience. You know²⁴⁵ the 'Beatrice Horton' books. Well, in those stories the girls at Exley College started such a fund. They gave entertainments and shows to help it along. Then they received money contributions from interested persons, too.

"I don't know whether we'd ever do as they did. I like the idea of the self-denial gifts from just the crowd of us. We could let the money pile up this year and if we had enough by next October we could start our Student's Aid Fund."

"We could keep up the good work during our vacations, too," enthusiastically suggested Mary Ashton. "A little self-denial then wouldn't hurt us, I guess, I think it would be fun for each of us to pledge ourselves to earn at least ten dollars this summer to put into the fund. Norma and Adrienne are the only ones of us here who ever earned a dollar. Dispute that if you can."

"I dispute it," grinned Judith. "My father once gave me a silver dollar for keeping quiet a whole hour. I was only five at the time I earned that fabulous sum."

"I've earned lots of dollars for churches and hospitals at bazaars," declared Christine. "I suppose most of us have. But that's not like earning money for ourselves."

"Well, everybody here is going to earn *ten* dollars²⁴⁶ this coming summer," stated Judith positively. "It would be still more fun if we each agreed to write a poem telling how we earned our ten dollars. We'd have a grand reunion as soon as we were all back in college and each of us would read her own poetic gem right out loud, so that we could all appreciate it."

Judith's proposal was greeted with laughter and accepted on the spot. The girls were no less enthusiastic over Jane's worthy plan and each expressed herself as ready and willing to do her bit toward furthering its success. Before the ten-thirty bell drove the revelers from the scene of revelry, Adrienne had been appointed to act as treasurer. Jane had been unanimously chosen, but declined, suggesting Adrienne in her stead.

Thus from one girl's generous thought was presently to spring an organization that would grow, thrive and endure long after Jane Allen had been graduated from Wellington College to a wider field in life.

That evening's jollification was the last for the participants until fateful mid-year, with its burden of examinations should come and go. The nearer it approached the more devoted became the Wellingtonites to study. Even basket-ball practice fell off considerably. The second game²⁴⁷ between the freshmen and sophomore teams was set for the third Saturday in February. This meant ample time for practice after the dreaded examinations were out of the way.

On the whole January seemed fated to pass out in uneventful placidity so far as Jane and Judith were concerned. Elsie Noble continued to glower her silent disapproval of her tablemates three times a day, but that was all. Since the disastrous failure of the scheme to leave Jane, Judith and Adrienne in the lurch at the freshman frolic, she had made no further attempts at unworthy retaliation for her supposed grievances.

Marian Seaton also appeared to be too fully occupied with her own affairs to undertake the launching of a new offensive against the girls she so greatly disliked. In fact, she behaved as though she had forgotten their very existence. For this they were duly grateful.

Only one incident occurred during the month which brought Marian's name up for discussion between Judith and Jane.

Judith arrived in her room late one afternoon with the news that Maizie Gilbert had lost a valuable sapphire and diamond pin. Notice of the loss had appeared on the main bulletin board at 248 Wellington Hall. It was worded almost precisely as had been the notice previously posted by Marian regarding the loss of her diamond ring.

Judith again confided to Jane her sturdy disbelief concerning Maizie's loss. As in the case of Marian, she attributed it as a silly determination to attract undue attention. Jane frowned reflectively at Judith's supposition, but refused to commit herself.

"I don't want to talk or even think about either Marian or Maizie," she said shortly. "I've been living in perfect peace since Christmas and I hate to break the spell. I'm trying to keep my mind on study just now. Are you aware, Judy Stearns, that exams begin to-morrow?"

"I am. I am prepared—in a measure. Ahem!" Judith snickered, adding: "A very small measure."

"Are you going to study to-night?" Jane demanded. "If you're not, then away with you. I'm going to be fearfully, terribly, horribly busy. Don't interrupt me. That means you. Alicia is coming in after dinner to-night. We are going to conduct a review."

"All right, conduct it," graciously sanctioned Judith. "I'm not going to study to-night. I never do the last evening before exams. I just try to keep what I already know in my head and let it go at that. Guess I'll inflict my charming self upon Adrienne and Ethel. They're not going to study, either."

"Do so; do so," approved Jane with smiling alacrity. "I'm sure they'll love to have you."

"Certainly they will. I am always welcome everywhere—except *here*, on the dread eve of the stupendous ordeal which we shall presently be called upon to endure."

Judith struck an attitude and continued to declaim dramatically.

"Who am I that I should desire for a moment to remain where I am not desired. I will flee to the welcome haunt of my true friends. We'll make merry and make fudge at the same time. And I sha'n't bring you a single speck of squidgy, fudgy fudge," she ended in practical tones.

"I can live without it," informed Jane drily. "Be as merry as you please, but be quiet about it. Remember, a lot of girls will be trying to study."

"Oh, we won't get ourselves disliked," airily assured Judith. "We'll be as quiet as can be. We know how to behave during such times of stress."

Jane merely smiled. Judith and Adrienne together meant much hilarity.²⁵⁰

Dinner over, Alicia appeared to hold student vigil with Jane. Judith as promptly betook herself to Adrienne's room for an evening's relaxation. There she found Norma, who had also elected to eschew study for fudge.

It may be said to the quartette's credit that, though hilarity reigned during the fudge making, it was of a subdued order. When the delicious concoction of chocolate and walnut meats was at last ready for sampling, the four girls sat down to eat and talk to their hearts' content.

The conversation drifting to the all-important subject of dress, Adrienne exclaimed in sudden recollection:

"Ah, Judy, but I must show you the sweet frock which I have this day received from *ma mère*. It is, of a truth, the dream. But wait one moment! You shall thus see for yourself."

Springing up from her chair, the little girl darted to a curtained doorway, the entrance to a roomy closet, containing her own and Ethel's gowns.

It was at least five minutes when she reappeared, minus the new gown, an angry light in her big, black eyes.

"What's the matter, Imp?" questioned Ethel concernedly.²⁵¹

For answer, Adrienne laid a warning finger to her lips with a mysterious wag of her curly head toward the curtained doorway.

Her finger still on her lips, she picked up a pencil from the writing table and scribbled industriously for a moment or two on a pad of paper. Silently she handed the pad to Judith, who read it, opened her eyes very wide and passed the pad to Ethel. Ethel, in turn, handed it to Norma.

Suddenly Adrienne broke the silence; speaking in purposely loud tones.

"I have the great secret to tell you, girls. It is of a certainty most amazing. Wait until I return. I shall be absent from the room but a moment. Then you shall hear much that is interesting."

Flashing to the door, she paused, frantically beckoning her friends to follow her. Next instant the four had made a noiseless exit into the hall and were grouped before the door of the next room.

Very cautiously, Adrienne's small fingers sought the door knob and turned it. Slowly, soundlessly, she opened the door and stepped cat-footed into the room. A little line of three, emulating²⁵² her stealthy movement, tip-toed after her into a room empty of occupants.

Straight to a curtained doorway Adrienne flitted, followed by her faithful shadows. Sweeping the chintz curtain aside with a lightning movement of her hand, she paused.

Looking over her shoulder, three girls saw a motionless figure lying flat on the closet floor. In that fraction of a second the figure suddenly acquired motion and speech. A scramble, an appalled "Oh!" and a very angry and thoroughly frightened girl was on her feet, confronting Adrienne. Her companions had now fallen back a little from the doorway. The listener now made a futile attempt at composure.

"What—why——" she gasped.

"Come out of this closet, dishonorable one," commanded Adrienne sternly. "Ah, but it is I who had the luck to discover you in the act of listening. Had you not too hastily shut the register when you heard me enter the closet on the other side, I should never have guessed. Come out instantly."

The imperious repetition of the command served its purpose. Adrienne backed out of the closet into the room, followed by Elsie Noble. The latter's small black eyes refused to meet those²⁵³ of her accuser. The blazing red of her cheeks betrayed her utter humiliation.

For a brief instant no one spoke. Then Elsie recovered speech.

"Get out—of—my—room, you—spies!" she stammered in a furious, rage-choked voice.

"Ah, but it is you who are the great spy!" scornfully exclaimed Adrienne. "There is no longer the mystery. So you must have listened often to Ethel and myself as we privately talked. Have you then no shame to be thus so small—so contemptible?"

"No, I haven't. I——"

Elsie's attempt to brazen things out ended almost as soon as it began. Her guilty, shifting gaze had come to rest on Norma's grave, sweet face. It wore an expression of wondering pity. Elsie turned and bolted straight for her couch bed. She threw herself downward upon it, beating the pillows with her clenched fists, in a fury of tempestuous chagrin.

"I think we'd best go, girls." It was Norma who spoke. "Alicia will soon be in. I don't believe we'd care to have even her know about this. Perhaps it would be just as well for us to forget that it's happened."

This charitable view of the matter brought²⁵⁴ Elsie's head from the pillow with a jerk. She sat up and stared hard at Norma, as if unable to credit the latter's plea for clemency in her behalf.

"I am satisfied to have thus solved a mystery. Now I wish to forget it." Adrienne made a sweeping gesture, as though to blot out the disagreeable incident with a wave of her hand.

"It certainly wouldn't be a pleasant memory," dryly agreed Judith. "Anyhow, we know now something we've wanted to know for a long time. That's about all that one feels like saying, except that one hopes it won't happen again."

"I guess it won't. Let's go, girls," was all that Ethel said.

Without another word the quartette turned to the door, leaving Elsie to her own dark meditations. She could hardly believe that she had thus easily escaped. It appeared that these girls whom she had been so sure she despised, had no mind for retaliation. They were simply disgusted with her. For the first time, a dim realization of her own unworthiness forced itself upon Elsie.

It was not strong enough to impel her to run after those who had just disappeared and apologize for her fault. Nevertheless, Adrienne's accusing²⁵⁵ question, "Have you then no shame to be thus so small; so contemptible?" rang in her ears. It dawned painfully upon her

that she *was* ashamed of herself. More, that she was done with eavesdropping for good and all.

Early in the year she had stumbled upon the discovery that the register in the dress closet could be efficiently used as a listening post. Its position, low in the wall between the two closets, made it possible for her to hear plainly the conversation of those in the next room when both sides of the register stood open. This state of matters had existed when first she made the discovery. More, the side opening into the dress closet belonging to Adrienne and Ethel had remained open.

This proved conclusively to Elsie that she was alone in her discovery. Fearful lest Alicia should note the sound of voices proceeding from the next room, she had been careful to keep the register closed whenever Alicia was present in their room. At times when the latter was absent, Elsie had noiselessly opened it and taken up her position in the closet as an eavesdropper. Now she began miserably to wish that she had never done it.

Meanwhile, Adrienne's first move on re-entering her room was to dash into the adjoining²⁵⁶ closet and close the treacherous register with an energetic hand. To block further listening, she promptly stowed a suitcase on end against it.

"*Voila!* I have now remedied the trouble," she announced, as she emerged from the closet. "We shall not need that register to give the heat to us. I have closed it and placed against it the suitcase. Strange we never before noticed."

"Better late than never," commented Judith. "Funny the way our little mystery was solved, wasn't it?"

"I should never have known, had she not made the noise in closing the register on her side," explained Adrienne. "I had but bent over to lift the box containing my new gown when I noticed the register, heard the sound and, of a sudden, grew suspicious. I recalled that it could not be Alicia. So I was most determined to know if my suspicion was the idle one. It was not. You saw for yourselves. It was all most disagreeable. I had the feeling of shame myself to thus discover this girl listening."

"So had I," echoed Ethel.

"It *was* rather horrid," declared Judith. "Maybe it will teach her a much-needed lesson. The ignoble Noble is a splendid name for her. I'm proud of myself for having thought of it."²⁵⁷

"I think she was really ashamed of herself," Norma said quietly. "I couldn't help feeling a little bit sorry for her. She pretended to be very defiant, when all the time she looked humiliated and miserable. I believe she was truly sorry, but couldn't bring herself to say so."

"She will too soon forget," shrugged Adrienne. "A few minutes with her cousin, that most detestable Seaton one, and her regrets will vanish. Once you said, Judy, that we should solve our little mystery when we least thought. So you are indeed the prophet. We can expect no gratitude from this girl, because we have thus overlooked her fault. Still, I have the feeling that she will trouble us no more. *Voila!* It is sufficient."

CHAPTER XXV

THE ACCUSATION

Adrienne's prediction that a few moments with Marian Seaton would effectually banish Elsie Noble's remorse, provided she felt remorse, proved not altogether correct. The beginning on next day of the mid-year examinations served as a partial escape valve for Elsie's feeling of deep humiliation.

By the end of the week she was divided between remorse and resentment. The latter over-swaying her, she fell back on Marian for sympathy. Marian's sympathy was not specially satisfying. She actually laughed over Elsie's aggrieved narration of the affair of the dress closet, and coolly informed her cousin that she should have locked *her* door before attempting any such maneuver.

The only grain of consolation which she bestowed²⁵⁹ was, "You needn't feel so bad about what those sillies think of you. They'll have something more serious to think about before long. It's high time Maiz and I took a hand in things."

"What are you going to do?" Elsie sulkily demanded.

"You'll know when the time comes," was the brusque reply.

A reply that sent Elsie back to her room, sullenly wondering what Marian was "up to" now. Strangely enough, Marian's vague threat awoke within her a curious sense of uneasiness. She was not so keen for retaliation now. She darkly surmised that Marian intended somehow to make trouble for Judith Stearns and Norma about the last year's affair of the stolen gown. Once she had been ready to believe Marian's assertion that Judith had been guilty of theft. She was not nearly so ready now to believe it.

As for Norma! Elsie could still see Norma's sweet face, with its gentle blue eyes pityingly bent on her. Marian might say all she pleased. Norma Bennett was fine and honest to the core. She had always secretly admired Norma for her wonderful talent. Now she admired Norma for herself. If Marian undertook to injure²⁶⁰ Norma——Elsie set her thin lips in a fashion denoting decision.

Mid-year came and went, however, with nothing to disturb the outward serenity of Madison Hall. A brief season of jubilation followed the trial of examinations. The new college term began with the usual flurry accompanying the rearranging of recitation programs and getting settled in classes. Basket-ball ardor was revived and practice resumed by the freshman and sophomore teams, pending the second game to be played on the third Saturday in February.

On the Monday evening before the game, Marian Seaton and Maizie Gilbert held a private session with Mrs. Weatherbee. It lasted for half an hour and when the two girls emerged from the matron's office, they left behind them a most shocked and perplexed woman. The story which they had related to her would have seemed preposterous, save that it touched upon a private matter of her own that had of late vaguely annoyed her.

For some time after the two had left her office, she wrestled with the difficulty which confronted her. Nor had she decided upon a course of action when she retired that night. For two days she continued in doubt, before she was able to make up her mind regarding the handling of the troublesome problem.

After dinner on Wednesday evening she sent the maid upstairs with certain instructions and promptly retired to her room.

"Mrs. Weatherbee wants to see us in *her room*?" marveled Judith, addressing Molly, the maid who had delivered the message. "Are you sure she said *her room*?"

"Yes, Miss Judith. That's what she said," returned Molly positively. "She said please come right away."

"That means us." Judith turned to Jane as Molly vanished. "Now why do you suppose she wants to see us in her room? She must have something very private to say or she'd talk with us in her office."

"I don't like it at all!" Jane exclaimed with knitted brows. "Something's gone wrong. But what? Can you think of any reason for it?"

"No, I can't. We haven't committed any horrible crimes that I can recall," returned Judith lightly. "Come on. We might as well go and find out the meaning of this thushness. We should worry. We haven't done anything to deserve a call-down."

One look at Mrs. Weatherbee's grave face as she admitted them to her room convinced both that something disagreeable was impending.

"Sit down, girls," the matron invited, in her usual reserved fashion. "I have sent for Miss Bennett. She will be here in a moment."

This merely added to Jane's and Judith's perplexity. Jane shot a bewildered glance toward Judith, as the two silently seated themselves. Directly a light rapping at the door announced Norma's arrival. She was also formally greeted and requested to take a seat.

For a moment the matron surveyed the trio as though undetermined how to address them. When she finally spoke, there was a note of hesitation in her voice.

"A very peculiar story has been told me," she said, "which intimately concerns you three girls, particularly Miss Stearns. Much as I dislike the idea, I am obliged, as matron of Madison Hall, to investigate it.

"Certain students at the Hall have made very serious charges against you, Miss Stearns. These charges are partially based on something that occurred here last year, of which I had no knowledge. I——"

"Mrs. Weatherbee! I insist on knowing at once what these charges are!"

Judith was on her feet, her usually good-natured face dark with righteous indignation.

"Sit down, Miss Stearns," commanded the matron not ungently. "I intend to go into this unpleasant matter fully with you. A valuable diamond ring belonging to Miss Seaton and a diamond and sapphire pin belonging to Miss Gilbert have disappeared. Though 'Lost' notices were posted regarding these articles, their owners have come to me stating their private belief that you are responsible for their disappearance."

"But surely you can't believe any such thing about me!" Judith cried out in distress. "Do you realize that those two girls actually accuse *me* of being a *thief*?"

"Wait a moment, please." The matron raised a protesting hand. "Let me finish what I wished to say. Miss Seaton does not believe you guilty of intentional theft. She accused you of being a kleptomaniac. She also accuses Miss Allen and Miss Bennett of knowing it and aiding you in keeping your failing a secret."

"What?" almost shouted Judith.

"Oh, this is too much!" It was Jane who now sprang furiously up from her chair, her gray eyes flashing. "I won't endure it. I insist, Mrs. 264 Weatherbee, that you send for these girls and let us face them."

"Yes, send for them! I won't leave this room until Marian Seaton takes back every single thing she's said about me," was Judith's wrathful ultimatum.

"I was about to suggest when you and Miss Allen interrupted me that I had thought it advisable to bring you girls together. Still, I deemed it only fair to let you understand the situation beforehand," stated the matron rather stiffly. "I have already sent Miss Seaton and Miss Gilbert word to come here at eight o'clock. It lacks only five minutes of eight. They will be here directly. We will not go further in this matter until they come. You will oblige me by resuming your chairs."

Mrs. Weatherbee's expression was that of a martyr. She was in for a very disagreeable session and she knew it. Marian's accusation against Judith made necessary an investigation. It had come to a point where Judith's honesty must be either conclusively proved or disproved beyond all shadow of doubt. If Judith, as Marian boldly declared, were really a kleptomaniac, she was a menace to Madison Hall.

Ordinarily Mrs. Weatherbee would have been²⁶⁵ slow to believe such a thing. The fact, however, that the silk sweater which she had intrusted to Judith to mail had never reached its destination, had implanted distrust in the matron's mind. To have recently learned that Judith had been exhibiting to her girl friends a sweater that answered to the description of the one she had knitted for her niece was decidedly in line with her private suspicions. Neither had she forgotten Judith's laughing assertion to the effect that she was not sure she could be trusted not to run off with the sweater.

Jane and Judith reluctantly reseating themselves, an embarrassing silence fell. Each of the three girls was busy racking her brain to recall the circumstance of last year upon which Marian Seaton had based her charge. None could bring back any of that nature in which Marian had figured.

The sound of approaching footfalls, followed by a light knock at the door, came as a relief to the waiting four. Next instant Marian and Maizie had stepped into the room in response to the matron's "Come in."

A bright flush sprang to Marian's cheeks as she glimpsed the trio of stern-faced girls. She had not anticipated being thus so quickly brought face to face with those she had maligned. Maizie appeared merely sleepily amused.

"Kindly be seated, girls." Mrs. Weatherbee motioned them to an upholstered settee near the door.

Casting a baleful glance at Jane, Marian complied with the terse invitation. Maizie dropped lazily down beside her, her slow smile in evidence. Matters promised to be interesting.

"Miss Seaton," the matron immediately plunged into the business at hand, "you may repeat to Miss Stearns, Miss Allen and Miss Bennett what you have already told me concerning the affair of last year. Miss Stearns has been informed of your charges against her. She wishes to defend herself."

"I certainly do," emphasized Judith, "and I shall make you take it all back, too, Miss Seaton."

"I'm sorry I can't oblige you by taking it all back," sneered Marian. "I can merely repeat a little of a conversation that occurred between you and Miss Allen in which you condemned yourself."

"Very well, repeat it," challenged Judith coolly.

As nearly as she could remember, Marian repeated the talk between Jane and Judith, to which she had dishonorably listened on the night of the freshman frolic.

"You were heard to admit that you had stolen a gown from Edith Hammond," she triumphantly accused. "That Edith blamed Miss Bennett and that she confessed you had stolen it. Also that Miss Allen settled for it and you all agreed to keep it a secret. Worse yet, you and Miss Allen only laughed and joked about what you called 'your fatal failing.' Deny if you can that you two had such a conversation."

During this amazing recital the faces of at least three listeners had registered a variety of expressions. Marian's spiteful challenge met with unexpected results. Of a sudden the trio burst into uncontrolled laughter.

"Girls," rebuked Mrs. Weatherbee sharply, "this is hardly a time for laughter. Miss Stearns, do you or do you not deny that you and Miss Allen held the conversation Miss Seaton accuses you of holding?"

"Of course we did," cheerfully answered Judith, her mirthful features sobering.

"Then you——"

"We were in the dressing room on the night of the freshman frolic when it took place," broke in Jane. "May I ask where *you* were, Miss Seaton, when you overheard it?"

Jane's gray eyes rested scornfully upon Marian as she flashed out her question.

"I—I wasn't anywhere," snapped Marian. "I—someone else overheard it."

"Then 'someone else' should have taken pains to learn the truth before spreading malicious untruth," tensely condemned Jane.

Turning to the matron, she said bitterly:

"Mrs. Weatherbee, this whole story is simply spite-work; nothing else. When I have explained the true meaning of Judith's and my talk together in the dressing-room, you will understand everything. Judith's fatal failing is not kleptomania. It's merely absent-mindedness."

Rapidly Jane narrated the incident of the missing white lace gown, belonging to Edith Hammond, in which herself, Judith and Norma had figured in the previous year. She finished with:

"I shall ask you to write to Edith for corroboration of my story. I must also insist on knowing the name of the girl who overheard our talk. She must be told the facts. We cannot afford to allow such injurious gossip to be circulated about any of us. Judith in particular. Further, it is ridiculous even to connect her with the disappearance²⁶⁹ of Miss Seaton's ring and Miss Gilbert's pin."

"Oh, is it?" cried Marian in shrill anger, "Just let me tell you that both the ring and the pin were stolen from our room. We posted a notice and offered a reward, hoping to get them back without raising a disturbance. It's easy enough for you to make up the silly tale you've just told. I don't believe it. You're only trying to cover the real truth by pretending that Miss Stearns is absent-minded. It's not hard to see through your flimsy pretext."

"That will do, Miss Seaton." Mrs. Weatherbee now took stern command of the situation. "I have no reason to believe that Miss Allen has not spoken the truth. This affair seems to consist largely of a misunderstanding, coupled with a good deal of spite work. You will oblige me by giving me the name of the girl who overheard the conversation."

Marian did not at once reply. Instead, she cast a hasty, inquiring glance at Maizie. The latter answered it with a slight smile and a nod of the head.

"It was my cousin, Miss Noble, who overheard the conversation," she reluctantly admitted. "She repeated it to me in confidence. She does²⁷⁰ not wish to be brought into this affair. You will kindly leave her out of it entirely."

"Your dictation is unbecoming, Miss Seaton," coldly reproved the matron. "I shall use my own judgment in this matter."

"You are all excused," she continued, addressing the ill-assorted group. "We will leave this matter as it stands for the present. When I have decided what to do, I will send for you again. Until then, not a word concerning it to anyone."

Marian and Maizie rose with alacrity. They had no desire to prolong the interview. It had not panned out to suit them. Jane's concise explanation of the gown incident had practically turned a serious offense into a laughable blunder. Mrs. Weatherbee undoubtedly believed Jane. After listening to her, she had not asked either Norma or Judith a single question. Instead, she had closed the discussion with a curtness that was not reassuring to the plotters.

"Elsie will have to help us out," were Marian's first words when she and Maizie reached their room. "She'll be raving when I tell her. She'll have to do it, though. If she doesn't, I'll threaten to tell all the girls about the way that little French snip caught her listening at the register."

"You might as well have owned up that it was²⁷¹ you who listened outside the dressing-room," shrugged Maizie. "Then you could have passed the whole thing off as a misunderstanding. That would have ended it. Now we're both in for a fine lot of trouble."

"Then why did you nod your head when I looked at you?" asked Marian fiercely.

"Oh, just to keep things going," drawled Maizie. "I like to see those girls all fussed up about nothing. Besides, Weatherbee can't do anything very serious about our part of it. She can say we are mischief-makers and call us down and that's all. No one except ourselves knows the truth about the ring and the pin. That's the only thing that could really get us into trouble."

"No one will ever know, either," declared Marian. "They're both in the tray of my trunk. We'll take them home with us at Easter and leave them there. That will be safest."

"You certainly leaped before you looked, this time," chuckled Maizie. "That gown business was funny."

"Well, how was I to know? I heard Judy Stearns say she stole it," retorted Marian testily. "The whole thing sounded suspicious enough to hang our losses on. Just the same I shall keep on saying now that I believe she stole our stuff.²⁷² Mrs. Weatherbee needn't think she can make me keep quiet. I have a perfect right to my own belief and I'll see to it that others besides myself share it."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE STAR WITNESS

In Jane's and Judith's room a highly disgusted trio of girls held session directly they had left Mrs. Weatherbee. Far from feeling utterly crushed and humiliated by Marian's accusations, Judith was filled with lofty disdain of Marian's far-fetched attempt to discredit her.

"I suppose I ought to feel dreadfully cut up over being accused of theft," she said, "but I can't. The whole business seems positively unreal. Jane, do you believe it was the ignoble Noble who overheard us talking that night?"

"No; I think it was either Maizie or Marian," returned Jane positively. "Didn't you see them exchange glances? Then Maizie nodded. They had agreed to put the blame on Miss Noble."

"I wonder if she had agreed to let them," remarked Norma. "I suppose she had. Otherwise,²⁷⁴ Marian wouldn't have dared use her name."

"I wonder what Mrs. Weatherbee will do about it," emphasized Jane. "There's more than weird unreality to it, Judy. You mustn't forget that Marian has accused you of taking her ring and Maizie's pin. She hasn't withdrawn that accusation. She won't withdraw it. I am very sure of that."

"Well, she needn't," retorted Judith. "We know how much it's worth. So does Mrs. Weatherbee. You heard what she said about spite work. She's very much displeased with Marian and Maizie. She'll probably send for us to-morrow night and them, too. Then she'll lay down the law and order the whole thing dropped. She must see herself how unjust it is. Your explanation about Edith's dress was enough to show that. Just because the pin and ring are missing is no sign that I should be accused of their disappearance. Besides, they've been posted as 'Lost.' That clears me, doesn't it?"

"It ought to, but it doesn't," replied Jane soberly. "Marian and Maizie will go on insinuating hateful things about you, even if they are ordered to drop the matter. Then there's Miss Noble. She's on the outs with us and on Marian's side. Unless we can do something ourselves to²⁷⁵ make these girls drop the affair, they won't drop it."

"If Mrs. Weatherbee can't stop them, we certainly can't," Judith responded rather anxiously. "I guess, though, that she can. She's awfully determined, you know. I'm going to put my faith in her and not worry any more about it. I dare say if a thorough search were made of Marian's and Maizie's room the lost jewelry would be found," she predicted bitterly.

"That's precisely my opinion," nodded Jane. "If it comes to it I shall tell Mrs. Weatherbee so. I'd rather wait a little, though, to see how things pan out. This is Wednesday. I hope it will be settled and off our minds before Saturday. We'd hate to go into the game with the least bit of shadow hanging over us."

"Oh, I guess it will be settled before then." Nevertheless Judith looked a trifle solemn. Despite her declaration that she did not intend to worry, Jane's prediction had taken uncomfortable hold on her.

"I think she ought to have settled it to-night," was Norma's blunt opinion. "It wouldn't surprise me if she really wrote to Edith Hammond. Mrs. Weatherbee's peculiar. I know, because I've worked for her. She probably believes Jane,²⁷⁶ yet she's in doubt about something. I could tell that by the way she acted."

"You don't believe she suspects me of stealing those girls' jewelry, do you?" questioned Judith in quick alarm.

"I hardly think that," Norma said slowly. "I only know she's not quite in sympathy with you, Judy. If she had been she wouldn't have hesitated to settle things then and there."

Norma's surmise was more accurate than not. Marian Seaton's sneering assertion that alleged absent-mindedness on Judith's part cloaked a grave failing had not been entirely lost on the matron. She could not forget the missing sweater. Was it possible, she wondered, that there might be truth in Marian's accusation?

Privately she resolved to do three things before passing final judgment. She would write to Edith for corroboration of the gown story. She would make further inquiry, concerning Judith's absent-mindedness, of Dorothy Martin. She would have a private talk with Elsie Noble. This last was solely to determine whether Marian had spoken the truth in regard to Elsie's having overheard the fateful conversation. She was as doubtful of Marian as she was of poor Judith.

Mrs. Weatherbee intended to delay making inquiry²⁷⁷ of either Dorothy or Elsie until she had received a reply to a special delivery letter which she had dispatched to Edith Allison, nee Edith Hammond.

In the interim Judith had gone from hopefulness to anxiety and from anxiety to nervousness. In consequence, she failed to play on Saturday with her usual snap and vigor, and had not her teammates put forth an extra effort, her unintentional lagging would have lost them the game. As it was they won it by only two points.

Completely disgusted with herself, Judith broke down in the dressing-room and sobbed miserably. A proceeding which made Christine, Barbara and Adrienne wonder what in the world had happened to upset cheery, light-hearted Judy.

Back in her room, Judith cried harder than ever.

"I'm all upset," she wailed, her head on Jane's comforting shoulder. "I don't see why Mrs. Weatherbee hasn't sent for us about that miserable business. It's got on my nerves."

"Never mind," soothed Jane. "If she doesn't let us know about it by Monday afternoon, I'll go to her myself. If I knew positively that Marian Seaton wrote the letter that nearly lost me²⁷⁸ my room, I'd tell Mrs. Weatherbee. It would only be giving her what she deserves."

Monday morning, however, brought Mrs. Weatherbee a letter from Edith Hammond, over which she smiled, then looked uncompromisingly severe. Her stern expression spelled trouble for someone.

Meanwhile, on the same morning, Jane also received a letter which made her catch her breath in sheer amazement. It was from Eleanor Lane and stated:

Dear Jane:

"I've remembered at last. Now I know why your name seemed so familiar. Last fall a Miss Seaton was staying at the hotel with her mother. She dictated a letter to me, the carbon copy of which I am enclosing. She told me that she was having the letter typed for a joke and asked me to sign it 'Jane Allen.' I knew that wasn't her name, because I had heard a bell-boy page her several times and knew who she was. She said that you were her cousin and that she was only sending the letter for fun, that it wouldn't do you the least bit of harm.

"I didn't like her at all. She was very²⁷⁹ hateful and supercilious. I thought at the time that the letter was a queer kind of joke, but I'd never been to college so I wasn't in a position to criticize it. Anyway, it wasn't my business, so I typed it and signed it as she requested. That's where I saw your name. I thought I would send you the letter and ask you if it was really a joke. I found it the other day in going over my files and it worried me. I realized that I had done a very foolish thing in signing it. I should have refused to do so.

"This is the second letter I've written since I last heard from you, so hurry up and write me soon. With much love,

"Ever your friend,

"Eleanor."

The shadow of a smile flickered about Jane's lips as she unfolded the sheet of paper enclosed in Eleanor's letter and glanced it over. As by miracle the means of retaliation had been placed in her hands.

She decided that she would wait only to see what the day might bring forth. If by dinner time that evening Mrs. Weatherbee had made no sign, she would go to the matron after dinner²⁸⁰ with a recital that went back to the very beginning of her freshman year. She would tell everything. Nothing should be omitted that would serve to show Marian Seaton to Mrs. Weatherbee in her true colors.

If, on the other hand, Mrs. Weatherbee sent for Judith, Norma and herself that evening and exonerated Judith in the presence of her enemies, Jane determined that she would not, even in that event, withhold the story of Marian's long-continued persecution of herself and her friends. Undoubtedly Marian and Maizie would be asked to leave Madison Hall; perhaps college as well. Mrs. Weatherbee would be sufficiently shocked and incensed to carry the affair higher. Jane hoped that she would. She had reached a point where she had become merciless.

While Jane was darkly considering her course of action, Mrs. Weatherbee was finding Monday a most amazingly exciting day. The morning mail brought her Edith's letter. Directly afterward she hailed Dorothy Martin as the latter left the dining-room and marched Dorothy to her office for a private talk. When it ended, Dorothy had missed her first recitation. Mrs. Weatherbee, however, had learned a number of things, hitherto unguessed by her.²⁸¹

Shortly after luncheon a meek-eyed, plainly dressed little woman was ushered into her office. In her mittened hands the stranger carried a package. Sight of it caused the matron to stare. Her wonder grew as the woman handed it to her.

"If you please, ma'am," blurted forth the stranger, red with embarrassment, "I hope you won't feel hard towards me. I know I oughtta come to you before. My husband found this here package in a rubbish can. He works for the town, collectin' rubbish. He found it jus' before Christmas and brung it home t' me.

"You c'n see for yourself how the name o' the party it was to go to had been all run together, so's you can't read it. The package got wet, I guess. But your name's plain enough up in the

corner. I knowed I ought ta brung it here first thing, but I—I—opened it. I knowed I hadn't oughtta. Then I seen this pretty silk sack and I wanted it terrible.

"I says to myself as how I was goin' to keep it. It wasn't my fault if you throwed it into the rubbish can by mistake. My husband he said I hadda right to it, 'cause findin' was keepin'. So I kep' it, but it made me feel bad. I was brung up honest and I knowed it was the same as stealin'.²⁸²

"But I wanted it terrible, jus' the same. I never see anything han'somer, an' it looked swell on me. I put it on jus' once for a minute. It didn't give me no pleasure, though. I felt jus' sneaky an' mean. After that I put it away. Once in a while I took a look at it. Then my little girl got a bad cold. She was awful sick. I forgot all about the sack. She pretty near died. I sat up with her nights for quite a while. When she got better I thought about the sack again, and knowed that God had come down hard on me for bein' a thief. So I jus' got ready an' brung it back. It ain't hurt a mite, an' I hope you won't make me no trouble, 'cause I've had enough."

Mrs. Weatherbee's feelings can be better imagined than described. The return of the missing sweater at the critical moment was sufficiently astounding, not to mention the pathetic little confession that accompanied its return. She felt nothing save intense sympathy for her humble caller.

When the latter took her leave a few moments later, she went away wiping her eyes. Far from making her any "trouble," Mrs. Weatherbee had treated her with the utmost gentleness. The stately, white-haired woman with the "proud²⁸³ face" had not only thanked her for returning the "sack," she had asked for her humble caller's address and expressed her intention of sending the little sick girl a cheer-up present.

Left alone, Mrs. Weatherbee sat smiling rather absently at the dainty blue and white bit of knitting which she had taken from its wrapper. She thought she understood very well how it had happened to stray into the rubbish can. She now recalled that the rubbish cans about Chesterford and at the edge of the campus were much the shape and size of the package boxes used by the postal service. Given a dark, rainy night and an absent-minded messenger, the result was now easy to anticipate. Here was proof piled high of Judith Stearns' "fatal failing."

There was but one thing more to be done before winding-up summarily an affair that had been to her vexatious from the beginning. She had obtained plenty of evidence for the defense. Now she turned her attention to the prosecution. She had yet to hold a private word with Elsie Noble. This she resolved to do directly the freshman in question had returned to the Hall from her afternoon classes.

Elsie, on her part, had been looking forward to²⁸⁴ this very interview with a degree of sullen satisfaction. On the day following the scene in Mrs. Weatherbee's room, Marian had informed her cousin of all that had taken place. As a result, Elsie had flown into a tempestuous rage over having been dragged into the trouble by Marian.

"You've got to do as I say, Elsie. If you don't, you'll be sorry," Marian had coldly threatened. "Maiz and I will drop you. Besides, I'll tell Mrs. Weatherbee all about that register business. Then she'll believe you listened outside the dressing-room, no matter how much you may deny it."

"I'll do as I please," Elsie had furiously retorted, and flung herself out of Marian's room.

Not at all alarmed by her cousin's anger, Marian had confidently remarked to Maizie: "Elsie doesn't dare go back on us. She'll do as I tell her. She always fusses a lot, then gives in. She has no more time for those three prigs than we have."

For once she was mistaken. Elsie had changed, though she alone knew it. Her secret admiration for Norma had paved the way to better things. She now rebelled at the thought of facing this sweet, truthful-eyed girl with a lie on her own lips. Marian's threat to expose her²⁸⁵ fault had awakened her to a bitter knowledge of her cousin's unbounded malice. She experienced a belated revulsion of feeling toward Judith Stearns. Jane Allen's explanation of the gown incident, scornfully repeated to Elsie by Marian, now stood for truth in Elsie's mind.

Having gone thus far, Elsie next mentally weighed Marian's bolder accusation against Judith concerning the missing jewelry. Face to face with her cousin's utter lack of principle, for the first time it occurred to her to wonder whether Marian might not know better than anyone else the whereabouts of the missing pin and ring. She decided to do a little private investigating of her own.

When, at five o'clock on the fateful Monday afternoon, the maid brought her word that Mrs. Weatherbee wished to see her, she went downstairs to the matron's office, fully equipped for emergency. The recital which she indignantly poured into the latter's shocked ears was the climax to an eventful day for Mrs. Weatherbee.

It may be said to Elsie's credit that she did not spare herself or even attempt to palliate her own offenses. She made a frank confession of her faults and expressed an honest and sincere contrition for them which showed plainly that her²⁸⁶ feet were at last planted upon the solid ground of right. She was no longer the "ignoble Noble."

"After what I've told you, I know you won't allow me to live here at the Hall any more," she said huskily. "I deserve to be punished. I'm going to accept it, too, as bravely as I can. I've been doing wrong all year, but at last I've come to my senses. I know that for once I'm doing right and it comforts me a good deal."

This straightforward avowal would have moved to compassion a far harder-hearted woman than was Mrs. Weatherbee. The matron realized that the dry-eyed, resolute-faced girl seated opposite her had been punished sufficiently by her own conscience.

"I shall *not* ask you to leave Madison Hall, my dear child," she assured very gently. "I wish you to stay on here because I am convinced that would be best for you. In justice to others, however, I must ask you to come to my room this evening, prepared to stand by me in whatever I may require of you."

"I thank you, Mrs. Weatherbee," Elsie said with deep earnestness. "I'll be only too glad to stand by you. I'm going upstairs now to get my wraps and I sha'n't be here to dinner to-night. I know Marian will be looking for me as soon as²⁸⁷ she receives word from you to come to her room. It will be best for me not to see her again until then. Don't you think so?"

"Under the circumstances, I should prefer that you hold no conversation with her beforehand," agreed the matron.

Thus ended the momentous interview. Woman and girl pledged their good faith in a warm hand clasp, and Elsie left the office feeling like one from whose shoulders a heavy burden had suddenly dropped.

"Where is Elsie?" was Marian Seaton's desperate inquiry, when at five minutes to eight she entered her room, following a fruitless search for her cousin.

"Search me," shrugged Maizie. "Very likely Weatherbee never said a word to her. I know she hadn't as late as luncheon to-day, for I asked Elsie and she said 'No.' We're just as well off without her. She has no more diplomacy than a goose. She's been so grouchy all week, that I don't trust her."

"Oh, she's harmless," frowned Marian. "Now listen to me, Maizie. If, when we get into Weatherbee's room, things don't look favorable, we'd better be ready to slide out of the whole business.²⁸⁸ We can withdraw the charge, you know. That will end the whole thing."

Maizie made no reply, save by smiling in her slow, aggravating fashion. She had her own ideas on the subject, but she was too indifferent of results to express them. At least, so she believed.

Her indifference fell away a trifle, however, as she and Marian were presently ushered into Mrs. Weatherbee's room by a most stony-faced matron. Instead of finding there three girls, a disturbing fourth was present. Decidedly disturbing to Marian's peace of mind.

At sight of Elsie Noble, who sat stolidly beside Norma on the davenport, Marian's face darkened. Walking straight over to her cousin, she asked furiously:

"Where were you this evening?"

"That will do, Miss Seaton." Mrs. Weatherbee now took command of the situation. "Kindly sit down and allow me to manage this affair."

With a baleful glance at Elsie, Marian sullenly obeyed the stern voice.

"It is not necessary to go into the subject of why you are here," began the matron, addressing the silent group of girls. "I will proceed at once to business. I shall first read you a portion of a²⁸⁹ letter from Edith Allison, formerly Edith Hammond."

Taking up an open letter from a pile of papers that lay on a small table beside her, she read aloud:

Dear Mrs. Weatherbee:

"What a shame that such an unfortunate misunderstanding should have arisen over that unlucky white lace gown of mine. It was really a ridiculous mistake all around. Jane's

explanation, of course, convinced you of that. It would never have happened if Judy's gown and mine had not been so nearly alike. We all had a good laugh over it, when Jane finally straightened out the tangle.

"I can't understand Miss Seaton's not knowing about Judy's absent-mindedness. It was the joke of the freshman class last year. She figured prominently in the grind book. I am extremely indignant to hear that her honesty has ever been doubted. She is one of the finest, most honorable girls I have ever known. I am very glad you wrote me about this."

"I shall not read the remainder of this letter,²⁹⁰ as it has no further bearing on the case," announced the matron in dignified tones. "Miss Seaton," she turned coldly to Marian, "Miss Noble assures me that she never overheard a conversation such as you attributed to her. I have, therefore, drawn my own conclusions. They are not flattering to you or Miss Gilbert. I now ask you and I demand a truthful answer, which of you two overheard that conversation?"

"I refuse to answer you," snapped Marian, her face flaming.

"I am answered," returned the older woman gravely. "The subject of the gown is now closed. We will take up that of your missing jewelry. I will now inform you that it has been found."

"Found!" Marian sprang to her feet in pretended surprise. "Then the person who stole it must have given it back!" She cast a malicious glance at Judith as she thus exclaimed.

"Miss Seaton!" Never before had Mrs. Weatherbee's voice held such a degree of utter displeasure. "You know, as does also Miss Gilbert, the utter injustice of such remarks. You know, too, where to look for the jewelry. It has never been out of your possession."

"I haven't it. I don't know where it is." Marian's voice rose in shrill contradiction.²⁹¹

"Oh, yes you do, Marian," bluntly differed Elsie Noble. "The ring and pin are in a little white box in the tray of your trunk. I saw them there yesterday. I went into your room while you were both out yesterday and hunted for them. After you showed me how spiteful you could be, I decided you were capable of even that. So I thought I'd find it out for myself, and I did."

"Not a word she says is true," Marian fiercely denied. "She's an eavesdropper and a mischief-maker. She——"

"Mrs. Weatherbee knows all about me," coolly informed Elsie. "She knows, too, that I'm done with all that. You needn't deny that the pin and ring weren't there yesterday. I saw them. You may have put them somewhere else by now, though."

"Will you please not interrupt me?" Marian had decided to make a last desperate attempt to crawl out of the snarl she was in. She fully realized the seriousness of the situation.

Addressing the matron, she said brazenly, "I came here to-night with the intention of withdrawing my charge against Miss Stearns. Miss Gilbert and I had decided that she was innocent. Whoever took the jewelry must have become frightened and put it back without my knowing²⁹² it. I will go at once and look in my trunk, since my cousin insists that it is——"

"You will kindly remain where you are," ordered Mrs. Weatherbee tersely. "Later, I shall insist on seeing both the ring and the pin. You and Miss Gilbert will now apologize to Miss Stearns for the trouble you have caused her. You will also apologize to Miss Allen and Miss Bennett."

"I was mistaken about the gown and the jewelry," Marian admitted with a toss of her head. She was addressing no one in particular. "I have nothing more to say."

"I was also mistaken," drawled Maizie imperturbably. Nevertheless a curious look of dread had crept into her sleepy black eyes. Matters were at their worst, it appeared. Things had been stirred up altogether too much for safety. Elsie had proved anything but harmless.

"Do you accept this apology?" inquired the matron of the three defendants.

"I do, provided Miss Seaton promises strictly to have *nothing more to say* in future against any of us to anybody," stipulated Judith with quiet finality.

"I will accept it under the same conditions," Jane said quietly.²⁹³

"And I," nodded Norma.

"Neither Miss Seaton nor Miss Gilbert will circulate any more injurious reports about anyone," assured Mrs. Weatherbee grimly. "This matter in itself is sufficient to warrant suspension from college.

"I regret that there is still another grave charge against you," she continued, fixing the guilty pair with a relentless gaze. "I have been informed that you, Miss Seaton, are the author of a malicious letter signed 'Jane Allen,' which I received before college opened."

This time it was Jane who received a shock. She had come to the matron's room prepared to take up the cudgels in Judith's behalf. Elsie Noble's unexpected stand on the side of right had been amazing enough. Elsie had certainly been the chief witness for the defense. Was it she who had told Mrs. Weatherbee about the letter?

"I haven't the least idea of what you mean," Marian haughtily retorted.

"That's not true," contradicted the invincible Elsie. "You know perfectly well that you sent that letter to Mrs. Weatherbee. You told me so yourself."

"I did nothing of the kind," persisted Marian.

"Then how did I know about it?" triumphantly²⁹⁴ demanded Elsie. "I mentioned it to Mrs. Weatherbee. *She* never mentioned it to me. If I had known then just how spiteful you could be I'd never have let you write it. You told me before I came to Wellington that Jane Allen was a hateful, deceitful, untruthful girl who had done you a lot of harm. I know now that *she* isn't. I know that *you* are. I'm sorry that you're my cousin and I don't intend to have anything further to do with you."

When Elsie had begun speaking, Mrs. Weatherbee had been on the point of checking her. She refrained, however, because she realized suddenly that Marian deserved this arraignment. She

had manufactured trouble out of whole cloth; now she fully merited her cousin's plain speaking.

"You have said a good deal about injustice, Mrs. Weatherbee. I think it very unfair that I should be accused of something which I don't in the least understand," began Marian, with a fine pretense of injured innocence. "I should like to see the letter you accuse me of writing."

From underneath the pile of papers on the table, the matron drew forth a typed letter. She handed it to Marian without a word.

Marian read it, then laughed disagreeably.

"No wonder Elsie knew of it," she sneered.²⁹⁵ "This is some of her work. She was crazy to get into Madison Hall with us. She knew there would be no vacancies. I had told her that. She listened to what I had said about Miss Allen, every word of it's true, too, by the way, and had someone type this letter. After that she applied for admission. Very clever indeed, Elsie, but you mustn't lay it to me. The signature is certainly not in my handwriting."

It was now Marian's turn to look triumphant.

"The whole trouble with Elsie is that I threatened to expose her for eavesdropping," she continued. "She has made me all this fuss simply to be even. She knows that she is responsible for this letter. The fact that she mentioned it to you, Mrs. Weatherbee, is proof enough, I should say. Certainly you have no proof that I had anything to do with it, beyond what she says. Her word counts for nothing."

A breathless silence followed Marian's bold turning of the tables. Elsie gave a sharp gasp of pure consternation.

"Oh, I didn't do it!" she stammered, casting an appealing glance about her. "I—hope—you—don't—believe——"

"Here is the proof that you didn't," broke in Jane Allen's resolute tones. She had resolved to²⁹⁶ come to the defense of the girl who had so sturdily defended Judith. From her blouse she had drawn Eleanor's letter and the carbon copy of the letter which Mrs. Weatherbee had received.

When the latter had finished examining both, she looked up and said in a dry, hard voice:

"This is the most dishonorable affair I have ever known to happen at Wellington. I shall certainly take it up with Miss Rutledge. There is now no room left for doubt regarding the authorship of this letter. It is undeniably your work, Miss Seaton. It remains yet to be discovered what part Miss Gilbert played in it."

Without further preliminary, the incensed matron read aloud Eleanor's letter.

Marian Seaton turned from red to pale as she listened. Maizie kept her eyes resolutely on the floor. This last bit of evidence was too overwhelming to be disputed. It could not be explained away.

"What have you to say to this?" demanded Mrs. Weatherbee of Marian.

"Nothing," was the muttered reply.

The matron had a great deal to say. For the next ten minutes she lectured the culprits with scathing severity.

"I shall recommend that you be expelled from²⁹⁷ college, Miss Seaton. Miss Gilbert, were you also a party to this affair?"

"Yes," was the tranquil response, "I knew all about it. Can't say I'm very proud of it. Still, it's rather too late now for regrets."

Maizie raised her unfathomable black eyes from their studied scrutiny of the floor. Quite by chance they met Jane's gray ones. Jane had a peculiar impression as of a veil that had been slowly lifted, revealing to her a Maizie Gilbert who had the possibilities of something higher than malicious mischief-making.

Obeying an impulse which suddenly swayed her, she turned to the matron.

"Mrs. Weatherbee," she said, "can't this affair be settled now and among ourselves? After all, no great harm has really come of it. The missing jewelry has been found, Judith has been exonerated, I still have my room, and no one except those present knows what has taken place here to-night. We are willing to forget it if you are. I am speaking for Judith and Norma. I am sure Elsie doesn't want her cousin to be expelled. Can't we blot it out and begin over again?"

"I should like it to be that way," said Judith quietly.

Norma nodded silent concurrence.²⁹⁸

"I'll never forgive Marian, but I'd hate to see her expelled," Elsie said, after a brief hesitation. "I don't think Maizie ought to be, either. It's not half as much her fault as Marian's."

Perhaps this latest turn of the tide amazed Mrs. Weatherbee most of all. For a time she silently scanned the group of girls before her. She had not reckoned that the defense would suddenly swing about and plead for the defeated prosecution.

"I cannot answer you now, Miss Allen," she gravely replied. "I can appreciate, however, your generosity of spirit. I shall ask all of you to leave me now. Later I will inform you of my decision."

Each feeling that there was nothing more to be said, the six girls obediently rose to depart. Marian walked to the door, looking neither to the right nor left. Without waiting for Maizie she made a hurried exit.

Maizie took her time, however. Her hand on the door knob she turned and addressed Jane.

"You're a real Right Guard," she said in her slow, drawling fashion. "Not only on the team, but in everything else. I'm sorry it took me so long to find it out."

CHAPTER XXVII

CONCLUSION

As a result of the events of the previous evening, Marian Seaton and Maizie Gilbert put in a very bad day. It began by a wild fit of weeping on Marian's part, after breakfast and in her room that morning. At breakfast she managed to keep up a semblance of her usual self-assured, arrogant manner, but the moment she reached her room she crumpled.

"Don't be a baby, Marian," was Maizie's rough advice, as she stolidly prepared to go to her first recitation of the day. "You brought this trouble on yourself. You might as well take the consequences without whimpering. You'd better cut your first recitation. Your eyes are a sight."

"I'm not going to *any* of my classes to-day. Go on about your own business and let me alone," was Marian's equally rude retort.³⁰⁰

Maizie merely shrugged at this announcement and went stoically upon her way. She was made of sterner stuff than her unworthy roommate, and with the realization that she had behaved very badly indeed, she had now steeled herself to accept her punishment bravely.

Marian, on the contrary, moped in her room all morning, went to Rutherford Inn for a lonely luncheon and returned to the Hall and her room to weep again and ponder darkly over her unhappy situation. She tried in vain to prepare an argument by which she might clear herself should Mrs. Weatherbee decide to expose her wrong-doing to Miss Rutledge. She could think of nothing that might carry weight. The case against her was too complete to afford the slightest loophole for escape.

As the day dragged on she gave up in despair. She made up her mind that her only hope now lay in appealing to Mrs. Weatherbee for mercy. She resolved to pretend deep remorse and promise a future uprightness of conduct to which she had no intention of living up.

At five o'clock that afternoon, Maizie walked in upon the despondent Marian with: "Mrs. Weatherbee wants to see us in her room. The³⁰¹ maid just told me. I'm glad of it. I'm anxious to have the matter settled."

"If Mrs. Weatherbee tells us that she is going to report us to Miss Rutledge, Maizie, we must beg her not to do it," quavered Marian. "We must promise her anything rather than let her go to Miss Rutledge. That's what I intend to do and so must you."

Maizie regarded Marian with the air of one who was carefully weighing the cowardly counsel. All she said was:

"Come on. We mustn't keep her waiting."

First glance at the matron's face as they were admitted to her room filled both girls with renewed apprehension. She looked more uncompromisingly stern than ever. With a brusque invitation to be seated, she took a chair directly opposite them and began addressing them in cool, measured tones:

"My original intention was to defer a decision of your case for several days, at least," she said. "Thinking the matter over to-day, I came to the conclusion that the sooner this disagreeable affair was settled and off my mind, the better pleased I should be.

"Both of you deserve expulsion from college.³⁰² I am sure that Miss Rutledge would be of the same opinion were I to lay the matter before her. Frankly, I have decided not to do so simply on account of Miss Stearns and Miss Allen. These two young girls have shown themselves great enough of spirit to overlook the injury you have endeavored to do them. This has made a marked impression upon me, so great, in fact, that I have determined not to report this very disagreeable affair to Miss Rutledge. Since it has occurred at the Hall and has no bearing on any one outside the Hall, I feel that I am justified in settling it as I deem wisest for all concerned.

"The fact that you are both young girls, also, has something to do with it. In my opinion it is a very shocking matter for a young woman to be expelled from college. You have been under my charge for almost two years, and I feel in a measure responsible for you. On this account and because Miss Stearns and Miss Allen have interceded for you, I shall not inform Miss Rutledge of your dishonorable conduct.

"For the remainder of the college year I shall allow you to continue under my charge at the Hall. When you leave Madison Hall in June, however, it will be with the understanding that you cannot return to it the following autumn.³⁰³ You must make arrangements to live at another campus house."

Thus far neither girl had been given the least opportunity of speaking. As it happened, neither had the slightest desire to speak. Both were feeling too intensely relieved for words. First to recover from the good news that she and Maizie would escape the punishment they merited, Marian Seaton now said with a faint touch of asperity:

"Why won't you allow us to come back to Madison Hall next year, Mrs. Weatherbee? We prefer it to any other campus house. If we give you our word of honor to let Judith Stearns and her crowd alone, isn't that sufficient?"

"No, Miss Seaton, it is not. I repeat that you must make other arrangements for next year. One thing more and we will conclude this interview. You must both pledge yourselves to good behavior while you are here. If I hear of any attempts on your part to malign a fellow student, either by word or deed, I shall revoke my decision and put your case before Miss Rutledge. Nothing except absolute fair play on your part will be tolerated here. That is all. You are at liberty to go."

Fighting back her anger, Marian arose, and³⁰⁴ with a stiff, "Thank you, Mrs. Weatherbee," walked to the door. She was congratulating herself that she had not been forced to ask favors of that "hard-hearted old tyrant."

Maizie rose, but made no attempt to follow Marian. Instead she raised unfathomable black eyes to the matron and said:

"You are kinder to us than we deserve. I thank you."

Then she turned abruptly and followed Marian from the room.

Back in their own room, she walked over to her bed and sat down on it and eyed Marian reflectively.

"Well, what's the matter with you?" asked Marian crossly. "You make me tired. Why did you say to that old dragon that she'd been kinder to us than we deserved? It wasn't necessary. The idea of her turning us out of Madison Hall. And we can't do anything to stop her, either. She has the whip hand and she knows it. It's a positive outrage and the whole affair is Elsie's fault, the hateful little hypocrite. She'll be sorry. I'll never rest until I pay her back for this."

"It strikes me," drawled Maizie, "that there's been altogether too much of this 'paying back'305 business. You'd best drop it, Marian. You are not a success in that line. As for me, I'm tired of it. I used to think it great fun and exciting, but now I know that it's petty, mean and unworthy. If I could be as true to myself as Jane Allen is, I'd be happy."

"*Jane Allen!*" exclaimed Marian in exasperation. "I *hate* the very sound of her name. I suppose now, since you seem to admire her so much, you'll begin running after her."

"No, not yet," was the tranquil response. "Perhaps never. I don't know. I'm going to stick to you for the present. I've been a party to your schemes and it wouldn't be right to desert you. But from now on, I am going to be fair with these girls. I warn you not to come to me with any plans of yours for getting even with them. I won't listen to them. If you are wise you won't make them. But you won't be wise. I know you too well. Only don't count on me to help you. The old Maizie is dead. I don't know what the new one's going to be like. I'll have to wait and find out."

"You're a big goose," sneered Marian. "I never thought you'd be so silly. And all on account of that priggish Jane Allen. She's——"306

"She's a fine girl," declared Maizie with an ominous flash of her black eyes. "I only wish you and I were more like her."

Meanwhile, in company with Judith Stearns, the objects of Maizie's newly discovered admiration were on their way to Mrs. Weatherbee's room. Immediately Marian and Maizie had departed, the matron had sent for Jane and Judith. For an hour they remained in friendly and very earnest conclave with Mrs. Weatherbee. When at last they left her, it was with the feeling that everything was once more right with their little world.

The instant the door of their own room closed behind the two, they expressed their emotions by clinging to each other in joyful embrace.

"Thank goodness, it's come out all right!" exclaimed Judith. "We'd never have felt quite comfortable if Mrs. Weatherbee had taken it higher. Marian and Maizie would have been expelled from Wellington, that's certain. It is enough punishment for them to have been told

that they couldn't come back to Madison Hall next year and wouldn't be allowed to stay here for the rest of this year only on the promise of strict good behavior."307

"I can't feel sorry about that part of it," declared Jane. "I think we are justified in being glad that Marian Seaton will be in another campus house next year. To tell you the truth I wouldn't mind Maizie's being here. She's a strange girl, Judy. There's a lot to her beneath that lazy, indifferent manner of hers. I'll never forget the way she looked when she turned to me and spoke about my being Right Guard."

"She looked as though she'd been asleep for a long time and then had suddenly waked up," nodded Judith. "And Elsie Noble! I can't get over the way she turned around and stood up for us. Just to think, too, she told Mrs. Weatherbee that it was Norma who had made her feel as though she wanted to be different. And Norma never even knew how much Elsie admired her."

"It shows that a person who does right and thinks right is bound to influence others without ever saying a word," Jane said reflectively.

"Yes, that's so," Judith agreed. "One never knows how much every little thing one says and does is going to impress others. I shall have to be pretty careful how I behave in future. My fatal failing's likely to land me in penitentiary yet, if I don't reform," she added with a giggle.308

"You'll have to learn to distinguish between a rubbish can and a package box, Judy," laughed Jane.

During the confidential talk with Jane and Judith, Mrs. Weatherbee had told Judith all about the missing sweater and its amazing return into her hands.

"It wouldn't have happened if some one hadn't moved that rubbish can up near the package box," asserted Judith. "It was so dark, and raining so hard I didn't stop to look. The lids of the rubbish can lift up on each side from the middle, you know. Of course, if I had my mind on what I was doing it wouldn't have happened, but I didn't."

"Mrs. Weatherbee didn't say so, but I'm sure she must have thought that the sweater Aunt Jennie made me was the missing one," Judith opined. "Honestly, Jane, I believe if it hadn't been for that, she never would have listened to Marian Seaton's accusations against me."