

Chase Josephine

Marjorie Dean's Romance



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CHAPTER I

IN THE STUDY

The sun that pale spring afternoon had appeared only in brief, tantalizing flashes. Of a sudden it burst through the curtain of ashen gray clouds, behind which it had been hiding, into flaming glory. Its warm rays rioted down through the long windows of Brooke Hamilton's study, filling the stately room with radiant light; transfiguring the face of the single occupant.

"Oh." Marjorie Dean raised her brown eyes from the time-stained sheet of paper she had been studying. She greeted the wealth of cheerful sunburst with a fond friendly smile, blinking a little at its almost too-ardent attention. It caught her, embraced her, caressed her lovely, smiling face; splashed her bright brown curls with gold.

"You're an affectionate old dear, even though you *did* skulk behind the clouds all morning." She made a valiant but vain effort to fix her eyes directly upon the king of day. "Can't do it. You are altogether too dazzling for me." She raised a shielding hand to her eyes. "Anyway, I'm glad you are here, full force. I saw you peeping out from behind the gray quite a while ago. I was too busy then to be sociable."

"Please, Missus Biographeress, were you talking to me?" broke in an inquiring, respectful voice. "I wasn't always like this, so I wasn't." Came an eloquent silence.

Marjorie left off trying to stare the sun out of countenance. She glanced about the study in half startled surprise. The door leading into it from the hall was closed. She suddenly laughed, a merry little gurgle. She fixed an expectant gaze on the study's back wall.

"I know where you are," she called out. "No; I wasn't talking to you. I was talking to the sun."

"Then you must be crazy." The voice was now minus respect. Instead it harbored smothered laughter.

"No, Jeremiah Macy; I am *not* crazy. But I am *very very* busy."

"That's almost as bad as being crazy," came the sympathetic opinion of the still unseen conversationalist. "I hope you're not too crazy, excuse me, busy, to deign to grant your humble friend, Jeremiah, an interview. Think of our happy bygone campus days and don't be snippy. Be not only great, Bean; be cordial."

"You win. Never dare call me snippy again. Since you are *right behind* the secret panel you may as well appear in the study." Marjorie gave laughing permission.

"Thank you. Your cordiality sounds genuine. I trust nothing has gone wrong with my hearing. Ahem. What?"

The secret panel in the back wall of the study slid noiselessly to the left; disappeared into its hidden groove. The square opening it left framed Jerry Macy's chubby, pink and white features decorated with a pleasant smile. Her head was poked forward like that of a speculative turkey. Her intensely blue eyes were trained upon Marjorie with an expression of impudent mischief.

"Here I come." She bent her back and bundled through the aperture. "Ah-h!" She straightened with satisfaction. "Always close the door after you, Jeremiah." She leaned forward; pressed the small oblong of wood which formed the hidden mechanism of the sliding panel. Next instant the opening had vanished. The high brown wainscoting again stretched unbroken along the study's rear wall.

“That secret panel is certainly a comfort to my lonely old age, Bean.” Jerry cast a grateful eye in its direction. “If I had come to the door of this sacred haunt you might have chased me away. But you couldn’t resist the panel method. Result – enter Jeremiah.” Jerry waved a complacent hand.

“That’s one version of how I happened to let you in,” teased Marjorie. “Here’s another. I knew you knew something new on the campus that I didn’t know. So I ‘deigned to grant’ you an interview.”

“Hm-m. You’re not as noble as you might be. Never mind. We won’t speak of that,” Jerry hurriedly assured.

“So kind in you,” Marjorie murmured, “or rather, so wise.”

“Precisely my own opinion. I may achieve greatness as soon as you.” Without waiting for an invitation Jerry slid into a high-backed chair exactly opposite that of Marjorie at the long library table.

“The girls will be here at five,” she announced. “They’re going to take us back to Wayland Hall with them. Leila has a new idea for a party. We’re to stay to dinner at the Hall. Miss Susanna’s resigned to it. She was invited, too, but she said she was ‘no buttinski.’ What do you think of that? It shows I’ve accomplished some good since I came to the Arms. I’ve taught Miss Susanna several pithy bits of slang, and Jonas is learning fast.”

“I should say he was. The other day when he took me to town in the car he told a motorist, who tried to run in ahead of us to park, that he was ‘too fresh’ and to ‘cut out his nonsense.” Marjorie gave a reminiscent chuckle.

Jerry smiled cheerful gratification of this news. “To make use of my own pet vocabulary: It’s up to me to show a hot-foot,” she declared. “While I enjoy lingering in this classic spot with you, beautiful Bean, I shall not linger. You heard what I said about five o’clock. Heed my remarks. I must go now.” She made a feeble pretense toward rising. She rolled humorous, entreating eyes at Marjorie.

“Oh, you may stay.” Marjorie became loftily tolerant. “First you may tell me everything you know about Leila’s new stunt. Afterward, I have a splendid job for you.”

“I don’t know a single thing about Leila’s new stunt. She ‘phoned me about half an hour ago and said she and Vera would come for us with the car at five. She said she had a fine idea but that we’d not hear a word about it until after dinner at Wayland Hall tonight. Anything else I might say on the subject I’d have to make up. You would not care to have your faithful Jeremiah resort to fiction, would you?”

“You’re a faithful goose. I’m not so news-hungry as to ask you to desert the truth, Jeremiah,” was the merry assurance. “Leila, the rascal, knows we’re eager for campus news and plans. She loves to create suspense and keep it up till the very last minute. Now I’m going to set you to work. You may sort some letters for me, if you will.”

“Will I? My middle name is willing!” Jerry drew her chair closer to the table with a grand flourish. A pleased light shone in her blue eyes. She was very proud of having already assisted Marjorie on several occasions in the work of arranging the data, prior to the writing of Brooke Hamilton’s biography.

Readers of the four volumes comprising the “Marjorie Dean High School Series,” know Marjorie Dean as a high school girl. They have learned to know her still better through the four volumes which comprise the “Marjorie Dean College Series.”

Returned to Hamilton College as a post graduate her work in connection with the building of a free dormitory for ambitious students in adverse circumstances has already been recorded in the three preceding volumes of the “Marjorie Dean Post Graduate Series,” respectively entitled “Marjorie Dean, College Post Graduate,” “Marjorie Dean, Marvelous Manager” and “Marjorie Dean at Hamilton Arms.”

Because Marjorie had deeply revered the memory of Brooke Hamilton, the founder of Hamilton College, she had come into an intimate friendship with his great-niece, Miss Susanna Hamilton, the only living representative of the Hamilton family. For many years Miss Susanna had been at enmity with the college board. Shortly after the death of her distinguished great uncle, Brooke

Hamilton, she had turned against Hamilton College and refused to furnish the data for a biography of the founder which was to have been written by the president of the college.

Due entirely to Marjorie's hopeful, sunny influence Miss Susanna had eventually emerged from the shell in which she had lived for years. She had decided that, since Marjorie had most revered the maxims and memory of her great kinsman, she was therefore the one best equipped to present him truly to the world in a biography. She had invited Marjorie to be her guest indefinitely at Hamilton Arms and had turned over to the youthful biographer the data for Brooke Hamilton's life story.

Marjorie had said good-bye regretfully to Wayland Hall, her college residence of almost five years and moved to the Arms on the first day of March. With her had gone a second cordially invited guest, Jerry Macy, her roommate and chum of Sanford high school days.

During their first week's stay at the Arms the two girls had been the center of a jolly little social whirl. Miss Susanna had insisted on entertaining their intimate friends at tea, luncheon and dinner. The festive week had ended with a reception to the dormitory girls at which the Travelers, Jerry's and Marjorie's sorority, were the guests of honor.

Then had followed Marjorie's introduction to Brooke Hamilton's study as her literary work shop. There she had been affectionately established by Miss Susanna and supplied with a cabinet full of Brooke Hamilton's personal letters and documents.

How long she might be engaged in the pleasantest task she had ever undertaken Marjorie could not say. As a labor of volition it demanded the best effort of thought and judgment that she could summon. With her usual lack of vanity she was not attaching much importance to herself as Brooke Hamilton's biographer. Her whole heart was set upon doing justice to a great American by a faithful presentation to the world of his integrity and genius.

"Do you realize, Jerry Macy, that we've been here at the Arms almost a month?" Her back to Jerry, Marjorie asked the question as she delved industriously among the packs of neatly tied letters on the top shelf of the cabinet. "Today's the twenty-fifth of March."

"I know it. How much of Brooke Hamilton's story have you written?" Jerry came back curiously.

"Not any of it as I intend it shall finally stand," Marjorie confessed. "I've made plenty of notes, but they only complicate matters at present. There is so much material, all intensely interesting. It would make a twelve volume biography. Miss Susanna wishes it to be a one volume story. My head is full of Hamilton history. It is positively maddening sometimes to try to keep track of all I read, and plan how I shall arrange it. I was never intended for a biographer, Jeremiah."

"You only think you weren't," Jerry encouraged. "After you have got away with Brooke Hamilton's history and covered your beautiful self with glory you may take up biographing as a steady job. I'll permit you to jot down the story of my life. I'll try to persuade my friends to confide their life stories to you for publication. There's old Hal, for instance. He – . Oh, forgive me, Marjorie. I didn't intend to be personal." Jerry's instant apology was regretful. "I wasn't thinking of a thing, but the funny side of Hal's having his biography written."

"Oh, never mind, Jeremiah." Marjorie was more embarrassed by Jerry's apology than she was at mention of Hal's name. Her face flushed hotly. She kept it turned toward the cabinet, rather than let Jerry see her confusion. A pause, then she added generously: "Hal is good enough to do great things in the world. Perhaps *you* may someday write his biography as that of a personage. There! Found at last." She affected deep interest in two bundles of letters which she took from the cabinet.

"No, Marvelous Manager; I can't see myself as Hal's biographer. He'd insist upon seeing every line I biographed before it was hardly off the bat. He wouldn't like a thing I said about him. If I wrote words of glorious praise, he'd say 'stuff' and 'slush.' If I failed to glorify him as a baseball artist, a promoter of yacht races and a four-time winner of the Sanford half-mile dash, he'd say I was stingy." Jerry retrieved her blunder with this humorous flow. "*No, siree*. My genius runs toward jingling, not

biographing. Get that? If Hal ever longs to see the story of his life in print he'll have to get busy and write it himself.”

CHAPTER II

THE WORLD WIDE SECRET

Marjorie was laughing as she resumed her seat at the study table. She was quick to understand the purpose of Jerry's ridiculous and elaborate objections to her really sincere words concerning Hal. Her flash of self-conscious embarrassment had vanished in quick amusement of Jerry's remarks.

"These are letters to Brooke Hamilton from friends," she explained as she shoved the two packs across the table to Jerry.

"He must have been right in line for a popularity prize." Jerry eyed the tightly-bound, thick stacks of letters with comical respect.

"They represent the correspondence of only four or five men. Each letter isn't from a different person, my child," Marjorie said lightly. "Your job is to put the letters of each person in separate piles. You may have that end of the table all to yourself."

"I get you, Bean." Jerry energetically gathered up the two packs of letters and moved with them to the upper end of the table. "Watch my speed, my efficiency, my celostrous usefulness. By the way, my new word is on the gain. I've persuaded Jonas to use it, Miss Susanna thinks well of it and Leila says it is clever enough to be Irish."

"It's a good imitation. Celostrous – sounds like a real word, even though it isn't," laughingly commented Marjorie.

"Sh-h-h. Somebody might hear you." Jerry held up a cautioning finger. She cast a roguish smile toward a vividly handsome face which looked down at her from a portrait on the wall. It was the face of Brooke Hamilton. Life-size and life-like the deep blue eyes seemed almost to twinkle an answer to Jerry's mischievous smile as she continued to gaze at the portrait.

"He's so real." Marjorie turned her head over one shoulder to glance up at the pictured face of a strong man in the noon of manhood. A friendly smile played upon her lips. "I hope you haven't minded my sitting with my back to you this afternoon, Mr. Brooke," she apologized.

"If that was a magic portrait this is the way it would be. Then the enchanted portrait spoke from the wall and said: "Don't mention it, beautiful Bean. Go as far as you like. Even the back of your head is an inspiration to me. I can never be grateful enough to you for writing my biography. How is your friend, Miss Macy? She is a lovely girl and I – ""

"Jeremiah, you disrespecter of great persons!" Marjorie sprang from her chair and made a frolicsome pounce upon Jerry. "Stop it this minute."

The two tussled gently for a brief instant, then fell laughingly apart. The blue eyes of the man in the portrait seemed almost to be watching the merry conflict.

"You see how utterly you disrupt serious work," Marjorie pointed out severely. "I have half a mind to take the job I gave you away from you."

"You can't. I have it cinched." Jerry snatched up the two packs of letters and tucked one under each arm. "I love the job. I'll do better, Bean. I promise on my sacred Jeremiah honor."

"I haven't the heart to take those letters away from you," Marjorie jestingly conceded.

"Glad of it. Kindly don't bother me. I am going to give a violent demonstration of the word 'work.' It's three o'clock now." Jerry peered down at the tiny open-face, necklace watch she wore about her neck on a fine-linked platinum chain.

"I knew it was nearly three. I've learned to tell time by the sun since I came to the Arms and began my work here." There was no timepiece in the study, nor would Marjorie wear a watch when she came into it to work. She did not wish to reckon her daily faithful application to the biography by time. She liked to lose herself in the thought that all time was hers in which to do Brooke Hamilton's memory honor.

Jerry followed her announcement of industry by a business-like attack upon one of the packs of letters. Soon she was deep in carrying out Marjorie's directions. Marjorie resumed a reading of the paper in which she had been engrossed when Jerry had entered. It was a dissertation on democracy in Brooke Hamilton's fine, clear hand.

Silence took up its reign in the study. Marjorie was deep in the dissertation. Oblivious to all else Jerry interestedly sorted letters, reading pertinent snatches of them. Neither saw the sliding panel in the back wall of the study begin to move slowly. Neither saw Miss Susanna's head appear in the opened square.

For fully a minute the old lady watched the industrious pair with brooding, tender eyes. She had thought Marjorie alone in the study and had come to her by the secret entrance in the same spirit of play which had prompted Jerry to use the sliding panel. In one hand were three letters for Marjorie which Jonas had just brought from the mail box at the main gates of the Arms.

As soundlessly as she had appeared in the secret doorway the visitant disappeared. In noiseless obedience to her touch the panel slid once more into place. Miss Susanna trotted down the long hall and on down the wide staircase. Her small face was illumined by a bright smile. She looked as though she had suddenly discovered the world-sought secret of happiness.

She continued on out the massive front door, down the steps and across the lawn to where Jonas was clipping long sprays of furry pussy willows for the two tall Chinese vases at each end of the sitting room mantel.

"You ought to see them, Jonas," she burst out happily. "They're both in the study, lost to the world among Uncle Brooke's papers. I came away without their knowing I saw them. I couldn't bear to disturb his helpers, Jonas. And I once thought no one but the president of Hamilton College was fitted to write his biography!"

"Strange things happen, Miss Susanna." Jonas's silver head wagged itself solemnly over the huge bunch of pussy willows he was holding. "He'd be better pleased, though, to have things as they are now. I believe he'd rather the little girl would write his story."

Jonas invariably spoke of Brooke Hamilton as one alive, but traveling in a far country, rather than of a man who had passed from earth.

"I think so, too, Jonas." The instant, eager response brought a pleased gleam to the old man's eyes. "He founded Hamilton College for the higher education of girls. It seems as though Hamilton has at last shown appreciation of him by raising up a student after his own heart. That student is Marjorie Dean." She paused, apparently taken with her own fancy. She added sturdily: "All the more reason why she should be the one to write his biography."

CHAPTER III

TWO HAUNTING BLUE EYES

“Hurray for Wayland Hall!” Jerry sketched a lively step in front of the dressing table mirror as she gave her reflection a last fleeting glance. “The Arms is a magnificent, palatial roost, but where, oh, where, are our little pals?”

“At Wayland Hall. Sometimes I wonder if you might not be happier there with the girls than here with me.” Marjorie brought a half wistful look to bear upon Jerry. She stood gazing at her chum, a lovely contemplative study in black and white. The straight cut of her white corduroy gown with its wide rolling collar and deep cuffs of black satin was so simple as to be exceptionally effective.

“Want me to shake you until your curls bob straight off your head and your teeth clatter like castanets,” Jerry growled menacingly. She made a threatening advance upon Marjorie, her blue eyes set in a determined stare.

“No, indeed.” Marjorie promptly put a high-backed chair between herself and Jerry. “I’ll protect my coiffure to the last gasp. I took pains to put those curls precisely where I wanted them to be.”

“Then don’t make any more foolish remarks, Bean.” Jerry halted. The set expression of her eyes changed to one of dancing fun. “I’ll set you a good example by not making any more myself that might even sound foolish. I know my own follies as well as I know yours.”

Marjorie leaned her arms on the crest of the tall-backed chair. She smiled rather absently. How like Hal’s eyes Jerry’s were, she was thinking. Recent mention of Hal had brought him to the foreground of her mind. Now she thrust memory of him impatiently aside.

“I’ll be nicer to you than you were to me,” she told Jerry. “You look very celostrous, Jeremiah.” “Celostrous” was a pet word of Jerry’s own coining. “Your dress matches your eyes and the silver beading on it looks like fairy mist. It’s a frock of frocks.” Marjorie continued her admiring survey of Jerry and her becoming finery. As she had remarked the gentian blue of the crepe exactly matched her chum’s eyes.

Again Hal’s handsome, resolute features sprang into memory. This time memory played her an unkind trick. She saw Hal’s eyes as they had appeared in that unforgettable, unguarded moment as he had paused before the portrait of herself at Castle Dean on Christmas Day.

She had then come into a very disturbing realization of how much pain she was causing him through her lack of love for him. She had tried to forget, knowing that she could offer no remedy. Work had largely driven away that disturbing memory since her return to Hamilton. Those two blue, despairing eyes returned to haunt her only upon receipt of a letter from their possessor. There had been only two letters. Marjorie had not answered either very promptly. She sometimes went so far as to feel that she might be better pleased not to hear from Hal. Still she did not wish to deny him friendship.

“You are *too sweet* for words.” Jerry broke in upon her train of reflection. She purposely simpered so as to hide her pleased embarrassment of Marjorie’s compliments.

“Am I?” Marjorie was not even seeing Jerry now. She was seeing Jerry’s brother who refused to retire from her somber reflections. No; she valued Hal’s friendship as dearly as she did Leila’s, Jerry’s or that of any of her chums. Her adoration was for her captain and her general only. Now that she had a clearer understanding of Hal’s disappointment she felt a more personal sorrow toward him. She had glimpsed the desolation of a strong man’s soul. The revelation had awakened in her a truer sympathy for him.

“Come out of it.” Jerry had paused directly in front of the chair on which Marjorie was leaning her elbows. She waved her arms making vigorous passes before the day-dreamer’s face. “What is the matter, Bean? Two minutes ago you were one grand sweet smile. Now your expression is werry sad.

You *have not* lost your last friend, Bean. Take heart. Jeremiah is here. Ah! I have it! Nothing like Bean Jingles to put the chee in chirk. Here we go!

“Celostrous day; rip whoop-ter-ray;
We celebrate with zest:
Your feathers preen, resplendent Bean,
All dressed up in your best.”

“According to your jingle ‘resplendent Bean’ must resemble a vain, strutting peacock.” Marjorie came out of her retrospective reverie with a giggle.

“No, indeed. I never meant to suggest such a thing. Regard yourself as a bird of Paradise, dear Bean,” Jerry corrected.

“I am not so conceited. Besides, I’m not dressed up in my best. This particular set of feathers is far from gorgeous; and not even my second best.”

“Have a heart. Remember the claim of poetic license, and respect it. Your practical, unpoetic criticism is *so* discouraging. Don’t put on the brake. There are more rhythmic inspirations to come. I feel them whirling madly in my gifted brain. I merely stopped for breath. Whir-r-r-r! Buzz-z-z-z! I’m off again.

“Oh, forth we’ll hike, upon the pike,
Beyond the campus wall;
We’ll tread the green, sweet, agile Bean,
Until we hit the Hall.

A charming pair, we’ll mount the stair;
Dear one, then take my arm:
Safe to fifteen, bewitching Bean
I’ll guide you without harm.”

CHAPTER IV

THE SPRINGTIME OF THE HEART

“And you will please trouble yourself to recite that jingle again before it vanishes into nothingness,” commanded a laughing voice from the doorway of the large, old-fashioned sleeping room. Leila Harper stood in the half-opened door, an attractive figure in the newest of English leather motor coats and sports hats.

“Leila Greatheart, what a *dandy* coat and hat!” Marjorie cried. She came forward, hands outstretched to meet Leila.

“Here I come with a fine Irish dash.” Leila made a funny cat-like leap into the room and caught Marjorie’s welcoming hands in hers. “It is a hundred years since I saw you; or so it seems,” she said in her whimsical way. “Now I shall say not a word more until I have taken down Jeremiah’s jingle. I happen to have a pencil, and bewitching Bean herself will furnish her Celtic friend with a bit of paper.”

“At your service. Let me conduct you to the writing desk,” Marjorie took Leila’s arm and escorted her to an open antique mahogany desk. She motioned Leila into the mahogany chair before it. “There you are.” She indicated several sizes of pale gray note paper bearing the monogram of the Arms. “Isn’t this beautiful paper, Leila?” she commented. “Miss Susanna put it here on purpose for us. She never uses it. She prefers white. This was Mr. Brooke Hamilton’s own stationary.”

“You are two lucky children in a fairy castle,” Leila declared. “Now say me the jingle, Jeremiah. Then we will talk about everything and anything.”

“Ahem.” Jerry coughed importantly. “I may have to depend upon bewitching Bean to help me. I never remember my own ravings – inspirations, I should say. Inspiration is – it is – well, it just is.”

“Is it?” Leila inquired with raised brows and an engaging grin.

“It certainly is,” Jerry responded with a difficult solemnity. It broke up in an amused high-keyed chuckle. Merely to glance at Leila, posed in an attitude of expectant and ridiculous affability was to laugh.

After one or two hitches and a little prompting from Marjorie who also had designs on Jerry’s funny effusions, Leila managed to record the three jingles, though she had arrived in time to hear only the last one of them.

“Now we have a beginning.” She exhibited open satisfaction of the penciled copy of Jerry’s lively doggerel. She folded it twice and placed it in a pocket of her leather motor coat. “I shall expect you to take down and save me all future jingles of Jeremiah, Beauty, since you are the inspiration. Never fail to do so. Now you may talk to me about anything. I am so gracious.”

“I have copies of two jingles that Jeremiah spouted last week on an occasion when I brought her four letters from the mail-box. I’ll mail you copies of them tomorrow. Where is Midget? I know she can’t be far away.”

Marjorie glanced inquiringly at Leila.

“She is lost somewhere in space downstairs. She is but a small doll in this great house. And you now promise me two more jingles. Two and two are four, and four is better than two. Soon we shall have a book. It must have a green crushed Levant binding with a portrait of Jeremiah reciting one of her own jingles as a frontispiece and the story of her life printed in gold letters on the front cover.”

“It looks as though I might become as famous as Bean, Harper, Page or any other campus high light if that crushed Levant edition doesn’t flivver,” Jerry said hopefully.

Full of their usual light-hearted raillery the trio of girls presently went downstairs to find not only Vera Mason in the sitting room with Miss Hamilton. Ronny Linde, Muriel Harding, Lucy Warner

and Robin Page as well were there, clustered around Miss Susanna. They greeted Jerry and Marjorie with a concerted shout and rushed them affectionately.

“How did the four of you manage to keep so quiet?” Jerry demanded. “I’m amazed.”

“You needn’t be. You were so noisy yourselves you didn’t hear us. But *we* heard *you*,” Vera assured. “We heard three different varieties of giggle, all going at once. Leila was told to hurry upstairs and bring you down instantly. Instead – ” She cast an accusing glance at Leila.

“Ah, but you were in good company, so I may be forgiven.” Leila made a gallant bow to Miss Susanna.

“You certainly are a fine Irish gentleman with your lordly manner and nice leather overcoat,” complimented Miss Susanna, her brown eyes dancing.

“Am I not?” modestly agreed Leila. “What I need most to make me impressive is a pair of green leather boots and a chimney pot hat.”

“I’ll cast you as the romantic Irish hero of a play in precisely that costume. See if I don’t,” Robin Page laughingly threatened.

“Who will write the play?” Leila quizzed interestedly.

“You of course.” Robin leveled a designating finger at Leila. “That’s a bully idea; to give a romantic Irish play. And for once you may act as well as be stage manager. So glad I happened to see you this afternoon and hear about your green leather boots and chimney pot hat.”

“As you will not require anything of me but to write the play, manage the stage and play the leading part I’ll not change your gladness to sorrow by snubbing you. Still I am wondering where I am to find the boots and the hat. And let me add a condition of my own. I will not be stage manager, actor or playwright unless Miss Susanna will promise to come to the show.” Leila launched this proviso with her most ingratiating smile in Miss Hamilton’s direction.

“I’ll come,” the old lady obligingly promised. Now that she had “surrendered,” as she humorously termed her change of heart toward Hamilton College she was almost as eager as her girls to have some part in campus fun and enterprise. “Will it be a house play?”

“No it will not.” Marjorie and Robin spoke the same words, and almost together. They looked at each other and laughed. The same thought had prompted the same answer.

“Wise Page and Dean. They see money in featuring Leila as the hero in her green boots and chimney pot hat,” was Ronny’s light explanation of the exchange of eye messages.

“Do we? Well, *rather!*” Marjorie said with warmth.

“Uh-huh,” emphasized Robin. “The campus dwellers will mob the gym to see Irish Leila as an Irish hero in an Irish play. We’ll reap a bully harvest of dollars for the dormitory.”

“You and Vera can do that Irish contra dance you danced at Page and Dean’s first show when we were junies.” Muriel grew animated. “In itself it’s worth the price of admission.”

“Oh, *do* have it in the play, Leila,” rose the general plea.

Leila bowed, hand over her heart. “How celebrated Midget and Leila are! That means Midget must play the part of the maid from Lough Gur, of the county Limerick. That is the place in Ireland where the fairies yet hold their invisible revels. And I think Midget might be taken for one of the Lough Gur fairy queens,” she said fancifully. “I am afraid to invite her home with me to Ireland for fear the fairy folk may steal her and shut her up in a mountain.”

“Not if I see them first,” Vera was positive upon this point.

“Midget is small, but valiant.” Leila rolled laughing eyes at her friends. “Ah, but you would not *see* the fairies, Midget, when they slipped you away. You would not see them until you were safe inside the mountain.”

“Then I’ll keep far from Ireland. I’ll be Irish in plays only,” Vera vowed.

“Be sure and save a good part for Luciferous Warneriferous,” was Muriel’s next thoughtful request. “She simply loves to act.”

“Oh, I do not.” Lucy looked alarmed. A gale of laughter went up at her horrified denial. “I can’t act. You know that, Muriel Harding.”

“You should learn to act,” Muriel said with severity. “It is your duty. *I* am giving you good advice. These persons are laughing at you.”

“Who made them laugh? Keep your advice. I’m furious with *you*. Br-r-r-r!” Lucy shook her head savagely, thrust her chin forward and fixed her greenish eyes upon Muriel in a frozen glare which convulsed that delighted wag. She thoroughly enjoyed teasing dignified Lucy to the point of retaliating.

“Oh, splendid! You look every inch a villain!” Muriel simulated profound admiration. “You have true histrionic ability, Luciferous. Let my flattering opinion sink deep, and encourage you.”

“I’ll let it go in one ear and out the other,” was Lucy’s derisive retort. “Don’t *dare* choose me even for a villager in your Irish play, Leila Harper. I’ll be far more useful as a press agent. I’ll get up a handbill about the play, and mimeograph it.”

“Bully idea, Luciferous. Be sure and hit all the high spots. When you have the handbills ready you may stand outside Hamilton Hall and distribute them to the campus dwellers.” Jerry patted Lucy on the shoulder with force.

“Ouch! That’s one of my high spots you just hit.” Lucy dodged out of Jerry’s reach, rubbing her assaulted shoulder. “I’d rather give out handbills any time than act,” she declared with a defiant glance at laughing Muriel.

“Be calm, Luciferous,” soothed Leila with an assuring grin. “I would rather have the handbills than you on the stage as a villain. It is Matchless Muriel who may have the pleasure of playing that part. She will have plenty of lines to learn.” Leila nodded significantly toward Muriel who merely continued to smile.

“Biographers, bill posters, stage managers, actors, et cetera; attention!” Vera called out. She pointed to the tall floor clock, imperturbably ticking off the minutes. “It’s five minutes to six. Too bad I always have to be time crier for this reckless aggregation.” She heaved a dismal sigh. “What *would* you do without me?”

“Be laggards all the rest of our lives, faithful Midget. You are one of the world’s finest institutions.” Leila beamed patronizing appreciation on her diminutive chum.

“I know my own worth. I am surprised to find you have an inkling of it,” Vera retorted with complacent dignity.

“A dignified Midget is so impressive,” murmured Leila. “See how wrapped up in her small self she is. She has forgotten about being town crier. I see I must – .”

“Don’t trouble yourself. I’m still on the job. It’s now five minutes later than it was five minutes ago,” Vera hastily announced.

“Come, good Travelers.” Muriel took the middle of the floor in a stiff recitative attitude. Raising one arm she declaimed in a high stilted voice: “Let us journey with all speed toward shelter ere dark night o’ertakes us.”

“Something like that,” was Ronny’s ultra modern agreement. “With so much talk and so little action it may be midnight ere we see the Hall. I’m not speaking of myself, or of Miss Susanna. We’re not loquacious.”

“*You* only miss being loquacious because you haven’t happened to start an argument with Matchless Muriel. I should hope you *weren’t* speaking of Miss Susanna.” Jerry put on a shocked expression.

“Don’t squabble over me,” Miss Hamilton said in a meek little voice. Followed a burst of ready laughter. She said as it died out: “I’m going to send you home now, children. Come back tomorrow evening to dinner. Bring Kathie and Lillian with you. Robin, please invite Phil and Barbara. Tell Phil to bring her fiddle. I will invite Peter and Anne Graham, and Signor Baretta. He will like to come to our party. He and Peter will be company for Jonas. I shall make Jonas sit at the table with us.”

The Travelers thought Miss Susanna's sisterly regard for Jonas one of her finest characteristics. While he had been a youthful servitor of the Hamiltons during Brooke Hamilton's declining years, he had filled the triple role of brother, servitor and friend to the Lady of the Arms during her long lonely reign in the great house. He was many years older than Miss Susanna, but still a strong, sturdy man.

Jonas looked upon Miss Susanna as an empress, to be revered and obeyed. Miss Hamilton's oft repeated assertion to him: "You are a direct importation of Providence, Jonas, willed me by Uncle Brooke," had made a deep impression on him at first utterance. As a consequence, his one aim in life was that of faithful service. Rarely could she coax him to appear socially at the Arms, even among the few friends who knew his worth.

"You're always thinking up something perfectly, splendidly hospitable!" As she rose from her chair to see the Travelers to the front door Marjorie pounced lovingly upon the Lady of the Arms, wrapping both arms around her.

"A hold up, a hold up!" cried Jerry. "I'm going to join in it." She made a playful attempt to pry Marjorie's arms loose from about the old lady. The others gathered around the pair, mischievous and laughing. They put Miss Susanna through a gentle wooling which left her with ruffled hair, her lace collar awry and her cheeks pink from the loving salutes of fresh young lips.

The Travelers went down the wide stone walk from the house looking back, waving and calling gay good-byes to the small, alert woman at the head of the veranda steps. The gate reached, Marjorie turned to wave her hand again. She mentally contrasted Miss Susanna's happy expression of the present occasion with the sharp, doubting, half resentful gaze the mistress of the Arms had turned upon her when she had first been ushered into the library by Jonas to meet Brooke Hamilton's kinswoman. Where there had once been shadow, somber silence, loneliness, was now light of love, gay friendly voices, sympathy, companionship.

It had been Miss Susanna's wish that Marjorie and Jerry should be at the Arms to greet the return of Spring. Remembering this a rare, rapturous flash of exaltation swept over Marjorie. She was thinking as she waved her hand to the little old lady on the veranda that Spring had not only returned to the Arms. It had miraculously returned to Miss Susanna's heart.

CHAPTER V

FOR THE GOOD OF THE “DORM”

“What’s on your mind, Leila Greatheart? You’ve thrown out tantalizing little scraps of what I’d call non-information ever since we left the Arms. Now stand, and deliver.” Marjorie made her plea for enlightenment as Leila closed the door of her room and favored her chums with one of her bland, wide smiles.

Dinner over at the Hall, the eight Travelers had lingered in Miss Remson’s snug office to talk to the little manager for a pleasant half hour. They had just made port in Leila’s and Vera’s room for what promised to be a most interesting session.

“What’s on my mind, Beauty?” Leila regarded Marjorie owlshly. “More than you might think, should you judge by appearance,” she said with mock seriousness. “I am enchanted with myself because of my own schemes. Sit in a circle around me and listen to the golden runes of Leila, the witch woman. I see gold, gold, gol-l-d.”

She made a sudden forward sweep of the arm toward Jerry who was about to seat herself on Vera’s couch beside Lucy Warner. Jerry raised a mild shriek of surprise, flopped against Lucy who was near the end of the couch. Unprepared for such a jolt, Lucy rolled off the end of the couch to the floor. Jerry clutched wildly at her arm. Her balance upset she followed Lucy to the floor and sat down upon her amid shouts of merriment from the six gleeful spectators to the double mishap.

“Now see where you put me.” Jerry still sat on the floor regarding Leila with an air of deep injury. Lucy had scrambled to her feet and made for a chair. “The very least you can do is help me up. Give me your hands, and don’t dare let go.” Jerry held up her hands to her still mirthful hostess.

Leila essayed the task of raising Jerry to her feet. Laughter robbed her of power to lift Jerry. It also robbed Jerry of power to raise herself from the floor. After three separate attempts at co-operation, all mirthfully unsuccessful, Jerry was hoisted to her feet by the combined efforts of Marjorie, Ronny and Muriel.

“You are an awful hostess.” Jerry opened her mouth widely on “awful” and ducked her head violently forward at Leila. “First you scare your guests by making wild sweeping swoops at them. Then you laugh at them when they come to grief. This time I’ll choose the middle of the couch, and be safe.” Very cautiously she re-seated herself on the couch, squarely in the center.

“We’ll sit one on each side of you, Jeremiah, so that you can’t fall off the couch again.” Ronny plumped down on the couch on one side of Jerry. Muriel obligingly seated herself on the other side.

“I was shoved off that couch and sat upon by Jeremiah, yet no one appears to remember it,” Lucy mournfully complained.

“I remember it. You tipped me off your lap,” accused Jerry.

“But you tipped me off the couch first,” reminded Lucy. “I forgive you, but never again will I sit on a couch beside you.”

“I always try to look upon everything that happens as for the best,” Jerry returned with angelic sweetness.

“There were no bones broken, but there was plenty of fuss made.” Leila thus summed up the accident. “Now pay attention to me, and let us have no more nonsense.” Whereupon she burst out laughing, thus starting her companions’ merriment afresh.

Quiet finally restored she began again. This time with the fine earnestness which she could readily summon when occasion demanded.

“Travelers, dear,” she addressed the now attentive seven, “we have left only six days of March, then April, May and the early part of June in which to earn money for the dormitory. We must give as many shows as we can manage between now and Commencement. We must give the Irish play

the first week in May. I shall write it in one week. It will be nothing startling, but it will be a play, I grant you that. I shall have a sorry siege to make the cast learn their lines in two weeks. It must be done. We must rehearse four nights in a week. Vera will make cunning Irish token cards and we shall sell them for a silver quarter apiece.”

“First I had heard of my new job, but I accept. May I inquire into the mystery of an Irish token card?” Vera asked with an assumption of profound respect.

“You will draw many little pictures of the cast, Midget, on many little cards,” was Leila’s somewhat indefinite answer. “You will learn more about my Celtic schemes when I am not so busy.”

“Oh, very well. See that *you* don’t interrupt any of *my* busy hours. If you see me put up a busy sign on my side of the room, respect it,” warned Vera.

“See that *you* do not again interrupt *me*,” flung back Leila, scowling portentously at her diminutive roommate.

Everyone else interrupted, however, and Leila had to come to a laughing stop in her harangue until she had enlightened the party regarding “Irish token cards.”

Like her artist father, Vera was gifted with the ability to draw. Leila’s idea of having small, head-and-shoulder, pen-and-ink sketches of the various characters in the play drawn on oblong cards, three by one and a half inches, was decidedly interesting from an artistic as well as a financial standpoint. Below the sketch would appear the stage name of the character, the true name and the date of the play.

“Vera won’t be able to do many cards, Leila. She won’t have time. She can’t make the rough sketches until we have our costumes and know ourselves how we are going to look,” was Ronny’s doubtful view of the feature.

“Oh, I can draw the different characters as they ought to look. Leila can show me the style of costume to be followed by the actors. I’ll draw each character once, leaving out the features till I know who will be who. Then I can fill in the blanks with the familiar eyes, noses, mouths and ears of the illustrious cast. After that it will only mean hours and hours of tedious copying my originals.” Vera made a triumphant outspreading gesture of the arms indicative of her mastery of the situation.

“How we do miss Ethel Laird,” sighed Ronny. “She was so clever. Do you remember how gorgeous those posters for the first show were that she painted. What became of them, Marvelous Manager?” She looked quickly toward Marjorie as though seized with a sudden idea.

“They’re with the other properties in the Page and Dean section of the garret,” Marjorie replied. “At least they were still there the last time I was up garret. That was after the Valentine masquerade. What is it, Ronny? I see you have something on your mind.”

“Let’s have an auction,” eagerly proposed Ronny.

“Not now; not until the first of June. We could clear up all the stuff we have used for advertising the shows, and other treasures of our own that have campus history, and auction them off. Let Jerry be the auctioneer. Oh, lovely! What?”

“Oh, lovely,” mimicked Jerry. “There is nothing very lovely about hard labor.”

“No use in pretending, Jeremiah. You know you’d revel in being an auctioneer.” Ronny shook her finger at Jerry.

“I’ve heard of worse stunts,” Jerry admitted with a grin.

“I have nearly as good an opinion of you, Ronny, as I have of myself,” Leila graciously conceded. “You and Jeremiah have my permission to manage the auction. You may collect all the wares for it, and do all the work. Between times, when you have little to do, you may dance in my shows.”

“*Your* shows?” Ronny’s eyebrows ascended to a politely satiric height.

“*My* shows,” repeated Leila with great firmness. “Have you not yet learned that Page and Dean amount to little without me. It is Harper and Harper who should have all the credit.”

“Right-o!” exclaimed Marjorie and Robin exactly together.

“Now why did you agree with me?” Leila demanded, her tone full of innocent Celtic surprise. “That was merely one of my Celtic jests.”

“Many a true word, you know,” cited Robin.

“We’ll make you senior partner in the firm, Leila Greatheart,” was Marjorie’s generous proposal. “Harper, Page and Dean has a fine, dignified sound.”

“Away with you!” Leila waved off the suggestion. “I am deaf to such a sound. Say no more, or I shall fly into one of my fierce frenzies. Now I am here not to rage, but to keep Midget in order, and conduct this meeting.”

“*In order?*” Vera interrogated in an awful voice. “Kindly state *when* I have been out of order since this go-as-you-please session began.”

“Not at all, Midget; not at all – as yet,” Leila laid significant stress on “as yet.” “So we may hope for the best and change the subject,” she hastily added.

“It’s high time it was changed,” Vera said loftily.

Leila turned comical eyes upon the company. Then she continued: “Now we have the Irish play and the auction on the carpet. Soon we shall be giving Kathie’s new play: ‘The Knight of the Northern Sun.’ Gentleman Gus will be featured in that. Kathie had finished the writing of it. Luciferous has already typed the parts. And I have picked a fine heroine. The Ice Queen is to play the part of Nageda, the Norse princess.”

CHAPTER VI

A TANTALIZING GLIMPSE

“Where did you collect the nerve to ask that ask?” Jerry admiringly demanded of Leila, following the shout of surprise from the others.

“I have nerve for any occasion,” was the modest reply.

“I believe you. What did the Ice Queen say to you, or was she too icily iced for words? I get you that she must have made a ‘yes’ sign, in spite of her freezing frozenness.”

“She said ‘yes.’ I went straight to the point with plenty of coolness in my own sweet Irish voice,” Leila answered with a touch of grimness. “She loves to be a center of attraction. I have a good idea of her beauty and cleverness. She knows that. We made the bargain like two veterans. She does not wish for my friendship. I can live without hers. We have in Ireland our own proverb of fair exchange. It is: ‘To exchange needs with your neighbor is nothing lost to him or you.’”

“In this instance it is everything gained,” Marjorie blithely asserted. “You are the same old wonder, Leila Greatheart. I must make a list of these coming attractions now.” She opened the small blue leather notebook which she was seldom without now wherever she happened to go on the campus. She wrote busily for a little, oblivious of the murmur of discussion going on around her.

“Three sure-fire attractions,” she exulted, as she presently glanced up from her notebook.

“I’ve something to report, too. I’ve at last persuaded Miss Oliver to let us feature her in a musicale in Greek Hall. It’s to come off a week from Friday evening.” Robin’s announcement was touched with pride.

It was the signal for another little burst of surprise. While Candace Oliver, the freshman musical genius who one of the Craig Hall girls had discovered, had on several occasions reluctantly played for Robin and a few other admiring students, she had steadily refused to appear on the college stage as a pianiste.

“Another obstacle surmounted. How did you do it? I thought I was too persuasive to be resisted, but she turned me down,” commented Muriel.

“Oh, I asked her to let us feature her, every time I met her. I used all the nice pleasant arguments I could think of but without effect. The other day I happened to meet her at Baretti’s. I introduced Signor Baretti to her. I was sitting at the same table with her and Baretti came up, as always, to speak to me. He only stayed a minute, but in that minute I remarked to him that Miss Oliver was a wonderful pianiste. He looked truly impressed and said in his odd way: ‘I like hear you play som’time. When you play in Miss Page, Miss Dean’s show, for help the dormitory. Miss Page, you come tell me when Miss Ol-ee-var play.’ I smiled at Miss Oliver. She had turned red as a poppy. Then I said, sweet as cream: ‘I surely *will* let you know, Signor Baretti.’”

“What did she say?” Ronny voiced the question that stood in six pairs of bright eyes.

“Oh, he trotted off just then, and I didn’t give her time to say a word. I began telling her about him and how sincere his interest in the dormitory was, and how he had fought for Page and Dean, and how altogether great-spirited he was. She listened without saying much. She was half through luncheon when I sat down at her table. She left the restaurant as soon as she had finished her dessert. Next day I received a four line note from her. She said in it that she had changed her mind about not being featured at a musicale. ‘I wish to do my part to help the dorm’ girls,’ was the line that made Robin execute a hornpipe.”

“The infallible Guiseppe again to the rescue,” Vera said lightly, yet with a certain pleased intonation which expressed the appreciation underlying it.

“Attraction number four.” Amid the gratified murmur which followed Robin’s recital, Marjorie set down the musicale in her book. “What is Miss Oliver’s program, Robin? Of course you’ve seen her since you received her note.” Marjorie knew that Robin was sure of her prize.

“Three Chopin numbers and Beethoven’s ‘Sonata Appassionata.’ Phil is going to play one of Brahms’s Hungarian dances and Jensen’s ‘Romance.’ Verna Burkett is going to sing. She has a glorious contralto voice, and Reba Hoffman, that little blonde German dorm will give a ‘cello number. I am anxious to exploit dorm talent, too. It’s going to be a hummer of a program. I think we ought to charge two dollars apiece for the tickets, the same as we charge for our revues. What do you think about it, Marjorie?” Robin earnestly consulted her partner. “You know we only charged a dollar and a half for tickets for the last musicale.”

“I don’t believe two dollars a seat will be considered robbery. We always reserve free seats for the dormitory girls at all the shows. The other Hamiltonites can afford to pay two dollars apiece for the kind of entertainment we shall offer. They’d have to pay from two to three dollars apiece for good seats at a special benefit musicale wherever they might go,” was Marjorie’s candid reply. “I don’t wish to seem priggish, but they could spend their allowance checks for no better cause.”

“True as truth, good partner,” Robin agreed, with a saucy little nod. “Oh, dear,” she changed to plaintive in a twinkling. “I wish we might use the Hamilton Concert Hall for the musicale. Think of the money we’d take in. Greek Hall is hardly more than half as large.”

“Why can’t you use it?” asked Lucy Warner with crisp suddenness.

“No one has the nerve to ask Prexy for the use of it, my child.” Vera bent a benign glance upon Lucy which contrasted oddly with her doll-like daintiness.

“Why not?” Lucy persisted.

“Prexy has yet to come to one of our shows, Luciferous,” Marjorie said quietly. “We’ve always sent him tickets, and Mrs. Prexy and her friends have come to them. But he never has. He approves of the dormitory enterprise. He has been friendly with me on all occasions, but – ” Marjorie smiled – “he never appears at our revues.”

“It’s the one thorn on Page and Dean’s rosebush,” laughed Robin. “Besides, Luciferous, we’ve never felt like trying to break into the regular college lecture and concert programs with our shows. It’s more a matter of deference than anything else. If he had ever offered the hall to us, we’d have accepted the offer instanter. But he never has.”

“I believe it never occurred to him,” Lucy said bluntly. “I wish I’d known long ago. I’ll ask him tomorrow for the use of it.”

“Lu-ciferous!” Muriel beamed on Lucy with a radiance too joyous to be genuine. “You deserve a citation. That is you will deserve one if you put the Prexy problem across. Do so, and I will cite your good conduct tomorrow evening in this very room at precisely seven o’clock. You will receive a tin star, three whacks on the shoulder and a ticket to the Hamilton Movie Palace. Popcorn and pink lemonade will be served to all.” Muriel effulgently included the rest of the party in the generous invitation.

The next five minutes were spent in jubilantly rushing Lucy. She received approving pats on the shoulders, pats on the back and pats on the head. Each Traveler tried to outdo the other in contributing funnily approving remarks. Muriel smilingly proposed raising Lucy to Jerry’s and her shoulders and parading about the room with her. Jerry and Lucy both had strong objections to the honor walk.

“I wouldn’t trust either of you to carry me two feet,” Lucy declared mirthfully. “Now never mind rushing me further. Leila beguiled us here with the promise of hearing something extraordinary. I have yet to hear it.”

“So I did.” Leila surveyed the Travelers, whose attention had quickly returned to her, her bright blue eyes asparkle. “Now this is what I have to say.”

As she laid her plan before her chums, a constant chorus of gurgles, giggles and chuckles accompanied her words. The instant she paused Jerry raised a not too loud cheer of approbation which the others echoed.

“I am indebted to you, Matchless Muriel, for suggesting the proper kind of refreshments. You may believe that popcorn and pink lemonade will be served at our party along with gum drops and peppermint sticks. I had not yet thought of the eats until you spoke. Now I shall get up a fine spread.” Leila’s tone conveyed her deep satisfaction.

“It will be oceans of fun.” Muriel had already begun to laugh as she thought of what her part in the event should be.

“The gentlemen of the campus may have to hunt diligently for suitable wardrobe. I shall see about mine at once.” Vera giggled softly.

Her naive remark was the signal for a fresh explosion of mirth. In a room further along the hall a girl moodily rested her pen to listen to the breath of laughter wafted faintly to her through walls and closed doors. Doris Monroe tried to frown at the distant sounds of harmonious comradeship. She found that she was not angry. She was despondent because she was lonely. She was beginning to glimpse a side of college life, wholly desirable, but, unfortunately for her, beyond her reach.

CHAPTER VII

THE DARK TOWER

Doris Monroe had seen Marjorie and Jerry in the dining room of Wayland Hall that evening. She knew the Travelers were holding a social session in Leila's and Vera's room and somberly envied them their fun. Things had been distressingly dull for her since her return from the holiday vacation spent with Leslie Cairns in New York.

She had thoroughly enjoyed herself in New York after Mrs. Gaylord, Leslie's chaperon, had appeared at the Essenden, the apartment hotel in which Leslie had engaged the Dresden suite of rooms. Leslie, too, had been more agreeable during that short, blissful two weeks of fine dressing, expensive dinners, luncheons and theatres than Doris had known her to be either before or since the vacation.

The few times she had been in Leslie's company after their return to Hamilton, Leslie had been preoccupied, irritable and altogether unpleasant. She had been so patently uncongenial that Doris had preferred to keep away from her on the plea of study. This plea was at least sound. Doris had had her hands full for a time in trying to stave off being conditioned in mathematics.

She had known nothing of Leslie's downfall as a business woman. It was at least three weeks after Leslie had reluctantly obeyed her father's mandate and left Hamilton for New York before she had written Doris a letter from an apartment on Central Park West which Mrs. Gaylord had secured for the two as a residence.

In the letter Leslie had stated that she would return to Hamilton for a few days early in April. She had not, however, explained her sudden departure, nor had she mentioned the disruption of her garage enterprise. Doris had answered the letter, feeling secretly relieved that Leslie was not in Hamilton. She had a shrewd idea that Leslie's father might be responsible for Leslie's return to New York. She had heard enough of the conversation between Leslie and her chaperon on the occasion, when Mrs. Gaylord had arrived unexpectedly at the Essenden, to guess that Leslie and her father were not on very congenial terms.

Leslie had left Doris the Dazzler, the white car she was so fond of driving. She had said nothing in her letter about it, nor had she mentioned the sum of money which she had placed to Doris's account in a Hamilton bank. Doris had not yet been able to return the seventy-five dollars she had drawn of the five hundred Leslie had placed in bank to her credit. She was resolved on doing so before the close of college in June. Selfishly indifferent and indifferently selfish though she was she had a certain standard of honor. She had not ceased to regret having allowed Leslie to bank the five hundred dollars to her account.

Doris was not so anxious to return the Dazzler to Leslie. True she had no expectation of keeping it indefinitely. She hoped, however, that Leslie would allow her to use it until the close of college. She was able to pay for its up-keep from her allowance. Though she cared little for the freshies and sophs who made much of her, she frequently took one or more of them with her on her drives in the white car. Secretly she preferred her own company to theirs. She regarded them as more or less "silly" and continued to accept their adoration with bored sweetness.

Unwillingly she had discovered in herself a growing interest for the Travelers. Her keen perception could not fail to show her their undeniable claim to originality and cleverness. She admired, even liked Muriel, to whom she had, however, not spoken since before Christmas. Before their misunderstanding she had been on the verge of real fondness for Muriel. She now missed their former pleasant relation as roommates. At times she was tempted to lay aside her grievance and try to restore the old friendly footing.

Leila had approached Doris at the psychological moment. Doris was weary of being rushed by those for whom she entertained hardly more than casual interest. She had not the diversion of Leslie Cairns' companionship. She had persistently turned "dig" to the extent of putting herself beyond the immediate fear of a condition in mathematics. She was therefore ready to entertain with secret pleasure Leila's polite request for her appearance in "The Knight of the Northern Sun." She was actually eager to take the part of Nageda, the Norseland princess.

Outwardly she showed herself as coolly business-like as Leila during their brief interview. After she and Leila had separated she experienced a half sad regret because she appeared to be so thoroughly "out of it" with clever Miss Harper. She was sure Miss Harper cared nothing about her personally. She merely regarded her as a student; one best suited to play the part of Nageda.

"The Knight of the Northern Sun" was to be given on the evening of April thirtieth. It would be presented at least three weeks in advance of Leila's Irish play. The Candace Oliver musicale was to take place on the evening of April fourth. On the night of April eleventh Leila's "great idea" would furnish the entire college body of students with an evening's fun.

Such was the program the Travelers drew up. After the meeting came the usual spread, eaten in high spirits. Marjorie, Robin and Jerry stole downstairs several minutes after inexorable old ten-thirty had shrilled its loud emphatic nightly command for retiring. Very quietly the trio let themselves out the front door into the moonlight.

Marjorie and Jerry gallantly offered themselves as Robin's escorts across the moonlit campus to Silverton Hall. They took hold of her arms and paraded her between them, expatiating to her as they rushed her along at a hiking stride, on the value of their company. In front of Silverton Hall they lingered briefly for a last animated exchange of laughing pleasantries, then Jerry and Marjorie turned their steps toward the entrance at the east end of the campus which gave on the pike toward Hamilton Estates.

"It seems strange to be walking out of the campus gates at this time of night." Marjorie made this light observation as the two Travelers stepped from the college premises and out upon Hamilton Pike.

"We're enchanted, you know. We broke the spell for a little while this evening. There's the enchanted trail back to the good fairy's castle." Jerry pointed to the pike, shining and white under the moon's clear, burning lamp. "That's the way I've felt most of the time since we settled ourselves at the Arms."

"So have I. It's not only Hamilton Arms that seems enchanted. Hamilton Estates is like a fairy-tale kingdom," Marjorie added to Jerry's fancy.

"The Kingdom of Castles," Jerry instantly supplied. "And in the heart of the kingdom dwelt Goldendede, a fairy empress."

As they continued on their way to the Arms the pair amused themselves with the weaving of a fairy tale about Miss Susanna, Hamilton Estates and themselves as willing victims of enchantment.

"Bing! that nearly shattered the enchantment," grumbled Jerry as an automobile whisked past them from the direction in which they had come. "There's nothing fairy-like about a buzz-buggy. That particular one butted into our fairy tale and reu-ined it."

"Never mind. You've been truly inspired since we left the campus tonight, Jeremiah," Marjorie consoled. "Goldendede is a beautiful name for Miss Susanna. The Kingdom of Castles exactly suits Hamilton Estates. You couldn't have named this aloof collection of turreted gabled houses better."

"That's higher commendation than you ever gave the Bean Jingles. It makes up for your sad lack of appreciation of those gems. I am *so* mollified, Bean!" Jerry fairly purred gratification.

"I'd appreciate your art of jingling more, Jeremiah, if it were addressed to someone else. Leila or Ronny or Vera Jingles would be less personal."

“You have a grudge against your charming self, Bean,” was Jerry’s retort. “Forget it. Brooke Hamilton is to be celebrated in biography, why shouldn’t Marjorie Dean be celebrated in verse. The first is not greater than the last in her own little way. The – ”

“Say another word like that and I’ll run off and leave you in the enchanted dark.” Marjorie placed a light hand over Jerry’s lips.

Jerry gently removed the restraining fingers and gave them a friendly squeeze. She kept Marjorie’s hand in hers and the two walked on, arms swinging. “You’re a resplendent goose,” she said, “but you win. At least you do until the next time.”

“Jerry, did you notice Miss Susanna’s face today as she stood on the veranda waving to us?” Marjorie changed the subject with abruptness. “It was transfigured!”

“I noticed. I thought then that there could not be anything quite so wonderful as the return of happiness to a person who had been shut away from happiness as long as she had.” Jerry turned suddenly serious. “And you began it, Marvelous Manager. You were the leaven – ”

Marjorie dropped Jerry’s hand and flashed away from her along the pike, a slim, flitting, shadowy figure. She was laughing softly to herself as she ran on for a few yards.

“I told you I’d run away from you.” she reminded, as Jerry came speeding up to her. “I didn’t propose to stay after hearing myself compared to a yeast cake.”

The two had paused, breathless and laughing at one side of the pike. Their run had brought them just beyond the brightly lighted gate posts of Lenox Heath, a rambling, many gabled English manor house. Its powerful gate lights illuminated the pike for several hundred feet. Farther ahead of them it was dark and shadowy, in spite of the full moon’s rays.

A few more steps would bring them to the part of the highway which skirted the Carden estate, forming its southern boundary. Formerly the pike at this point had extended between irregular embankments of stony earth which rose to a low height above the pike’s smooth bed. It was at this particular part of the pike that Miss Susanna had narrowly escaped being run over by Lillian Walbert’s car on a February afternoon of the previous year.

During the summer which followed the date of Miss Susanna’s near accident, the right side of the pike which marked the northern boundary of the Clements estate had been leveled with the road bed by order of the Clements themselves. The low lumpy irregular ridge on the Carden side of the pike remained, flaunting itself in the face of improvement, a proof of Carden indifference and obstinacy. Because of it the Carden house and grounds appeared even more neglected and unkempt.

“It’s good and dark here in spite of the moon.” Jerry glanced up at the great arching limbs of the trees on the Carden side of the pike. A row of giant elms grew just inside the thick evergreen hedge which enclosed the Carden premises and gave the estate its name. Though still bare of leaves, the thick interlacing branches of the elms served as a screen against the moon’s pale radiance.

“What a gloomy old dump the Carden estate is!” was Jerry’s disapproving exclamation. “It looks like a ghost ranch.”

“It’s the Dark Tower in the Kingdom of Castles.” This time Marjorie did the naming. “Two Travelers to the Dark Tower came,” she laughingly misquoted.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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