

BAIRD JEAN KATHERINE

HESTER'S COUNTERPART:
A STORY OF BOARDING
SCHOOL LIFE

Jean Baird

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Story of Boarding School Life**

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CHAPTER I

Debby Alden, to use her own adjective in regard to herself, was not "slack." To this her friends added another term. Debby was "set." There could be no doubt of that.

When Hester was but twelve years old, Debby had decided that the girl should have at least one year at the best boarding-school. Four years had passed, during which time, Debby's purpose had remained firm, although not yet ripe for perfecting.

After the experience with Mary Bowerman's taunts and Abner Stout's guile, Debby decided that the time had come for Hester to have a change of environment. Miss Richards's advice was again sought. But that old friend no longer held the full power in her hands. Debby had grown alive and alert. She knew the standing of the schools throughout the State, and in what particular line of study or discipline each one excelled.

For months, she studied catalogues and estimated expenses. She had never made a study of psychology; but she understood that Hester had reached the most impressionable age of her life. Each thought and word would leave its marks upon her. Debby, who believed firmly that tendencies are inherited, had always with her the fear that Hester would show the tendencies of an alien race. Her one consolation was that much may be overcome by training, and too, perhaps, there was in Hester's veins only a drop of darker blood.

No one understood the position in which Debby Alden was placed. She always held herself responsible for the death of Hester's mother. Duty had compelled her to take care of the child, until love had come to her as a reward for the fulfillment of duty.

There was no one to whom she could speak concerning Hester and her fears in regard to her. One thing she had done and would do; she would keep the child far removed from any influence which would tend to the strengthening of those traits which are supposed rightfully to belong to the race of slaves.

Debby consulted principals and teachers and read and re-read catalogues. At length, she decided upon Dickinson Seminary as the school which came nearest to fulfilling her desires for Hester.

Hester had always been sweet and submissive to Debby Alden. The girl had more than love for the woman who was mother and father both to her. Mingled with Hester's love for Debby was an inexpressible gratitude. Hester realized how much Debby had done and was doing for her. But it was not the dainty dresses and good home that touched her most. Debby Alden had given the waif her mother's name, and Hester never wrote in her big angular hand, Hester Palmer Alden, without feeling a glow of pride. She had a name of which to be proud, a name which Debby Alden had always held dear.

"It was the very kindest thing Aunt Debby could do," was a thought which came often to Hester. "She must have loved me even from the first, or she would have never given me her own name. She's so proud of being an Alden. Their name has never had a bit of shame or disgrace touch it." Then she added an afterthought, "and it never will through me."

One day she brought up the subject of the Alden name while in conversation with her aunt. Hester expressed herself warmly on the subject and the elder woman listened with a lightening heart. The pride of the Alden name and family which Hester showed, pleased her. To Debby came the thought that only those who had such birthrights could comprehend and appreciate the honor of

possessing them. For a moment, she believed that she might have been mistaken in regard to Hester's parentage; but just for a moment. She could not close her eyes to facts. She, herself, had seen the purple tinge about the finger nails of the woman and had observed the lips and eyes which were peculiar to another race.

"It was beautiful of you, Aunt Debby, to give me your name, and I'll never, never bring shame to it."

"Let us talk no more of the subject," was the curt rejoinder. "We have much to do before you are ready to go to Dickinson, and we must not spend our time in telling what is to be done or not to be done a dozen years from now."

Hester was drying the dishes. At the mention of going to school, she stopped. Regardless of consequences, she raised her tea-towel in one hand like a banner, and Aunt Debby's blue cream jug, a relic of the Alden family, high in the other.

"Dickinson Seminary!" she exclaimed in a voice pitched high with nervousness. "I'll tell you right this minute, Aunt Debby, I will not go."

Had the ceiling fallen down upon her, Debby Alden could not have been more surprised. Hester, the obedient, now in the guise of an insurgent.

"*Will* not, Hester Palmer Alden, is not the word to use to me. I am the one to decide what is best for you to do or not to do, and I've decided upon your going to Dickinson."

The voice of the speaker was strong with the Alden firmness and decision. Perhaps, she forced herself to unusual firmness lest her great love for the girl should make her weak in discipline. She expected that Hester, having once made so strong an affirmation, would cling to it and perhaps be inclined to disputation. On the contrary, Hester began to sob.

Debby turned to look at the girl, down whose cheeks the tears were streaming. Then she said with a show of gentleness: "It's only natural that you feel bad about leaving home. Everyone does that. I really should not feel pleased if you did not feel bad. You can not give up to that feeling. I do not mean to permit you to do so. School is the best place for you, and you must go. You'll enjoy it after a while."

"I was not thinking about myself, Aunt Debby. I was thinking of you. Do you think that I can ever enjoy being away and having a good time while you are here alone?"

"I was used to being alone before you –"

"But you are not used to it now. I'll think of you sitting here alone in the evening. Every time you leave the house you'll be alone and you'll come into a lonely house when you come back. I will not go and leave you here, Aunt Debby, and you cannot make me."

"Hester Alden –" Debby Alden meant to be firm. It was scandalous to have a child so express herself to her elder, and that elder as a mother to her. Debby Alden would not be weak. She would be firm, and not so much as allow Hester to express an opinion.

"Hester Alden," she began, but could say no more because of a queer little catch in her voice. She turned back to her dish-pan and fell with great vigor to her dishwashing. After a few moments, she felt that she could control herself, and turning to Hester, said, "Now, Hester Alden, we'll have done with this nonsense right here. I've been alone and stood it fairly well and I can stand it again. What does it matter if I am alone? I'm no longer a young girl who demands company. I'm just a plain old –"

"Why, Aunt Debby – you are not. Doesn't everyone say you're beautiful, and you're not old – and you're never going to get old." Hester turned and brought her foot down with some vigor, as though she would frighten old age and gray hair and loneliness from the house.

"Why, Aunt Debby, everyone says you're beautiful. The girls at school –"

Debby's cheeks flushed. There was something very sweet in the assertion, although she did not believe it even for a moment. But in all her forty years, no one had ever used that word in speaking of Debby. Although she felt that even now love, and not facts, was making use of it, she was touched. She was a woman after all, and it was sweet to find herself beautiful in someone's eyes.

But discipline must be maintained. She turned toward Hester. The girl threw her arms about Debby Alden's neck and sobbed, and Debby held up her kitchen apron before her eyes and wept silently.

"There, Hester, there!" she said at last. "We're both very silly, very silly. You must go to school and that's an end to it."

"No, Aunt Debby. I'll never go and leave you here alone. If I go, you must go with me."

"Go with you! That is the veriest nonsense, Hester. Debby Alden in a seminary. I'm not in my second childhood yet."

"But you could live in town. Mame Thomas has a cousin who lives in a little flat. She's a widow and keeps her girls in school. Couldn't you go and live there. We could see each other – ."

"The dish-water is getting cold. Really, Hester, you and I are getting slack. I believe that is the first time in my life that I ever stood talking and let my dish-water get cold. It isn't a good way of doing. Mother never allowed us to be slack about such things. I was not brought up to talk first and work afterward. Think of me, a woman my age, doing such a thing!"

Taking up the dish-pan, she left the kitchen to empty the water. Hester dried her tears. Her heart grew light. She understood Aunt Debby well and she knew that the talk about letting the work stand was only a chastisement Debby was giving herself, when she felt herself yielding.

The subject was again discussed during the evening. No decision was reached. Debby, however, conceded enough to say that she would think the matter over and would ask Miss Richards's opinion concerning it.

Hester was fully satisfied with this. She knew that her Aunt Debby never forgot a promise. Hester knew also that Miss Richards would advise Debby Alden to spend a winter in the city.

The following day, after the housework had been finished and the dinner dishes put away, Debby Alden dressed and went to call upon her friend.

Hester went with her, as far as Jane Orr's home. "I'll be back shortly, Hester. You may stay with Jane until I call for you."

She made her way down the main street of the little country town.

Hester paused as she was about to mount the steps, and turned to look at the retreating figure. She could not restrain a smile. "It's certainly odd, but Aunt Debby doesn't seem to know how pretty she is."

Hester's adjective was not strong enough to describe Aunt Debby. There was something infinitely greater and finer in the woman than mere prettiness.

Debby Alden at twenty-five had been scrawny, hard-featured and severe. She then had the appearance of one who knew only the hard things of life, and was giving expression to them in her features and carriage. But this new Debby Alden was wholly different. Hester had brought love and interest with her. Debby Alden was alive to the world about her, and her active interests had given brilliance to her eyes and lightness to her steps. The angles of twenty-five years had been softened into curves. Debby was no longer hard-featured and scrawny. She had grown plump and round.

Some old wise man declares that it is woman's fault if she be not handsome at forty years; for then the body is but the reflection of life itself. Debby had been so true and faithful and so big-hearted and generous, that at forty, beautiful was the only word worthy to describe her.

Debby's call upon Miss Richards was short. To-day was one day when all things were working toward favoring Hester's project.

Miss Richards was growing old. She did not wish to travel alone or to be far from her friends. She was dainty, gracious, and smiling as ever, but age had laid its finger lightly upon her.

She listened to Debby Alden's plans.

"You are young yet, Debby," she said. "No woman should be content to sit at home and not improve her time. With Hester gone, there will be nothing to keep you here. The school is but a short distance from town. Why not rent a small flat?"

"But what would I do with no responsibilities? Keeping two or three rooms in order will not employ my time."

"Lockport is famed for lectures and recitals. Study-clubs are plentiful. You could read and study and you might practise your music, Debby. A few lessons will do you worlds of good."

"Lessons when I am almost forty years old!"

"Forty years young, my dear girl. Lessons, why not? Life is one long school term. The pupil who expects a hundred-mark must be learning and moving onward all the time. I am more than twenty years your senior, and yet I feel as though I was but beginning to learn how to live."

She paused a moment. Her mind dwelt on the things which were past. Then with a radiant smile, she turned to her companion. "Be very much alive while you are alive, Debby. The interests you have outside yourself will add to your own happiness. If you wish to find perfect happiness, fill your life with vital interests. Go to Lockport, study, read and work; see Hester when your heart longs for her. I – " she paused, wondering if Debby would accept her suggestion.

"I should like to be with you, Debby. I need something new. Each winter I have been south for so many years that it is a story oft told. Do you think that you and I could be happy together in a little flat? Hester then could have two hearts to fill with interest."

She looked wistfully toward Debby. For the first time Debby realized that her old friend was alone – very much alone as far as hearth-ties and love were concerned. It was not with thoughts of her own enjoyment that Debby's heart bounded. As an inspiration, it came to her that she held within her hands that which would fill the void in her friend's life.

"I am sure we could," said Debby. "We might as well settle the matter here, and we'll go to town this very week, attend to selecting Hester's room and we'll look up a nice little place for ourselves. We'll not have it too far from the school."

Then observing Miss Richards smiling, she added, "I presume you think I'm a little hasty; but I don't see it in just that way. Anyone with judgment can readily see that it is just the thing for us to do. When our minds are made up, there's no use in being slack. We'll go Thursday. Hester may stay with Jane Orr. Mrs. Orr will be glad to have her. And now, I must go and tell Hester. I don't understand how that child came to be so foolishly sentimental. She has taken the notion that she cannot be happy anywhere without me. Utter nonsense, of course! I've tried to train her to believe that one's happiness never depends on another."

She went her way, leaving her friend smiling at the speech. When Debby had gone, Miss Richards spoke aloud: "Debby, Debby Alden, how fearfully blind you are about yourself and your girl! How could Hester ever think other than she does when every bit of happiness in the child's life has emanated from you. Hester has sound judgment for one of her years, and she knows how much she owes to you."

But Hester did not know the full amount of her debt to her foster aunt nor did Miss Richards; for Debby kept her own secret in regard to Hester's parentage and no one but herself knew the fearful weight it was upon her.

CHAPTER II

Thursday morning, Miss Richards and Debby Alden started for Lockport. This was a small city and the county seat. Its situation made it a pleasant place to spend the summer and the population increased and diminished with the change of seasons.

The town lay between two ridges of high mountains. On one side the river flowed; on the opposite side Beech Creek, the conjunction of the streams being at the eastern edge of town. On the brow of the lower hills were the summer homes of the city folk. There were acres of lawn and grove with natural ravines through which ran little streams and over whose banks the laurels grew in wild profusion. Back of these hills, the mountains towered like great green giants. On foggy days, their peaks were hidden in clouds. They were awe-inspiring, for fog-covered brows spoke of mysteries beyond the comprehension of those who dwelt below.

The valley grew narrow toward the western end. Here, nestled close between hills, was Dickinson Seminary, one of the most exclusive and rigidly-disciplined schools of the State. The campus and grove beyond were extensive. Beech Creek lay to the south and was used for bathing and boating and skating in their seasons. It was a deep, narrow stream. Being fed only by a few short mountain brooks, it was little affected by floods.

To the north lay the river. It was serene and powerful, except when its waters were swollen. Then it made its way over the banks and encroached upon the campus. The seminary folk were pleased than otherwise at this, for on the river-soaked campus edge the willows and water birches thrived, and made a beautiful protection for the campus. The river was at a distance from the building; yet at flood time on a quiet night as the girls lay in bed listening, they could hear the noise of its waters.

Debby Alden and Miss Richards reached Lockport just at noon Thursday. Debby's first thought was of Hester and her accommodations at school. She visited the seminary, attended to matters there, and returned to the city. The expenses connected with Hester's education would not be light, and Debby knew that she would be compelled eventually to use the little money which her father had put by for a rainy day; the interest of which had met her living expenses. The woman looked forward and saw the time when her money would be gone. But, strange to say, contrary as her present mode of action was to all her inheritance and previous training, she anticipated no day when she would be reduced to poverty. She calculated closely, knowing almost to a dime what the three following years would cost her and Hester.

By that time, perhaps, Hester would be prepared for some life-work and as for Debby – . She smiled grimly when she thought of coming to a place where she could not take care of herself. "It's not the Alden way to get stuck," she repeated to herself.

She mentally reviewed all these conditions before she set out with Miss Richards in search of a flat suited to their needs. In her look into the future, Debby believed herself able to see her way clear for three full years.

"And then, if the worst comes to the worst, I can sell the timber land. It's never brought in anything."

She put this last thought into words. "Does that mean that you are pressed for money, Debby?"

"Not yet; but I may be before three years are gone, and Hester is through with school. I can see my way clear for three years."

"You are fortunate indeed if that be so. A score of things may happen that you know nothing of now. I have learned to anticipate neither joy nor sorrow but to take each day as it comes."

"But surely one must look ahead. Money matters do not take care of themselves. Hester's schooling will cost me almost every cent of my ready money. I'll have only my little place and the timber tracts beyond."

"You are not scattering your money in sending Hester to school, Debby. You are placing it where it will draw the greatest interest. Sometime you'll draw a big dividend." She smiled reassuringly.

"I hope so; but I wasn't thinking of that now. All I want is to have Hester prepared for some work – to take care of herself and be a happy useful woman when I'm gone."

"Meanwhile, we'll stop in here and look at this little place. I think, Debby, you and I will never be content to shut ourselves up in little boxes on a second or third floor."

"No, I want room to breathe and some place outside where I can set my foot on the soil. I'm not one who likes the click of my own heels on the pavement. There's something about putting your feet on the earth that makes you feel that you belong."

The place into which they now turned was a little cottage at the extreme east of town near the conjunction of creek and river, yet high on the brow of a hill. It was a simple little place, weather-beaten and faded; but a strip of sod ran about the front and side. The little low porch was shaded with a Virginia creeper, and an old gnarled tree at the corner leaned over the roof as though about to rest itself against it.

Its being at the extreme end of town from the seminary was to Debby Alden the one thing against it.

"If we were at the west end, Hester could slip in each day. The pupils are allowed an hour 'off campus' you know."

"And she would come to you with every thought that troubled her. You would be bearing her childish burdens just as you have always done. If you live where Hester can talk with you each day, she will lose the greatest benefit a year in school can give her."

"I think you are right," said Debby Alden.

"I like the house. I'm used to low ceilings and big porches and vines. I'm satisfied with it if you are; and we'll have Hester home but once a month."

It was best for Hester to be away and to learn to depend upon herself. That fact settled matters for Debby Alden. If it were good for Hester, then it should be done and Debby Alden would give no thought to herself in this matter.

Miss Richards was pleased with the house and the two friends made arrangements with the care-taker to have it ready for them a few days before the opening of school. There were papering and painting to be done. Had it been within her own home, Debby Alden would have done the work herself. Every bit of woodwork in her own home had been done over with her own brush, and her paper-hanging had won the admiration of the country-side.

The next in the course of events was selecting the articles of furniture which might be spared from home. Debby had no idea of dismantling her old home. The house had been built and furnished for a large family. There were furnished bedrooms which Debby and Hester never entered except at cleaning time; below there were the old-fashioned parlor, the living-room with its air of comfort, the dining-room, kitchen and what in that locality was termed the shanty-kitchen. This last was a great room between the woodshed and kitchen proper. It was provided with every article for laundry use, and during the canning season was the scene of most of the household activities.

Since the early spring days when going away to school had first been mentioned, Hester had viewed the event with dread. She knew nothing of meeting strangers and imagined there could be nothing pleasant about it. During the summer while Debby had talked and planned, Hester had shown little interest and had never of herself, brought up the subject. But since she had influenced her Aunt Debby to go to the city with her, she was almost satisfied to go. Her joy would have been unbounded had it been possible for Debby to be with her within the school. That could not be. Hester was wise enough to know that. There was one other course that could be followed, however. She could live in town with Aunt Debby and Miss Richards and be but a parlor student at the seminary. To Hester's mind, this would be a very satisfactory arrangement, and she meant to bring it to pass. Having been successful in persuading her Aunt Debby to live in town, Hester was confident that it would be no

difficult matter to persuade her to this second course. Hester was naturally a diplomat. There was nothing deceptive about her; but, young as she was, she intuitively knew that some times are ripe and some are not for discussion. The time propitious for bringing up the question of her being but a parlor student was not until Debby and Miss Richards were established in their little cottage at the east end of Lockport.

Satisfied that she could bring matters to pass in the fashion she desired, Hester grew enthusiastic over the preparation for quitting the old home. There was much to be done in spite of the fact that Debby was never "slack" in the ways of her household. Every cupboard and closet was gone over. Bed clothes were aired and laid away where neither mice, rust, nor mildew could touch them. China and silver were sorted and again sorted before Debby was able to decide what pieces were best to take and what best to leave. The flowers were to be potted and put away to keep for spring planting. When it came to this, Debby began to realize what leaving home meant.

"I can take the spotted-leaved geranium," she said to Hester while they were making the rounds of the garden. "I always do pot that for a house-plant. I suppose it will grow as well at Lockport as here, if I see that it is attended to. Fortunately for plants, they have no feelings."

The words showed sentiment enough, but the tones of Debby's voice made them seem harsh and unfeeling. Hester was not deceived. Debby Alden came from a race who had for generations looked upon the expression of love and sentiment as a weakness. Whenever Debby felt her emotions conquering her, she unconsciously resorted to the ways of her forbears; she lashed herself into a semblance of sternness in an endeavor to conceal her real feelings.

"I suppose I'll not get a look at the asters when they bloom. It would be a shame to let them die on the stalk without a soul pulling one. I think I'll ask Kate Bowerman to see to them. She might pack up a few and send to me. I'm curious to see how that new royal purple turns out. I've been suspicious all summer that it would turn out a scrub. It looks like a scrub."

She was bending over the plants growing along the fence which divided her yard-proper from the garden and wood-yards beyond. Debby was proud of her collection of asters which were of every variety known throughout the country.

"They certainly are scrubs," she repeated as she bent for a closer inspection.

"How do you know, Aunt Debby? To me, they look like the other plants."

"I just know," said Debby. "I don't know how I know, but I just do. Plants show their breed just like people and animals. I've no need when I look at old Jim Ramsey's horse to be told it's mighty common stock. Yes; it has the same number of legs and hoofs and its eyes are in the right place, but it isn't a thoroughbred. Anyone can see that at a glance. It is just the same with plants. There's a wide difference. Though I suppose it is only ones who work about them and love them that see the difference. And with people! Some people are born common stock and stay common stock all their lives, even if they've lived in mansions and hold a dozen diplomas."

She paused suddenly. "Run and get some more crocks, Hester," she added. Debby was annoyed at herself in talking of family in the child's presence. With Debby's knowledge of Hester's parentage, it was as though she had thrown a taunt in the child's face. When Hester returned, bearing in her arms the two, large flower-pots, Debby made a point of showing her unusual consideration, asking her opinion as to the best flowers to be potted and whether she did not wish a plant for her window in school.

From the beginning of these preparations, one duty had been firmly fixed in Debby's mind. It was not a pleasant one, yet she did not mean to shirk it; but she did put it off to the very last morning when she and Hester had brought down the trunks and were preparing to pack their own personal belongings.

"There are some things in the attic, Hester, which rightfully belong to you. I've never mentioned them to you before, because you were yet such a child. But now you are leaving and Providence alone knows what may be in store for us. I may not come back. Now, don't begin to cry. I expect to live a

good many years yet; but there's no telling. I believe in doing what Grandmother Alden always said, 'Hope for the best, but be prepared for the worst.'

"If anything should happen to me, it is only fair that you should have what is yours by rights. Just let your packing go this morning. We'll have time to finish this afternoon and not be rushed. I want you to go with me and look over the clothes that were yours and your mother's.

"I laid your mother out in the best things I could buy; and I kept every stitch she wore when the accident befell her. Somewhere or sometime, some of her friends will appear and they may be able to recognize these clothes."

Debby lead the way to the attic, climbing up the narrow dark stairway which lead from the kitchen bedroom and Hester followed at her heels.

The attic was low and narrow. Except in the middle, one could not walk without stooping to escape the rafters. Along one side was a long row of boxes and trunks in which the Aldens, for generations, had kept their heirlooms. So far as money value was considered, there was nothing here worth while. A surveyor's compass and staff, a spinning wheel; old blue dishes covered with hair-like lines. There was no real lace, and there were no handsome gowns. Nevertheless, they meant much to Debby Alden. They were family to her.

A little low trunk was at the extreme end of the attic. It was to this that Debby directed her steps.

"Everything in this trunk belongs to you, Hester. When I packed it away, I put a card inside so that you might know that they were your mother's. There's nothing at all of value. Sit down here and we'll go over them."

She knelt before the trunk and opened it. Hester, obedient to Miss Debby's wishes, sat down on the floor near the window while the woman took out each article and passed it to her companion.

"This is the dress your mother wore. I thought from the material that she must have been well-to-do. She had a gentle, nice way of speaking. She looked like a woman who had never worked hard and was used to having things comfortable. That's why I can't understand how she could disappear and no one search for her. We sent notices to all the papers for miles about."

Debby Alden paused. She could not justify herself even in her own thoughts. By withholding what she knew of Hester's parentage, the newspaper accounts of the death of the French woman, had been misleading. This was one act of her life that gave her no satisfaction in thinking over. She put it from her mind and in nervous haste, passed the other articles of clothing to Hester.

"I've saved even her shoes. You see what a little foot she had. Your mother was a very pretty woman, Hester. Of course, I saw her only that hour at dinner when she sat in the kitchen. She had dark eyes and hair and a plump, round figure. You look like her, only there is a difference. Your eyes are dark but they don't look as your mother's did, and your mouth and expression are not as I remember hers to be."

Hester made no comment as she looked over the clothes. She was not at all moved by the sight of these things. She was sixteen, and had come to the place where she was able to understand much that Debby did not tell her.

She knew that something lay back of all this. Why had none of these people come for her? What were they that they would leave a little child in the world without ever making an effort to find her? They could not have been fine people. Hester was confident of that. She had picked up Debby's word and mentally set down the people from which she had sprung as "poor stock."

"If I ever am anything at all, it will be because of Aunt Debby's training," she concluded as the last article of her mother's clothes lay in her hands.

"It seems strange that they never came for you."

"I'm glad they didn't," responded Hester. Her pride was in arms. If her own people cared so little for her, she would never grieve for them.

"I am glad – very glad that they didn't," she repeated. "I belong to you. I'd rather be your girl than anyone's else and I couldn't be that if they had taken me away when I was a baby."

According to tradition, Hester's sentiment was not at all proper. One should cherish one's family above all else.

"It isn't right to say such things, Hester. Of course, you and I are very near to each other; but you cannot feel toward me as though I was your mother."

"Of course not. I feel a great deal more." She arose to her feet, dropping on the floor, the articles of clothing which had been in her lap. "Why, Aunt Debby, I'd treasure an old shoe-lace of yours more than those things." She pointed to the heap of clothes on the floor.

Debby meant to be firm. She had intended from the first that Hester should be rigidly disciplined. She believed in "the speak-when-spoken-to" child. But there are some arguments that cannot be questioned. She wanted Hester to love her above anyone else. She could not chide her for doing that. Debby's discipline went to the winds.

"How very foolish you talk, Hester!" she said reprovingly; but she looked up at the girl with such a tender light in her eyes, that Hester laughed aloud.

"But you like my foolishness, Aunt Debby. I know you do." She was down beside Debby Alden with her hand laid caressingly on the woman's arm.

"Now, Hester, you are –"

"But you like me to be foolish. You know you do, Aunt Debby."

"I surely do not –"

Hester laughed again. Aunt Debby was blushing like a young school-girl.

"You cannot say that you do not like it," cried Hester. "You turn the question every time and do not answer directly."

"We'll finish this work and go back to our packing," was the firm rejoinder. "Your little baby-clothes are here. Your mother must have been a fine needle-woman, for the rolled hems and hemstitching are perfect."

The little dresses and petticoats were yellow with age. There was no distinguishing mark about them. They were of fine sheer linen, and exquisitely made. But thousands of babies over the land might have worn just such garments.

"You had a little handkerchief about your neck like a bib," continued Debby. "This is it. It was pinned down in front with an odd pin. It's rather peculiar and not worth much as far as money goes."

She handed the pin to Hester. It was of yellow metal – gold, perhaps – of oval shape and about the size of a dime. Inside the outer gold edge was woven a narrow strand of hair, and within this was imbedded a peculiar yellow stone.

"Isn't it pretty!" cried Hester. She held it in her hands and examined it eagerly. It was the first interest she had evinced in anything which belonged to that time before she entered the Alden home.

"I fancy it isn't gold," continued Debby Alden. "I never knew gold to have that peculiar tinge. It was that way when I unpinned it from your bib. I tried to brighten it a little, but I couldn't. It looks now just as it did when I laid it away. That stone, of course, is nothing more than a bit of yellow glass of small value."

"Yes," said Hester slowly. Her eyes were fixed upon the queer stone. "I never saw a bit of glass look so. When I hold it one way, it looks like a spark of fire. It looks as deep as a well, when you look directly into the center."

"Cut glass," said Debby. "All cut glass reflects light like that."

Cut glass or something more, it appealed to Hester. Turning it about in her hand, she examined it critically.

"There's a little hook here at the end," said Hester. "Did you notice that, Aunt Debby?" Debby took the pin in her hand to examine it. "I didn't notice that before. It has been an old fashioned earring made into a pin. Earrings used to be fashionable. No lady ever dressed without them, I've heard my mother say. The breast-pin that I wear with my gray silk was made from an earring of Grandmother Palmer's. Dear, dear, I wonder who wore these."

"I'm going to keep this and wear it, Aunt Debby."

"I don't believe I would, Hester. Someone might ask you where you got it."

"And I shall tell them it was my mother's, and that I wore it when I was a little baby. That is true. Isn't it, Aunt Debby?"

"You might lose it – " Debby began.

"If I do, no one will care except me. I'd dearly love to have it, Aunt Debby. Isn't it my own to do with as I please?"

There was no argument to bring against this, and Debby remained silent. Hester, pleased with the bauble, pinned it on her dress and then set about replacing the other articles in the trunk.

The pin might be cut glass or something better. Neither Debby nor Hester knew, nor could they know that it would bring to Hester loss of friends and – but neither the girl or woman could anticipate that. At present, all they could do was to admire the glitter of the stone and watch the changing lights play upon it.

CHAPTER III

I was the last week in August when Debby Alden and Miss Richards moved into the cottage at the east end of Lockport. The seminary was not to open until a week later and Hester was with her friends, assisting in every way she could in putting the place to rights.

Thursday evening, the house was immaculate. There was neither fad nor fancy about its equipment. Debby had brought down some great four-posters, old blue china, and solid silver. Miss Richards had several black walnut armchairs that were old enough to have been Mayflower Pilgrims, but which were not. There was a rug which Miss Richards had picked up in Europe twenty years before and a gay screen which Lieutenant Richards had bought a century before in an old junk shop in China.

"We look as though we had stepped from a previous century," said Miss Richards. "We haven't a modern article about us – " She glanced toward Hester and then added – "except Hester."

"You really need me," responded the girl. "I'm the only piece of twentieth-century furniture you and auntie have. I think I shall remain with you. I could study just as well here as shut up in that old stone building. I really think I could get my lessons better."

"I think so, too," said Miss Richards, "that is if you refer but to book lessons."

"What other kind could there be?"

"The kind that people teach you. They are all sorts of lessons, as varied in kind as there are people. The girls at Dickinson will teach you many a good lesson."

"I should think you and Aunt Debby could do it better. I've quite made up my mind to be but a parlor student."

"There are some things Debby and I cannot teach you. We love you too much to give you the very lessons which we know would prove best for you. The girls at school will do that for us."

"I do not always quite understand," said Hester. "Mr. Sanderson used to declare that I was neither philosophical nor mathematical. I do not see deeply into matters. I do know, though, which I like. Just now there is nothing I should like better than being at home with you and Aunt Debby, and I have quite made up my mind to that."

"You had better unmake it, Hester," said Debby who, coming into the house at that moment, had overheard their words.

"You will remain at the seminary even over Saturday and Sunday, except once each month. Miss Weldon does not approve of pupils coming back and forth. I think she is quite right. This flitting about gives a most unsettled feeling. You will not know where you belong, and we'll have none of it for you."

Hester sighed and turned aside. She was disappointed, only for the time. Had she been Debby Alden's own daughter, she could not have partaken more strongly of some of Debby's characteristics. When Hester once made up her mind, she was quite "set." She had no thought of giving up her plans.

"About the time that I'm ready to leave them, they'll both realize how much they'll miss me. Then I'll be able to persuade Aunt Debby to allow me to board at home."

Confident in her power of persuasion, Hester went about her work as happy as though the matter had been adjusted to her satisfaction.

There was yet some shopping to be done before Hester's outfit would be complete. Miss Debby had purposely delayed buying until she came to Lockport where she believed a better selection might be made.

Miss Richards had friends in town and had gone off to spend the day with them. After the household duties had been disposed of, Debby and Hester set out on their shopping expedition.

The morning was delightful and Debby, who took pleasure in the exercise of her muscles, decided to walk. With the exception of the summer homes which lay on the outskirts, Lockport was

compact. The shopping district lay within a few squares. The store windows were tastefully decorated and Hester to whom all this was new, lingered to gaze and comment.

"I never knew hats could be so pretty. Did you, Aunt Debby? Why the window is a dream – a poem!" She paused to study the millinery display.

She had grown tall. Her shirt-waist suit of white linen was dainty and simple. She had pushed back her hat. When she was interested in anything, she was wholly unconscious of herself and what was going on about her. Now with bright eyes, and flushed cheeks, she stood before the window. She was a very pleasing sight to passers-by. More than one person stopped for a backward glance and smiled, well pleased, and passed on. Someone in particular found her pleasing. A young man hurrying from the store adjoining, paused a moment to look at Hester. Her face was in profile. All he could see was the cheek and chin, the tall, slender figure and the long braid of hair.

He paused but a moment. Then he smiled with delight and advancing, came up beside her. "Hello, honey. I did not know you were in town. Are you picking your fall chapeau?"

Hester was startled. She looked about her. Debby Alden had moved on and unconscious of what was taking place, was studying the display in windows several yards distant.

At Hester's alarm, a flush came to the young man's face.

"I humbly crave your pardon," he said, lifting his hat. "I mistook you for my cousin Helen. Believe me, I regret exceedingly – "

Debby Alden had turned at this moment. She came hurrying up. Hester had been alarmed and turned to lay her hand on Debby's arm.

"He thought I was his cousin," said Hester.

Debby turned toward the young man who would have explained had she allowed him to do so; but she gave him such a glance that words failed him.

"Come, Hester, an apology is merely an insult." Hester walked meekly along. She was not able to grasp the situation.

"He said he thought I was his cousin, Aunt Debby. He seemed so sorry – "

"Nonsense. He had no idea that you were his cousin or anyone else that he knew. He is just a smart, ill-bred young man, Hester, who, thinking you a stranger and not used to the ways of a city, did what he could to annoy you. Never pay any attention to such folk, Hester. Hurry away from them as fast as you can. They are never desirable people to know."

"But he looked very nice, Aunt Debby. Did you notice his eyes? I liked the way he spoke. I really do believe that he thought that I was his cousin."

"It matters little what you think on such matters. Hereafter never give anyone time to apologize for speaking to you."

Smith and Winter's was the largest store in Lockport. It was on Pine, between Third and Fourth Streets. It was here that Debby Alden intended making her purchases.

"Do you think you would like a tan jacket better than a blue one, Hester?" she asked as the floor-walker was conducting them toward the coat department.

"I think so, Auntie. But you select what you think is best."

Debby made known her wants to the sales-woman. Jackets of tan and blue, of many sizes and shades were brought forth and tried on Hester. They were interrupted in their selection, by one of the girls from the alteration department, claiming the attention of the clerk.

"Miss Herman, did Mrs. Vail say when she wished her dress?"

"It was to be sent out to-morrow, but she telephoned last evening saying that she was called away. We are to send the dress on. She may not come back here. Her cottage will close this week."

"That's odd. She promised to come back for another fitting."

"She often does that; but she's not erratic. She always has a reason for going off in that way. When you get to know her as I do, you will think she's the sweetest woman in the world."

"I wasn't thinking of that – nor did I mean to criticise her. I wanted to know whether or not I should finish her work without another fitting."

"No, I'd wait." The clerk who had been addressed as Miss Herman turned to Debby Alden and waited her orders.

"Hester thinks the tan will please her best," said Debby. "If you can send it out to this address," she gave the woman her card. Miss Herman read it and smiled. "I have mistaken you all along for someone else. I thought you were Mrs. Loraine. I never met her, but her daughter is a seminary student here and often comes into my department. I was sure that this young lady was a younger sister of Helen Loraine's."

"No, we are not related. I know nothing of the people," said Debby stiffly.

"They are a fine family," said the clerk. "We are always pleased to serve them."

Hester would have spoken had not Debby silenced her with a look.

"Auntie, did you not hear that name?" she said as they moved away. "Helen Loraine. Isn't that the name of the girl who is to room with me, and that young man said his Cousin Helen."

"That young man's cousin exists only in his mind, and as your roommate – she may be a wholly different person. The name Loraine is common throughout this section."

"But, Aunt Debby, the clerk thought I looked like – "

"Nonsense. Some people never see further than their own nose. If the clerk noticed that your hair and eyes were black, she decided that you looked like every one else she knew who had the same coloring. I fancy she said that but to make conversation."

The following day when Debby Alden suggested that they make ready to go to the seminary, Hester brought up again the question of remaining at home. Debby listened patiently until the girl had expressed herself and had presented every argument in favor of attending the seminary for recitations merely. When Hester had finished, Debby Alden said quietly: "Please put on your hat and gloves, Hester. We must take the next car if I wish to be back home in time to get supper."

Hester felt that the decision was final and nothing could be gained by argument. Leaving the room, she soon returned with hat and gloves. These last articles she swung in her hands as they went down the walk.

"Hester, when at home we were a little lax about certain customs. Here in Lockport and among strangers, we must be more careful. Put on your gloves before we leave the house. My mother taught me that a lady must finish her toilet before she leaves her home."

She waited until Hester had put on and buttoned the gloves. "It seems a trifle," continued Debby, "but it is trifles which mark the difference between a cultivated and an uncultivated woman."

When the street car took siding at Williams Street to give right of way to the east-bound car, a carriage drew up close to the curb. The coachman was in livery. Hester noticed that at once, for at her home no distinction in dress was made between the man who drove and he who employed him.

Servants in livery were not new to Debby Alden. Her attention was attracted to the sweet-faced woman in the carriage. This woman who was richly gowned was scarcely older than Debby herself; but her hair was white. There was some quality in the face which attracted and held. Perhaps it was the power of self-control. The power to smile sweetly when the person had cause only for tears. This woman was bending from the carriage in conversation with a man and woman on the sidewalk. As the car moved, the nervous horses jerked suddenly. The woman in the carriage turned her head and met Debby Alden's direct glance. Just for a moment, these two women looked into each other's eyes. Then the car moved on; the carriage bowled along. With each woman an impression of the unusual lingered.

Debby really was troubled. The face of the strange woman was as the face of a half-forgotten friend.

"That woman in the carriage made me think of someone," she said to Hester. "But I cannot think who. There was something about the turn of her head and the way she looked up at me that made me think I have met her somewhere."

"I did not see her," said Hester. "I was looking at the coachman. I hope that some day I may have matched horses and a man in livery." Then she turned toward Debby Alden. "Hasn't this been a peculiar day, Auntie. Every one thinks I am someone else, and you think every one is some one you know."

"Every one? You are putting it a trifle too strong, Hester. I have come in contact with a great many people, but I remember but one who made me think of someone else. You exaggerate, Hester."

"I'd really rather call it hyperbole," said Hester. "You are a classical scholar when you use hyperbole and a 'fibber' when you exaggerate."

Debby smiled at the sally. She and Hester were good friends, with a perfect understanding between them.

"Put your effects toward the classical into working order. I catch a glimpse of the seminary walls, Hester."

This was the first glimpse Hester had of her new home. There was a long stretch of grass, old trees and then the low, long, gray wall of stone. The campus crossed the end of the street. It seemed to the occupants of the car that they would be carried across the campus and through the building. But the line turned suddenly and ran along the edge of the grounds.

"We get off here, Hester," said Debby leading the way out.

Hester's gay spirits ebbed. Silently, she followed Debby Alden to the entrance. The office-boy swung open the great hall door for them to enter and escorted them down the long hall to the office.

Hester's eyes grew big. She had not dreamed that any place could be as beautiful as this. Her feet sank in the soft, thick carpet. She followed Miss Debby's footsteps as silent as a mouse.

Doctor Weldon was in her private office. Into this, Marshall conducted the callers. Hester shook hands in silence, and then sank into the nearest chair. For the first time in her life, her tongue refused to work as it should. It felt now as though it were glued to the roof of her mouth. She listened to the conversation between Doctor Weldon and Debby, but was not able to grasp what it meant.

Then Debby arose to depart. Marshall was sent in search of a hall-girl to conduct Miss Hester Palmer Alden to Room Sixty-two. Then Hester realized that she and Debby must part.

"I'll go with you to the door, Aunt Debby," she said. No further word was said until they stood on the steps and Debby turned for a farewell embrace. The tears were very close to Hester's eyes; but she forced them back, determined that she would not vex her Aunt Debby by a show of feeling.

Debby put her arms about Hester, kissed her warmly and said, "Be a good girl, Hester and do as the teachers tell you."

Such had been her words ten years before when she had taken her into the primary grade and left her in Miss Carns's care. Hester answered meekly now as then, "Yes, Aunt Debby."

Debby went down the winding path. Once she glanced back. Hester was standing erect with her head thrown proudly back. It was as though she were declaring, "You may kill me, but I shall not cry."

The haughty proud turn of the head! Where had Debby seen that before? The experiences of the day rushed over her like a flood. Hester's poise and turn of the head were like that of the sweet-faced woman in the carriage.

CHAPTER IV

Miss Loraine, so the hall-teacher informed Hester, would be her roommate. Miss Loraine, however, was not at the seminary at present. She had come the previous day and attended to business matters, put her room in order and had then gone out to the home of her aunt who lived at a country place called Valehurst.

This information was given to Hester while she was being conducted to her room. The seminary and living-rooms were under one roof. The main building was a great rectangular block, containing offices, class rooms, dining-hall and chapel. From this extended an east dormitory, and one on the west. Each suite of rooms consisted of a bedroom and a small study or sitting-room. This was occupied by two students. Number Sixty-two which Hester was to occupy with Helen Loraine was on the second floor just where the dormitory joined the main building. It overlooked the front campus and was considered one of the most desirable rooms in the school.

Hester, being new to the ways of boarding-school life did not realize how fortunate she was in securing so fine a location. Helen Loraine had been a seminary girl for two years and knew the "ropes." The previous spring, she had put in an application for Number Sixty-two. She had come down several days before the opening of school to take possession, feeling sure that if she was once placed there, no misunderstanding would arise. There had been several instances at Dickinson, where girls had moved in their trunks and took possession before the rightful occupant of the room appeared.

The hall-teacher escorted Hester to the door and then left her. She found that the sitting-room lacked the bareness of dormitory rooms. Helen had unpacked her trunk and converted it, by means of a gay cover and cushions into a cosy corner. The study table held a few books and a candle with a shade. Across one end of the room, gay ribbons had been stretched across the wall. These were filled with photographs. The second study table held a great number of posters. On top of these, Hester found a note addressed to herself.

"Dear Roommate-to-be: I have put up enough belongings to hold the fort until you arrive. I did not like to do more until you came. I was afraid you might not like my style of decoration. I shall be back within a day or so. Meanwhile make yourself comfortable and do not get homesick.

"Helen Vail Loraine."

Hester read the note several times. It was a thoughtful, kind act for Miss Loraine to leave the note. Hester was already experiencing the first tinge of homesickness; but she had no intention of giving way to her feelings. She could do just as Helen had done. She would keep so busy that she could not even think of Aunt Debby and Miss Richards sitting down together at their evening meal.

She unpacked her trunk and put her clothes in order in the closet and drawers. Helen had rigidly observed the old time custom of the hall and had stretched a blue ribbon from hook to hook, this portioning off equal space for herself and roommate.

Hester heard the ten-minute bell ring, but being unused to the ways of school, did not know its meaning. She opened the door leading from the sitting-room into the hall. She paused a moment to ascertain the reason for the bell's ringing. A murmur of voices came from the several rooms below. They were beautifully modulated with the intonation of those who have been trained to speak carefully.

"Really, I think you are mistaken, Mame. The Fraulein told me that Helen had gone to her aunt and would not return until Monday."

"I am not mistaken. Do you think that I do not know Helen Loraine when I roomed with her two terms?" This voice had in it a touch of petulant decision, as though the speaker was vexed because the responsibility of settling all pertinent matters devolved upon her.

"I saw her come across the campus," the speaker continued. "A lady was with her; but they went into the private office and remained ever so long. I would have waited had not Miss Burkham come along and informed me that a public hallway was not the proper place for a young lady."

Hester heard the words and felt the sudden touch of ironical humor in them; but she did not know of the smile which passed over the group in the room below; neither did she know Miss Burkham.

"I saw her," a third voice took up the conversation. It was a ringing, clear, happy voice as though the speaker had always lived in the sunshine, and her voice had partaken of its rippling notes. "I saw her when she crossed the campus, and was sure it was Helen. I was just about to run out and give her a hug – Helen is the dearest girl in the world – when I saw I was mistaken. She isn't nearly so tall as Helen and she doesn't wear her hair in a bun as Helen does. She was an awfully sweet-looking thing, though, and looked for all the world like Helen."

"There's a new girl in Sixty-two. She went in there." The voice was deliberately low and steady. It was as though the owner had grown weary of life, but meant to live it down if she could. "Perhaps she may be Helen's sister, who knows?" The tone of voice would have influenced a stranger to believe that being sister to Helen Loraine, was a dire calamity.

A murmur of amusement rippled over the group. "Sara Summerson, do arouse yourself. Life is worth living, and examinations are months away."

"It will be all the same to me. It will be this term as it was last. I shall not have time to get out my lessons. When I wasn't getting a drink for Erma, I was driving my roommate in from the corridor and getting her down to work. When I thought I could get out my 'Unter Linden,' Miss Laird would call me to button her waist. If I ever am principal of a seminary, I'll have a law passed making it criminal for a teacher to wear a dress buttoned in the back. It's bound to distract the attention of the pupils from their books." The slow, sad monotone never varied. The hearers laughed. A bell rang and there was a sound of a general uprising.

Hester, conscious for the first time that she had been listening, turned into her room and closed the door. She heard the sound of passing footsteps, the murmur of voices, and then all grew still.

Alone in the dormitory! It sounded to her as fearful as alone in the desert. But Hester had not been trained by Debby Alden without effect. She had not the least intention of sitting down and giving way to her homesick feeling. The fear that she might give way, aroused her. She grew antagonistic with herself. There was some unpacking yet to be done and Hester flew at it as though her life depended on having it done a certain time and in regular fashion.

The little old-fashioned brooch which her Aunt Debby had given her was in a tiny box by itself. Hester took it out and examined it carefully. The little bit of cut glass in the center attracted her strongly. In the sunlight it gleamed like fire. In the shadow it showed a pale yellow tinge like the petal of a faded yellow rose.

Hester had no desire to wear it. It was pleasant, however, to have something which belonged to one's own people. The Alden home was rich in bits of china, linen, and silverware which had been handed down from generation to generation; but this little circle of gold, the mat of hair and bit of glass, was all that Hester had of which she could say, "This belonged to my family."

Helen's note had bade her make herself comfortable. Hester felt privileged to inspect the posters, take up the books and to examine the photographs.

She was growing hungry. The dinner hour must have passed. Perhaps, the bells which she had heard ringing earlier in the evening were to call the students to the dining-room. Hester had not understood that, but it really made little difference. She would not have ventured alone into the dining-hall though she were starving.

The hall-girl from the west dormitory had evidently forgotten her. It was the duty of hall-girls to play the part of hostess to new students. Fortunately for Hester, there were other persons more thoughtful than the hall-girls.

Hester had reached the stage where a good healthy appetite would have looked with favor upon crackers and cheese, when a knock came at the door. She opened to admit a round-faced, dimple-cheeked girl of sixteen, bearing a tray in her hand.

"I hope I am not intruding," she said. It was the same slow droll voice which Hester had overheard an hour before in the room below. "I am Sara Summerson, one of last year's girls. I did not know until after dinner was over that you were here, – a stranger and starving. The servants are in the dining-hall, so I asked Mrs. Hopkins if I might bring your dinner here."

"I am so glad!" cried Hester. "Will you come in?"

The invitation was not necessary. The caller was evidently a lady of resources, despite the slowness of her speech and movement. She had entered, moved back the books from the nearest study table and had set down her tray. "I brought you some tea," she said. "Will you not please sit down and eat while I fill your cup. We did have cocoa. I did not know which you like best; but I did know that if one does not like cocoa, one cannot bear to taste it."

Hester took her place at the table. Her new acquaintance sat opposite. Hester studied her now and came to the conclusion that she could like Sara Summerson. She was of Hester's age and physique, but of wholly different coloring. Her eyes were gray and calm; while Hester's were black and at times snapping. She wore a simple white gown with a Dutch neck. She was not at all pretty; but she was good to look at. There was a repose and calmness about her that had a good effect on Hester. Her droll slow smile gave an expression of humor to her slightest word.

While Hester was eating, the caller made no attempt to converse. When Hester had finished her meal, Sara looked across at her, viewed her slowly and serenely and said, "I saw you to-day when you came from the car. I thought you were Helen Loraine."

"I have heard that several times to-day," said Hester. "Is Helen Loraine beautiful?" It was a guileless question and Hester saw no compliment to herself in the asking. Sara scanned her slowly, deliberately. "If she were, I should not tell you. I never spoil people by complimenting them – even though it be over someone's else shoulder. No, she is not beautiful. She's more than that. She's distingué." She smiled blandly at Hester.

"I'm afraid I do not know what you mean. That word is new to me."

"It would not be if you could see it printed. It is no doubt, one of your most intimate words. I've given it the French pronunciation. Miss Webster declares my French is startling in its originality. You wish to know of Helen? She is one of those people that you need to glance at but once to know that she is something. She is tall and fine-looking; but that is not all. She has an 'air' you know."

Yes; Hester did know. An "air" in this sense meant the same as Debby Alden's "stock."

"And I look like her? I was mistaken to-day for her while in a store."

"You look much alike, yet there is a difference. Are you related to her?"

"No, indeed. I never heard the name until to-day."

The subject ended there. Sara sat for some time. She told Hester of the customs of the hall, the manner of calling and returning calls; the conventions which were observed when one had a spread, and the social distinction between that and a fudge party. Fudge-making was always informal, and often surreptitious. Anyone might be invited to it; but a spread and chafing-dish party observed a difference.

"It had been known," Sara said, "in that very dormitory that freshmen – girls who had not been in school a month – had had the audacity to invite a senior to their parties. But they never did it a second time."

Thus having put Hester on the right track socially, Sara took up her tray and departed.

"The first bell rings at nine forty-five," so Sara had informed her. This gave the girls a half-hour to prepare for bed and for Bible reading.

Hester looked at the time. It was fully an hour before the retiring bell would ring. She had a feeling that after the first night, she would not mind being alone. She felt like an alien now. Perhaps,

she would soon become part. She hoped so at least; for there is nothing quite as lonesome as being alone among many people. Sara had offered to escort her to breakfast and to introduce her to the other girls. Had Helen Loraine been in school, the courtesy would have been hers to fulfill.

To sit idle was impossible to Hester. The little box in which she had placed her pin, lay on the table. Without thinking, she placed it in the corner of her wardrobe, where it fitted snugly. In the shadow, it was hardly distinguishable from the woodwork. She put it safely away and then, perhaps because it was a new possession, straightway forgot about it for months.

Helen's photographs were many. The seminary girls had the habit of exchanging pictures each commencement. So it followed that students who had gone through their spring semesters, were well provided for in the line of pictures. Hester looked them over. There were girls and girls and yet more girls. Some wore evening dresses and hair in party style; others were in cap and gown. There were gymnasium costumes and bathing suits – all utilized for the picturing of girls.

Among the hundred or more were but one or two which were not those of students. There was one, old and fingermarked. It was that of a mother and children. The mother was young and beautiful. A boy leaned against her knee and a baby nestled in her arms. The boy was a handsome, manly little fellow; the baby was dimpled and smiling; its head was covered with soft dark curls, and its eyes were large and dark.

"Isn't she sweet?" said Hester to herself. "She looks as though she could eat those children up. She seems so fond of them. Mothers are always that way. Mrs. Bowerman looks at Mary as though she was the prettiest thing in the world and Mary is homely – just ordinarily homely, and Jane Orr's mother – ." The thought was too much for Hester. Her lips quivered, her eyes filled with tears so that she could scarcely distinguish the features of the picture which she held in her hand. "It's just a way that mothers have," she said again. "I do wish I had had a mother!"

Then, as though the thought were unjust to the woman who had taken a mother's place to her, she added quickly. "But I wouldn't give up Aunt Debby for any mother – not even Jane Orr's."

She did not realize how long she sat with the picture in her hand, studying the mother and children. She was awakened from her reverie by the half-hour bell. She was relieved at the sound of it. Now she could sleep and forget that she was alone and under a strange roof.

She was very tired and soon fell asleep. An hour passed and in a half-conscious way she was aware that the light was on in the sitting-room and someone was moving softly about as though not to disturb her. She was too far gone in slumber to realize where she was. She thought that she was back home and Aunt Debby had slipped in to see that she was properly covered. Satisfied that this was so, she fell sound asleep. It was broad day when she was awakened by someone bending over her. She felt the touch of lips on her forehead and the sound of a sweet musical voice.

"Wake up, little roommate. The rising-bell rang long ago. You will miss breakfast."

Then as Hester opened her eyes wide, she saw bending over her, a tall, slender girl enveloped in a soft kimona, and with her dark hair streaming like waves over her shoulders.

Beautiful! Hester decided at that instant that she had never seen a sweeter face.

"I slipped in last night so that I might not waken you. I am Helen Loraine. I hope we shall be good friends, little roommate."

CHAPTER V

After a few days' acquaintance with Helen Loraine, Hester understood what Sara meant by saying that Helen had an "air" about her. She was always friendly, but never intimate or familiar. The sweep-women in the hall were accorded the same courtesy as a teacher. She was sympathetic without being gushing. She was just in her treatment of others, generous and kind, yet she never allowed herself to be imposed upon. With Hester, she divided all things equally; neither giving nor keeping a larger part. She was as just to herself as to others. She would have battled royally before she would have given up one of her rights. Yet no one imposed upon her; for there was that about her which instinctively fixed the boundary line. It was not what she did or said, but what she *was*, which caused her to find favor among the students.

During the first week, Helen and Hester spent their spare time in arranging their rooms. It was really marvelous what could be done with cretonne and dotted swiss. Hester had come prepared to do her part in the furnishings. Debby Alden, acting upon Miss Richards's suggestion, had selected for Hester, fancy covers, cushions and a few pictures.

Hester had not realized the importance of the accessories until the "fixing up" fever was apparent. During the first week of school, the conversation of the entire dormitory was concerning the arrangement of their rooms. There were no calls made. The conventions of the hall frowned upon one student calling upon another until that other had time to put her rooms in livable condition.

Working together, Helen and Hester soon grew friendly. Before the week had ended, Helen knew that Debby Alden was the most remarkable article in the aunt line that the age had produced. She knew also that Hester had neither sister nor brother; but she did not know that the name Alden had been given her by courtesy rather than by right, or that Hester and the beloved Aunt Debby held no ties of blood in common.

On the other hand, Hester learned that Helen was an only child; that she had a cousin Robert Vail who was almost as a brother to her; that Robert had neither brother nor sister, and that his mother, who was Helen's Aunt Harriet, loved Helen and kept her at the Vail home as much as possible.

"You would like Aunt Harriet," said Helen in one of the confidences. It was Friday evening. The study hour had been short. The girls in kimono and with their hair in braids, sat in their sitting-room. As they talked, they gave satisfied admiring glances about the room.

"Aunt Harriet is only forty, yet her hair is white. She had nervous trouble and brain fever that caused her to become gray; but in other ways she is like a girl. She is most unselfish. The girls in school love her. She understands what girls like and is always doing something nice for them. I cannot explain to you in what way she is so attractive. When you meet her, you'll understand just how she is."

"I may never meet her," said practical Hester.

"You will if you remain at Dickinson. When she is at her home, she comes to see me very often. Her country home, Valehurst, is back on the hills, about three miles from here. It is a charming place. You have noticed how the road gradually rises from Susquehanna Avenue. It ends in a little plateau and there Aunt Harriet's home stands."

"Her country home? Doesn't she always live there?"

"No, uncle has business which keeps him in the city a great part of the time. He must be there during the winter. Generally, the family stay at Valehurst until the last of September. Then Aunt Harriet drives or motors in each week to see me. She likes her horses best, because they are alive. She is very fond of animals and was a fine horsewoman when she was younger. She always takes me for a ride, and best of all, takes my roommate with me."

"But she does not know me," Hester was tremblingly expectant. At home, automobiles were rare, and Hester knew no more of them than the smell of the gasoline. To ride in an automobile would

be a joy unspeakable. If it should chance that Mrs. Vail would take her, she would write and tell Jane Orr about it and describe the sensations that went with the ride.

"But she will know you. She makes a point of knowing all my friends. I know just what she will say the instant she comes into this room. She has a proud way with her. She carries herself very straight and holds her head high." Helen arose and moving toward the door, showed to Hester the grand manner of her Aunt Harriet.

"She will say," continued Helen, "I am very glad to see you, Helen. I miss you very much. Have you everything you need for your room and your wardrobe? If you haven't, make out a list and I shall see that you are provided for, and your roommate, dear. I hope you like her. I should like to meet her."

Helen came back to her easy chair. She laughed softly as she leaned back. "And then you'll be brought in and her heart will warm to you. It always does to every girl she meets, and it will to you. Do you know what you will do, Hester Palmer Alden?"

"No, about that time, I'll be so embarrassed that I shall not be able to say a word. If your aunt is haughty and proud, I shall be afraid."

"But she is not that kind of proud. I know what you'll do. You'll do just what every girl has done. You'll fall heels over head in love with her and before she goes, you'll be ready to declare that she's the dearest woman in the world."

"Except Aunt Debby," said Hester with dignity.

"Hester, will you light the alchohol lamp. Let us have a cup of cocoa before we go to bed. You set the chafing-dish boiling while I look for Aunt Harriet's picture."

Helen began her search among the pictures which had been heaped in a basket; for after grave consideration, she and Hester had decided that photographs ranged about the wall were out-of-date and not at all in harmony with the other fittings of their rooms.

Hester lighted the alchohol burner; suspended the kettle and brought forth the cups. This was one of the side-issues of school life on which she had not counted. She had been anticipating successive days of hard study and recitations. Having never experienced it, she could not dream of the little social bits which crept in as easy and naturally as they did at home; the half hour of confidential chat, the lunches, the visits into the rooms of the other girls, the walks and rides; the gymnasium stunts and the dances where the tall girls lead.

The kettle was boiling before Helen found the picture.

"Here it is!" she cried triumphantly. "It is really soiled for I have kept it out for two or three years. This does not look as Aunt Harriet does now. It was taken a long time ago." As she talked she held out the card to Hester.

"Why, that is the picture I liked so well. When you were not here – that first evening I was alone, I looked over your pictures. What a sweet face she has and what dear little children! Is that little boy your cousin Robert?"

"Yes, but he does not look like that now. When I wish to tease him, I show him this picture. He thinks it is horrid – perfectly horrid – though the word he uses is 'beastly.' He declares if he could find the man who took such a picture he'd have him in jail – or have his life."

"What for?" asked Hester.

"Simply for putting out such a picture. Rob says it is libel – pure and simple, to say he ever looked like that."

"I think it is lovely," said Hester. "Is the baby you?"

"No; that is Aunt Harriet's little girl. I am a year older than she."

Hester studied the picture attentively. While she did so, her mind reviewed the remarks Helen had made in regard to the Vail family. There were statements at variance.

"You said Robert had no sisters or brothers," she said.

"He hasn't," was the reply. "They did – that is – " Helen was visibly embarrassed. She could not equivocate, neither could she go into details of a family history. She hesitated a moment and said, "Little Dorothy was not with them long – just a year."

"Poor little baby. It must be dreadful to die when you are little. You miss so much. If I had died when I was little, I should have been sorry all the time thinking about what I had missed."

Hester's new logic caused her not to notice that Helen had made no affirmation in regard to the death of the child.

"Little Dorothy," was what Hester called her. From that time on, at odd moments, Hester introduced the subject of "little Dorothy," yet never became aware that the subject was not a pleasing one to Helen who never encouraged or took part in it.

Taking the card, Helen slipped it into the basket.

"Is your cocoa ready, Hester? I am almost famished. I never eat veal, so Friday evenings I go hungry. Friday is always veal day at school."

"I was so interested in the picture that I forgot about the cocoa." She hurried to the alcohol lamp.

"It is burnt out. It really did not have much in it. I should have filled it, I suppose. But I am not accustomed to cooking in this way. The water is boiling."

She measured the cocoa and cream into the cups and poured the boiling water from the kettle upon it.

"I wish your Aunt Harriet would come to see you to-morrow," continued Hester. "I liked her picture when I first saw it. I know that I should like her almost as much as I do Aunt Debby. Do you think that she will come to-morrow?"

"No, not to-morrow. She went away last week. She did not expect to go, but she heard something which caused her to go to Canada. Poor Aunt Harriet!"

The last words surprised Hester. She could see no just cause for the use of that word "poor," in connection with Mrs. Vail. To Hester's mind, a woman with a city and country home, automobiles, horses, and servants in livery was far from being poor.

The week had been so filled with new experiences that Hester had been from her room only for recitations, meals and the required walk about the campus. She had met a number of the girls, but with the exception of Helen and Sara, could not remember the name of any.

"I'll never know one girl from another. They all look alike to me," she said to Sara one day.

"Not when you know them. You'll know Renee – " She stopped in time. She was not naturally critical. To express her opinion to Hester concerning the girls, was not fair.

"We are all different," she continued slowly. "All with different virtues and faults. To be perfectly candid, I'm the only really fine one in the set."

They had been walking arm in arm up and down the corridor. As they came to the rear door of the dormitory, Sara paused. "More notices, I see. Come, Hester, we must know the worst at once. Here is where our dear Miss Burkham makes known her by-laws."

For the first time, Hester observed the white cards stuck along the edge of the door. Pausing before them, she read aloud.

"The young ladies will not make use of this entrance except to gain admittance to the gymnasium. On all other occasions, the front dormitory door must be used."

Then Sara explained. "Miss Burkham does not approve of visits at rear doors. When the girls have on the gym suits, they are not permitted to go to the front of the building. If you go out this door, you can enter the gymnasium without attracting undue attention."

Sara smiled. Undue attention was Miss Burkham's bugbear. She was always endeavoring to instill into the minds of her charges, that a lady never attracts undue attention. The word had been in use so frequently that it had become a by-word among the students.

"The next card is what makes my mouth water," continued Sara who had been reading silently.

"Beginning with the first week of the fall term, the ice-cream man will keep to the front side of the east wing. Plates will be put in their usual place for Belva to take care of."

"Basket-ball team Number one – known as the Invincibles will hold a business meeting at 10:30 Saturday morning in the gymnasium."

This last notice was signed, "Helen Loraine, Captain."

"She never told me," cried Hester. "I never suspected that she was interested."

"Helen never tells anything about herself," said Sara. "Sometimes I grow quite exasperated about her reticence. She has been on the team ever since she was a student here. She played well before she came. Her cousin, Rob Vail, was a captain when he was in school and he taught her all the tricks of the game."

Hester had no words to express herself. Basket-ball! It was enough to send the color to her cheeks. She had seen the boys in the high-school play. At home, girls did not indulge in such games. It might be that she herself, Hester Alden, could learn to play and be put on one of those teams. The thought brightened her cheeks and sent the blood through her veins with excitement.

"Who teaches you? How many teams have you, and how can you get on one? Does it take long to learn to play?"

Sara looked at her. Sara was deliberate. Her expression now was one of sad surprise.

"Do you often talk as fast as that?" she asked. "And do you expect your friends to answer with the same velocity? If you do, Hester Alden, never come to me with your questions."

Hester laughed. "I always talk fast when I get excited. The words pop from my mouth like popcorn over a hot fire."

"Give me time and I'll answer your questions. Our crack team is the Invincibles. They are the only one we allow to play the tournament games with outside teams. They play with the girls from the high school, the Normal Training School and, with some of the seminary teams. I really do not remember how many games were scheduled last year. They have never allowed me to play. I'm too – . Helen Loraine is good enough to say '*deliberate*.' The other girls call it '*slow*.'"

"Then of course there must be a scrub team for the Invincibles to battle against. You must play scrub before you can hope to become an Invincible. Then the freshies and juniors have substitute teams. They practice with each other and fill up on the other teams as they are needed."

"I think I could learn to play," said Hester. "I am not – not very deliberate."

"I should say not, if you fly at a ball in the same way you talk. You might get on a substitute team. Miss Watson, the physical-culture teacher, will hold a meeting soon. The first week of school is generally so busy that the gymnasium work is not begun."

"But next week, she will meet the girls and make arrangements for the work on the teams and in the gym. If I were you and really wished to play, I'd speak to Helen Loraine. She'll get you on if anyone can. You need a friend at court, for there are always more applications than there are places or times for practice."

"We must turn back. Miss Burkham would campus us, if we were to go out at this door." Sara turned and arm in arm, the girls moved toward the front entrance. "Listen, do you hear that melodious bell? That is Sykes's cow-bell. Come, and I'll treat you."

Hester followed as Sara lead the way from the front dormitory door out on to the campus. As they passed the end room, the sound of voices in conversation came to them.

"Can you let me have some perfume, Erma, and a fine handkerchief? I neglected to put mine in the laundry."

"Help yourself," was the reply.

Sara smiled. "Erma Thomas is easily worked. If she does not take a firm stand, she'll keep Renee in perfume and other extras for the entire year."

Just then the door opened and Renee Loveland came out. She was a tall, handsome girl, with the bearing of a princess. She bore in her hands a bottle of perfume and two dainty handkerchiefs.

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