

Johnston Annie Fellows

The Little Colonel's Christmas Vacation



Annie Johnston

**The Little Colonel's
Christmas Vacation**

«Public Domain»

Johnston A.

The Little Colonel's Christmas Vacation / A. Johnston — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	11
CHAPTER III	18
CHAPTER IV	26
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	30

Johnston Annie F. Annie Fellows

The Little Colonel's Christmas Vacation

CHAPTER I

WARWICK HALL

Warwick Hall looked more like an old English castle than a modern boarding-school for girls. Gazing at its high towers and massive portal, one almost expected to see some velvet-clad page or lady-in-waiting come down the many flights of marble steps leading between stately terraces to the river. Even a knight with a gerfalcon on his wrist would not have seemed out of place, and if a slow-going barge had trailed by between the willow-fringed banks of the Potomac, it would have seemed more in keeping with the scene than the steamboats puffing past to Mount Vernon, with crowds of excursionists on deck.

The gorgeous peacocks strutting along the terraces in the sun were partly responsible for this impression of mediæval grandeur. It was for that very purpose that Madam Chartley, the head of the school, kept the peacocks. That was one reason, also, that she proudly retained the coat of arms in the great stained glass window over the stairs, when circumstances obliged her to turn her ancestral home into a boarding-school. She thought a sense of mediæval grandeur was good for girls, especially young American girls, who are apt to be brought up without proper respect for age, either of individuals or institutions.

In the dining-room, two long lines of portraits looked down from opposite walls. One was headed by a grim old earl, and the other by an equally grim old Pilgrim father of *Mayflower* fame. The two lines joined over the fireplace in the portraits of Madam Chartley's great-grandparents. It was for this great-grandmother, a daughter of the Pilgrims and a beautiful Washington belle, that Warwick Hall had been built; for she refused to give up her native land entirely, even for the son of an earl.

At his death, when the title and the English estates were inherited by a distant cousin, the only male heir, this place on the Potomac was all that was left to her and her daughter. It had been closed for two generations. Now it had come down at last to Madam Chartley. Although it found her too poor to keep up such an establishment, it also found her too proud to let her heritage go to strangers, and practical enough to find some way by which she might retain it comfortably. That way was to turn it into a first-class boarding-school. She was a graduate of one of the best American colleges. The patrician standards inherited from her old world ancestors, combined with the energy and common sense of the new, made her an ideal woman to undertake the education of young girls, and Warwick Hall was an ideal place in which to carry out her wise theories.

The Potomac was red with the glow of the sunset one September evening, when four girls, on their way back to Washington after a day's sightseeing, hurried to the upper deck of the steamboat. Some one had called out that Warwick Hall was in sight. In their haste to reach the railing, they scarcely noticed a tall girl in blue, already standing there, who obligingly moved along to make room for them.

She scrutinized them closely, however, for she had seen them in the cabin a little while before, and their conversation had been so amusing that she longed to make their acquaintance. Her face brightened expectantly at their approach, and, as they leaned over the railing, she studied them with growing interest. The oldest one was near her own age, she decided after a careful survey, about seventeen; and they were all particular about the little things that count so much with fastidious schoolgirls. She approved of each one of them from their broad silk shoe-laces to the pink tips of their carefully manicured finger-nails.

As the boat swung around a bend in the river, bringing the castle-like building into full view, a chorus of delighted exclamations broke out all along the deck. The four girls hung over the railing with eager faces.

"Look, Lloyd, look!" cried one of them, excitedly. "Peacocks on the terraces! It's the finishing touch to the picture. We'll feel like Lady Clare walking down those marble steps. There surely must be a milk-white doe somewhere in the background."

"Oh, Betty, Betty!" was the laughing answer. "You'll do nothing now but quote Tennyson and write poetry from mawning till night."

"They're from Kentucky," thought the girl in blue. "I'm sure of it from the way they talk."

As the boat glided slowly along, Lloyd threw her arm around the girl beside her, with an impulsive squeeze.

"Kitty Walton," she exclaimed, "aren't you *glad* that the old Lloydsboro Seminary burned down? If it hadn't, we wouldn't be on ouah way now to that heavenly-looking boahding-school!"

The sudden hug loosened Kitty's hat, held insecurely by one pin, and in another instant the strong breeze would have carried it over into the river had not the girl in blue caught it as it swept past her. She handed it back with a friendly smile, glad of an opportunity to speak.

"You are new pupils for Warwick Hall, aren't you?" she asked, when Kitty had laughingly thanked her. "I hope so, for I'm one of the old girls. This will be my third year."

"How perfectly lovely!" exclaimed Kitty. "We've been fairly crazy to meet some one from there. Do tell us if it is as fine as it looks, and as the catalogue says."

"It is the very nicest place in the world," was the enthusiastic reply. "There are hardly any rules, and none of them are the kind that rub you up the wrong way. We don't have to wear uniforms, and we're not marched out to walk in wholesale lots like prisoners in a chain-gang."

"That's what I used to despise at the Seminary," interrupted Lloyd. "I always felt like pah't of a circus parade, or an inmate of some asylum, out for an airing. Keeping in step and keeping in line with a lot of othahs made a punishment out of the walk, when it would have been such a pleasuah if we could have skipped along as we pleased. I felt resentful from the moment the gong rang for us to stah't. It had such a bossy, tyrannical sawt of sound."

"You'll not find it that way at Warwick Hall," was the emphatic answer. "There are bells for rising and chapel and meals, but the signal for exercise is a hunter's horn, blown on the upper terrace. There's something so breezy and out-of-doors in the sound that it is almost as irresistible a call as the Pied Piper of Hamelin's. You ought to see the doors fly open along the corridors, and the girls pour out when that horn blows. We can go in twos or threes or squads, any way we please, and in any direction, so long as we keep inside the grounds. There's an orchard to stroll through, and a wooded hillside, and a big meadow. On bad days there is over half a mile of gravel road that runs through the grounds to the trolley station, or we can take our exercise going round and round the garden walks. The garden is over there at the left of the Hall," she explained, waving her hand toward it. "Do you see that pergola stretching along the highest terrace? That is where the garden begins, and the ivy running over it was started from a slip that Madam Chartley brought from Sir Walter Scott's home at Abbotsford."

"It is the stateliest old garden you ever saw, and the pride of the school. There's a sun-dial in it, and hollyhocks from Ann Hathaway's cottage, and rhododendrons from Killarney. There's all the flowers mentioned in the old songs. Madam has brought slips and roots and seeds from all sorts of places, so that nearly every plant is connected with some noted place or person. I simply love it. In warm weather I get up early in the morning, and study my Latin out in the honeysuckle arbour. Latin is my hardest study, but it doesn't seem half so hard out there among the bees and hummingbirds, where it's all so sweet and still."

"Oh, will they let you do things like that?" came the same amazed question from all four at once.

"You wait and see," was the encouraging reply. "That isn't the beginning."

The four exchanged ecstatic glances.

"Oh, we haven't introduced ourselves," exclaimed Kitty, bethinking herself of formalities. "I am Katherine Walton, and this is my big sister, Allison. That is Lloyd Sherman and Elizabeth Lewis. They're almost as good as sisters, for they live together, and Lloyd's mother is Betty's godmother. And we're all from the same place, Lloydsboro Valley, Kentucky."

"And I am Juliet Lynn from Wisconsin. That is, I lived there till papa had to come to Washington. He's a Congressman now. I was sure that you were from Kentucky, and I've been hoping that you were new girls for the Hall ever since I heard you talking about some house-party where you all did such funny things."

"Oh, yes, that was one we had this summer at The Beeches," began Kitty, glibly, "when we all took turns –"

But, with a big-sister frown of warning, Allison said, in a low aside: "For pity's sake, don't stop to tell all that long rigmarole over *now*. We want to hear some more about the school."

"What is Madam Chartley herself like?" she asked, turning to Juliet. "She must be something of an old dragon if she can keep forty girls straight with so few rules. We've pictured her as a big British matron, dignified and imposing, – a sort of lioness rampant, you know, with a stern air, as if she was about to say in a deep voice, 'England – expects – every – man – to – do – his – duty, – sir!'"

"But she isn't that way at all!" cried Juliet, almost indignantly. "She's just as American as you are, for she was born and educated in this country. She has the gentlest voice and sweetest manner. Her hair is snow-white, and there's something awfully aristocratic about her, for she is – sort of – well, I hardly know how to express it, but just what you'd expect the 'daughter of a hundred earls' to be, you know. But you won't feel one bit in awe of her. The girls simply adore her."

"But isn't she something to be afraid of when you break the rules?" queried Kitty, anxiously. "When you have midnight feasts and pillow-case prowls and all that?"

Juliet shook her head. "We don't do those things. I tell you it isn't like any other boarding-school you ever heard of."

"Then I know I sha'n't like it," declared Kitty. "All my life I've looked forward to going off to school just for the jolly good times I'd have. You see we were only day-pupils at Lloydsboro Seminary, and there wasn't a chance for that kind of fun, except the one term when Lloyd and Betty boarded in the school while their family was away from home. We managed to stir up a little excitement then, and I'd hoped for all sorts of thrilling adventures here. I'm horribly disappointed that it's so tame and goody-goody."

Juliet's face coloured resentfully. "It isn't tame at all!" she declared. "It's only that we are always so busy doing pleasant things and going to interesting places that nobody cares for stolen spreads. Some girls don't like the place just at first, because it's so different from what they've been used to. But by the end of the term they're so in love with Warwick Hall and everything about it that nothing could induce them to change schools. There's only one girl I ever heard of who didn't like it."

"And why didn't she?" asked Lloyd and Allison, in the same breath.

"Well, she came from some ranch away out West, Wyoming or Nevada or some of those places, where she'd been as free and easy as a squaw, and she couldn't stand so much civilization. You see, from the minute you enter Warwick Hall you feel somehow that you're a guest of Madam Chartley's instead of a pupil. She uses the old family silver and the china has her great-grandfather's crest on it, and she brought over a London butler who grew up in the family service. She keeps him for the same reason that she keeps the peacocks, I suppose. They give such a grand air to the place."

"Lida Wilsy – that's the girl from the ranch – couldn't live up to so much stateliness, especially of the stony-eyed butler. Hawkins was too much for her. She told her roommate that she thought it was foolish to have so many forks and spoons at each place. One was enough for anybody to get through a dinner with. Life was too short for so much fuss and feathers. She never could learn which to use first, and she would get her silverware so hopelessly mixed up that by the time dessert was

brought on maybe she would have nothing to eat it with but an oyster fork. I've seen her ready to go under the table from embarrassment. Not that she cared so much what the girls thought. She joked about it to them. Her father owned the biggest part of a silver mine, and they could have had Tiffany's whole stock of forks if they'd wanted them. It was Hawkins she was afraid of. Of course he was too well trained to show what he thought of her mistakes, but you couldn't help feeling his high and mighty inward scorn of such ignorance. It fairly oozed from his finger-tips."

Kitty's black eyes sparkled, anticipating times ahead when she would certainly make it lively for Hawkins.

"There's grandfathah!" cried Lloyd, catching sight of a white-haired old gentleman who had just come up on deck. "I want to tell him about the garden before we lose sight of it."

Juliet's glance followed her with interest as she darted away, for it was a distinguished-looking old gentleman who lifted his hat with elaborate courtesy at her approach. He was dressed in white duck, and the right coat-sleeve hung empty.

"It's Colonel Lloyd," explained Allison, noting Juliet's glance of curiosity. "He's bringing us all to school, for it wasn't convenient for mother or Mrs. Sherman to come."

"They don't look alike," remarked Juliet, surveying them with a puzzled expression. "But what is it about them – there is such a startling resemblance?"

"Everybody notices it," said Kitty. "When Lloyd was smaller, they used to call her the Little Colonel all the time, but especially when she was in a temper. They call her Princess now."

"Princess," echoed Juliet. "That name suits her exactly."

She cast another admiring glance at the slender, fair-haired girl, standing with her hand in her grandfather's arm, pointing out the beauties of the place they were slowly passing.

"And she will suit Warwick Hall," she added, with a sudden burst of schoolgirl enthusiasm, "just as the peacocks suit it, and the coat of arms, and Madam Chartley herself. She's got that same 'daughter-of-a-hundred-earls' air about her that Madam has."

"Oh, it all sounds so delightful and fascinating," sighed Betty, pushing back the brown hair that blew in little curls about her face, and smiling at the slowly disappearing Hall with a happy light in her brown eyes. "I can hardly wait for to-morrow."

The boat had glided on until only the high, square tower was left in view, with the red sunset glow upon it.

""The splendour falls on castle walls
And snowy summits old in story"" —

Betty sang half under her breath, with a farewell flutter of her handkerchief, as the boat rounded a bend in the river which hid the tower from sight. Already she was in love with the place, and already, as Lloyd had predicted, she was fitting some line of Tennyson to it at every turn.

Acquaintance progressed rapidly in the next half-hour. Long before they reached Washington, Juliet knew, not only that she had guessed Allison's age correctly at seventeen, that Betty was sixteen, and Lloyd and Kitty a year younger, but that each girl in her own way would make a desirable friend. Incidentally she learned that Allison and Kitty had lived in the Philippines, and were daughters of the brave General Walton who had lost his life there in his country's service. When they parted at the boat-landing, it was with delightful anticipations of the next day, and with each one eager to renew an acquaintance so pleasantly begun.

If Warwick Hall suggested ancient stateliness on the outside, it was informal and frivolous enough within, when forty girls were taking possession of their rooms on the opening day of the school year. In and out like a flock of twittering sparrows, the old pupils darted from one room to another, exchanging calls and greetings, laughing over old jokes and reminiscences, and settling down into familiar corners with an ease that the new girls envied.

Juliet Lynn, quickly establishing herself in her last year's quarters, started down the corridor to announce at every door that she was the first one unpacked and settled. All the other rooms were in hopeless confusion, beds, chairs, and floors being piled with the contents of open trunks.

At the first door where she paused, a shower of shoes and slippers was the only answer to her triumphant announcement. At the next a laughing cry of "Help! help!" greeted her. At the third she was informed that there was standing-room only.

"Don't you believe it, Juliet!" called a gay voice from the chiffonier, where an earlier visitor was perched. "There's always room at the top. I've discovered where Min keeps her butter-scotch. Come in and have some."

"No, I'm going the rounds to see what everybody is about," she answered. "You're all in such a mess now, I'd rather look in later. I'm one of the early settlers, and have been in order for ages."

"What's the odds so long as you're happy?" called the girl on the chiffonier. "Besides, it's no better next door. They'll invite you to make yourself at home under the bed, as they did me. Come on back and tell us your summer's experiences. Min has had one dizzy whirl of adventures after another."

But Juliet kept on down the hall. She wanted to find what rooms had been assigned to the girls whom she had met the day before on the boat, and to hear their first impressions of Warwick Hall. Presently, through a half-open door, she caught sight of Betty, sitting at an open window overlooking the river. With chin in hand and elbows resting on the sill, she was gazing dreamily out at the willow-fringed banks, so absorbed in her thoughts that she did not hear Juliet's first knock. But at the second she started up and called cordially: "Oh, I'm so glad to see you! Come in!"

"Why, you're all unpacked and put away, too!" exclaimed Juliet, in surprise, looking around the orderly room. "I thought that I was the only one, but I see you've even hung your pictures."

"Yes, we don't know any of the other girls yet, so we didn't lose any time running back and forth to their rooms, as everybody else is doing. We've been through ever so long. Lloyd is out exploring the grounds with Allison, but I was too tired after all the sightseeing we have done. I'd be glad not to stir out of my room for a week."

She pushed a rocking-chair hospitably toward her guest, and leaned back in the opposite one.

"I don't want to sit down," said Juliet. "I'm just exploring. I think it's so much fun to poke around the first day and see how everybody is fixed. You don't mind, do you, if I walk around and look at your pictures?"

"No, indeed!" answered Betty, cordially. "Help yourself."

Catching a glimpse of herself in the mirror, she sat up straight in her chair, and adjusted the side-combs which were slipping out of her curly hair. It was a pleasing reflection that the mirror showed her, of a slim girl in a linen shirt-waist and a dark brown skirt just reaching to her ankles. But it held her gaze only long enough for her to see that her belt was properly pulled down and her stock all that could be desired. The friendly brown eyes and the trusting little mouth never needed readjustment. They always met the world with a smile, and thus far the world had always smiled back at them.

"Last year," said Juliet, as she wandered around, "the girl who had this room simply plastered the walls with posters. It was so sporty-looking. She had hunting scenes between these windows, and there was a frieze of hounds and a yard of puppies where you have that panel of photographs. Oh, what perfectly beautiful places!" she cried, moving nearer. "Do tell me about them. Is that where you live?"

"Yes, this is our Lloydsboro Valley corner – the Happy Valley we call it," answered Betty, crossing the room to point out the various places: "Locust," her home and Lloyd's, a stately white-pillared mansion at the end of a long locust avenue; "The Beeches," where the Waltons lived; the vine-covered stone church; the old mill; the post-office, and a row of snap shots showing Lloyd and her mounted on their ponies, Tarbaby and Lad.

"What good times you must have there!" sighed Juliet, presently.

Betty opened a drawer in the writing-desk and took out six little books, bound in white kid, her initials stamped in gold on each cover.

"Just see how many!" she exclaimed. "I started to keep a record of all my good times when I went to Lloyd's first house-party. When godmother gave me this volume, number one, I thought it would take a lifetime to fill it, but so many lovely things happened that summer that it was full in a little while. Then I went abroad in the fall, and that trip filled a volume. Now I am beginning the seventh."

Juliet stared at the pile of white books in amazement. "What a lot of work!" she cried. "Doesn't it take every bit of pleasure out of your good times, thinking that you'll have to write all about it afterward? I tried to keep a diary once, but it looked more like the report of a weather bureau than anything else, and my small brother got hold of it and mortified me nearly to death one night when we had company, by quoting something from it. It sounded dreadfully sentimental, although it hadn't seemed so when I wrote it. That's the trouble in keeping a journal, don't you think so? You'll often put down something that seems important at the time, but that sounds silly afterward."

"No," said Betty, hesitatingly. "I always enjoy going back to read the first volumes. It's interesting to see how one changes from year to year in opinions as well as handwriting. See how little and cramped the letters are in this first volume. It's good exercise, and, as I expect to write a book some day, every bit of practice helps."

Betty made the announcement as simply as if she had said she intended to darn a stocking some day, and Juliet looked at her in open-mouthed wonder. She had never encountered a girl of that species before, and more than ever she felt that her friendship would be worth cultivating. When she finally took her departure, there was no time for any further tour of inspection, but she ran into several rooms on the way back to her own to say, hastily: "Girls, do all you can to get that Kentucky quartette into our sorority! I'll tell you about them later. We must give them a grand rush to-morrow night at the old girls' welcome to the new. I hope I'll get to take Elizabeth Lewis. My *dears*, she's a perfect genius! She's written poems and plays that have been published, and she's at work on a *book*!"

As Juliet closed the door behind her, Betty took up the new volume in the series of little white records, and began turning the blank pages. Like the new school year, it lay spread out before her, white and fair, hers to write therein as she chose.

"And I'll try my hardest to make it the best and happiest record of them all," she said to herself. As she dipped her pen into the ink, there was a knock at the door, and a white-capped maid looked in.

"Madam Chartley would be pleased to see you at once in the pink room, miss," she announced, and Betty, much surprised, rose to answer the unexpected summons.

CHAPTER II

"THE OLD GIRLS' WELCOME TO THE NEW"

As Betty opened the door, she ran into Kitty Walton, who at sight of her struck an attitude on the threshold, crossing her hands on her breast, and rolling her eyes upward until only the whites were visible.

"What new pose is this, you goose?" laughed Betty, shaking her gently by one shoulder.

"Don't laugh," was the solemn answer. "This is pious resignation to fate." Then her hands dropped and she turned to Betty tragically.

"I've just come from an interview with Madam Chartley," she explained. "And what do you think? That blessed old soul expects me to live up to the motto on her teacups! But how can I give Hawkins his just due *if* I do? I had the loveliest things planned for his tormenting, but I'd be ashamed to look her in the face if she ever found me out after this interview.

"Oh, Betty, I don't want to renounce the world and the flesh and all the other bad things this early in the term, but I'm afraid that I've already done it. She's laid a spell on all of us."

"Has she sent for Lloyd and Allison, too?"

"Yes, Allison was the first victim. She came back in a regular dare-to-be-a-Daniel mood, and announced that she intended to start in, heart and soul, for the studio honours this year. Then Lloyd had her turn, and she came back looking like Joan of Arc when she'd been listening to the voices. I vowed she shouldn't have that effect on me, but here I am, perfectly docile as you see, fangs drawn and claws cut. I tremble for the effect on you, sweet innocent. Your wings will sprout before you get back."

Betty laughed and hurried past her down the stairs. Evidently it was Madam's custom to make the acquaintance of her new girls in this way, one at a time. Only fifteen freshmen were admitted each year, so it was possible for her to take a personal interest in every pupil.

Betty's heart fluttered expectantly as she paused an instant in the door of the pink room. Madam Chartley had looked very imposing and dignified as she presided at the lunch-table that noon, with the stately Hawkins behind her chair and the stately portraits looking down from the walls.

She looked now as if she might be the original of one of these old portraits herself, as she sat there in the high-backed chair, with the griffins carved on its teakwood frame. Her gray gown trailed around her in graceful folds. There was a soft fall of lace at wrists and throat, and her white hair had a sheen like silver against the pink brocade with which the chair was upholstered.

With a smile which seemed to take Betty straight into her confidence, she held out her hand and drew her to a seat beside her. An old-fashioned silver tea-service stood on a table at her elbow, and when the maid had brought hot water, she busied herself in filling a cup for Betty.

"There!" she said, as she passed it to her. "There's nothing like a cozy chat over a cup of tea for warming acquaintances into friends."

Betty wondered, as she took a proffered slice of lemon, if Madam began all her interviews in this way, and if she was to hear the same little sermon about the crest on the ancestral teacups that Kitty had heard. It certainly was an interesting crest. She lifted the fragile bit of china for a closer survey. A mailed arm, rising out of a heart, clasped a spear in its hand, and under it ran the motto, "I keep tryst."

But Madam's conversation led far away from the crest and its lesson. At first it was about a quaint old English inn, where is served delicious toasted scones with five o'clock tea. When she mentioned that, it was as if they had discovered a mutual friend, for Betty cried out joyfully that she had been there, and had spent a long rainy afternoon in one of its rooms, where Scott had written many chapters of "Kenilworth." Betty remembered afterward that not a word was said about school and its obligations. It was of the Old Curiosity Shop they spoke, and the House of Seven Gables. Madam

promised to show her the autographs of Dickens and Hawthorne, which she had in her collection, and a pen which had once belonged to George Eliot.

Then Betty found that Madam had known Miss Alcott, and, before she realized what she was doing, she had thrown herself down impulsively on the stool at her feet, and, with both hands clasping the griffin's head on the arm of the high-backed chair, was asking a dozen eager questions about "Little Women" and the author who had been her first inspiration to write.

Nearly an hour later, when she went back to her room, it was with something singing in her heart that made her very solemn and very happy. It was the immortal music of the Choir Invisible. She had been in the unseen company of earth's best and noblest, and felt in her soul that some day she, too, would have a right to be counted in that chorus, having done something really great and worth while.

That evening after dinner Kitty bounced into the room where Allison sat talking with Lloyd and Betty during recreation hour.

"To-morrow night there's to be the Old Girls' Welcome to the New!" she cried. "Come on in, Juliet, and tell them about it."

Juliet thrust her head through the half-open door.

"Haven't time to stop," she answered, "but I'll tell this much. It's the first of the great social functions. Everybody wears her party clothes and a sweet smile. It's the first lesson of the year in How to attain Ease under New and Exacting Conditions. No matter how the seniors snub you later on, in order to teach you your proper place, you'll all be birds of a feather that one time, and flock together as peaceably as pet hens.

"Each new girl has an escort appointed by the entertaining committee, who sends her flowers and calls for her and sees that her programme is filled. So there are never any wallflowers the first night. No, Allison, it isn't a dance. The programmes are for progressive conversation. Somewhere in the background there's a piano playing waltzes and two-steps, and so forth, but you talk out the numbers instead of dancing them. Changing partners so often keeps you from getting bored, and strangers can tell who is talking to them, for there are the names on their programmes. You can refer to that when anybody comes up to claim you. I'm to take Lloyd, and Sybil Green is to take Kitty. I haven't found out the other assignments yet. I'll let you know as soon as I do. Continued in our next."

With an airy wave of the hand she withdrew, leaving them to an animated discussion of what to wear.

"You must remember that this isn't the only time you're to appear in public, Katherine Walton," said Allison, severely, when Kitty proposed her best array. "There's to be a reception at the White House next week, and Friday night we're to go in to Washington to see Jefferson in 'Rip Van Winkle,' and there's to be a studio tea soon, and a recital, and all sorts of things. I saw the bulletin of the term's entertainments in the hall this evening."

"We'll never be seen at those things," insisted Kitty.

"We'll scarcely be a drop in the bucket. But to-morrow night, isn't the whole affair for us? We'll be the whole show. We'll be *it*, Allison, and 'it's my night to howl.' I intend to wear my rose-pink mull and a rosebud in my raving tresses, and carry the gorgeous spangled fan that the dear old admiral gave me in Manila. So there!"

"Then don't come near me," said Allison, with a warning shake of her head, "for I am going to wear my cerise crêpe de chine. It's lovely by itself, but by the side of anything the shade of your pink mull it's the most hideous, sickly colour you ever saw. I *wish* you'd wear that pale green dress, Kitty. You look sweet in that, and it goes so well with mine."

"But, my dear sister," laughed Kitty, "I don't expect to spend any time getting acquainted with *you*. I'll probably not be near you the whole evening. It's not expected that, just because we are from Kentucky, we have to pose as those two devoted creatures on the State seal, – stand around with our hands clasped, exclaiming 'United we stand, divided we fall!' to every one that comes up."

"Nevah mind, Allison," said Lloyd, laughing at Kitty's dramatic gestures and her sister's worried expression. "I'll play 'State seal' with you. I have a pale green almost the shade of Kitty's, and I'll wear the coral clasps and chains that were Papa Jack's mothah's. He gave them to me just before I left home. I'll show them to you."

She began to rummage through her trunk. Betty sat looking at the ceiling, trying to decide the momentous question of dress for herself. Finally she announced: "I'll just wear white, then I'll harmonize with everybody, and can run up to the first one of you I happen to see when I need a spark of courage. I know I'll be terribly embarrassed. It makes me cold right now to think of meeting so many strangers."

But Betty's courage needed no reinforcing next evening, when Maria Overlin, one of the seniors, took her in charge. The reception took place in what had been the ballroom, in the days when Warwick Hall was noted for its brilliant entertainments. Even its first hostess could not have received her distinguished guests with courtlier grace than Madam Chartley received her pupils, when, to the music of a stately minuet, they filed past her down the long line of teachers.

For once, each of the new girls, no matter how timid or inexperienced in social ways, tasted the sweets of popularity, and the four whom Juliet Lynn had dubbed the Kentucky quartette were overwhelmed with attentions.

Juliet, who had hoped to escort Betty, was glad that Lloyd had fallen to her lot when she saw what an admiring little court flocked around her wherever she turned. In the pale green dress, with its clasps of pink coral carved in the shape of tiny butterflies, she looked more princess-like than ever. She wore a bracelet of the coral butterflies also, and a slender circlet of them about her throat. They gave a soft pink flush to her cheeks.

No sooner had she passed the receiving line than she was surrounded by a group of white-gowned girls clamouring for an introduction and a place on her programme.

"Whose initials are these?" she whispered to Juliet presently when the card was all filled and there were still several girls asking to be allowed to write their names on it.

"Couldn't I give Miss Bartlett this line where there's nothing but G. M. scrawled on it?"

"Mercy, no!" exclaimed Juliet. "That's for Gabrielle Melville. It would never do for you two to miss each other to-night. I put them down for her, as she's to play later in the evening on the violin, you know, and I knew she'd never get here in time to do it herself. She always has such frantic times dressing. Just struggles into her things, never can find half her clothes, and what she does manage to fall into catches and rips in the struggle. Her hat is always over one ear, and her belts never make connection in the back, but she's so adorable that nobody minds her wild toilets. They laugh and say, 'Oh, it's just Gay.' That's her nickname, you know. Here's Emily Chapman coming to claim you. Emily, you can tell Lloyd some things about Gay, can't you?"

"I rather think so," laughed Emily. "We roomed together last year, and I got her again this term. It took a fight, though, for she's the most popular girl in school."

"Is she pretty?" asked Lloyd.

"We think so, don't we, Juliet? If she had any enemies, they might say that she has red hair and a pug nose. But that would be exaggerating. Her hair is that beautiful bronzy auburn that crinkles around her face and blows in her eyes till she always seems to be bringing a breeze with her."

"And her nose isn't pug exactly," chimed in Juliet. "There's just a darling, saucy little tip to it, that seems to suit her. She wouldn't be half as pretty with the approved Gibson girl kind, no matter how perfect it was."

"And her complexion is so lovely," Emily resumed, enthusiastically. "And her eyes are a jolly, laughing kind of brown, with an amber sparkle in them, except when she gets into one of her intense, serious moods. Then they are almost black, they're so deep and velvety. She's never twice in the same mood. Oh! There she comes now."

A side door opened, and a slim little thing all in white, with a violin under her arm and a distracted pucker on her face, hurried up to the piano. Nervously feeling her belt to make sure that she was presentable before turning her back on the audience, she whispered to the girl who was to play her accompaniments, and began tuning the violin. Then, tucking it under her chin as if she loved it, she listened an instant to the piano prelude, and drew her bow softly across the strings.

"Good!" whispered Emily. "It's that Mexican swallow song. She always has such a rapt expression on her face when she plays that. She makes me think of St. Cecilia. She's so earnest in all she does. If it's no more than making fudge, she throws her whole soul into it, just that way. She's as intense as if the fate of a nation depended on whatever she happens to be doing."

As Lloyd joined loudly in the applause which followed the performance, another girl came up to claim her attention. It was Myra Carr, the senior who had taken Allison under her wing.

"Doesn't Gay play splendidly?" she exclaimed, not knowing that she had been the previous topic of conversation. "We think she's a genius. She improvises little things sometimes in the twilight that are so sweet and sad they make you cry. Then she's unconventional enough to be a genius. She's always shocking people without meaning to, and so careless, she'd lose her head if nature hadn't attended to the fastenings."

"We all love her dearly, but we vowed the last time we went sightseeing that she should never go with us again unless she let us tie her up in a bag, so that nothing could drop out by the way. First she lost her hat. It blew off the trolley-car, one of those 'seeing Washington' affairs, you know. She had to go bareheaded all the rest of the way. Then she lost her pocketbook, and such a time as we had hunting that. The time before, she lost a locket that had been a family heirloom, and we missed our train and got caught in a shower looking for it."

"Where does she live?" asked Lloyd, watching the bright face that was making its way toward them across the crowded room.

"At Fort Sam Houston, down in San Antonio. Her father is an army officer at that post."

There was no time for further discussion, for Gabrielle was coming toward her with outstretched hand.

"This is Juliet's Princess, isn't it?" she asked, with a smile that captivated Lloyd at once, flashing over the whitest of little teeth. "You're getting all sorts of titles to-night. I heard a girl speak of you as a mermaid in that pale sea-green gown and corals, but I've come over here on purpose to call you the 'Little Colonel.' You don't know how much good it does me to hear a military title once more. Out at the fort it's all majors and captains and such things."

Then, dropping her grown-up society manner, she suddenly giggled, turning to include Emily in the conversation.

"Oh, girls, I had the worst time getting dressed this evening that I ever had in my life. When I unpacked my trunk yesterday, everything was so wrinkled that there was only one dress I could wear without having it pressed; this white one. So I laid it out, but, when I went to put it on to-night, I found that mamma had made a mistake in packing, and put in Lucy's skirt instead. Lucy is my older sister," she explained to Lloyd. "We each had a dotted Swiss this summer, made exactly alike, but Lucy is so much taller than I that her skirts trail on me. Just look how imposing!"

She swept across the floor and back to show the effect of her trail.

"Of course there was nothing to do at that late hour but pin it up in front and go ahead. I'm afraid every minute that I'll trip and fall all over myself, but I do feel so dignified when I feel my train sweeping along behind me. The pins keep falling out all around the belt, and I can't help stepping on the hem in front. I love trains," she added, switching hers forward with a grand air that was so childlike in its enjoyment that Lloyd felt impelled to hug her. "It gives you such a dressed-up, peacocky feeling."

Then she looked up in her most soulful, intense way, as if she were asking for important information. "Do you know whether it's true or not? *Does* a peacock stop strutting if it happens to see its feet? My old nurse told me that, and said that it shows that pride always goes before a fall. I

never was where they kept peacocks before I came to Warwick Hall, and I've spent hours watching Madam's to see if it is true. But they are always so busy strutting, I've never been able to catch them looking at their feet."

She glanced at her own feet as she spoke, then gasped and, covering her face with her hands, sank limply into a chair in the corner behind her.

"What's the matter?" cried Juliet, alarmed by the sudden change.

"Look! Oh, just *look!*" was the hysterical answer, as she thrust out both feet, and sat pointing at them tragically, with fingers and thumbs of both hands outspread.

"No wonder they felt queer. I was so intent on getting my dress pinned up, and in rushing out in time to play, that I couldn't take time to analyze my feelings and discover the cause of the queeriness. Madeline blew in at a critical point to borrow a pin, and that threw me off, I suppose."

From under the white skirt protruded two feet as unlike as could well be imagined. One was cased in dainty white kid, the other in an old red felt bedroom slipper, edged with black fur.

"And it would have been all the same," sighed Gay, "if I had been going to an inaugural ball to hobnob with crowned heads. And I had hoped to make *such* a fine impression on the Little Colonel," she added, in a plaintive tone, with a childlike lifting of the face that Lloyd thought most charming.

If the mistake had been made by any other girl in the school, it would not have seemed half so ridiculous, but whatever Gay did was irresistibly funny. A laughing crowd gathered around her, as she sat with the red slipper and the white one stretched stiffly out in front of her, bewailing her fate.

"Anyhow," she remarked, "I'll always have the satisfaction of knowing that I put my best foot foremost, and if they had been alike I couldn't have done that. Now could I?" And the girls laughed again, because it was Gay who said it in her own inimitable way, and because the old felt slipper looked so ridiculous thrust out from under the dainty white gown. As others came crowding up to see what was causing so much merriment in that particular corner, Gay attempted to slip out and go to her room to correct her mistake. But Sybil Green, pushing through the outer ring, came up with Allison and Kitty.

"Gay," she began, "here are the girls that you especially wanted to meet: General Walton's daughters."

Gay's face flushed with pleasure, and, forgetting her errand, she impulsively stretched out a hand to each, and held them while she talked.

"Oh, I'm so glad to meet you!" she cried. "I wish that I had known that you girls were here yesterday before papa left. He is Major Melville, and he was such a friend of your father's. He was on that long Indian campaign with him in Arizona, and I've heard him talk of him by the hour. And last week" – here she lowered her voice so that only Allison and Kitty heard, and were thrilled by the sweet seriousness of it. "Last week he took me out to Arlington to carry a great wreath of laurel. When he'd laid it on the grave, he stood there with bared head, looking all around, and I heard him say, in a whisper, 'No one in all Arlington has won his laurels more bravely than you, my captain.' You see it was as a captain that papa knew him best. He would have been so pleased to have seen you girls."

Kitty squeezed the hand that still held hers and answered, warmly: "Oh, you dear, I hope we'll be as good friends as our fathers were!" And Allison answered, winking back the tears that had sprung to her eyes: "Thank you for telling us about the laurel. Mother will appreciate it so much."

While this conversation was going on at Lloyd's elbow, Betty came up to her on the other side. "Please see if my dress is all right in the back," she whispered. "It feels as if it were unfastened." Then, as Lloyd assured her it was properly buttoned, she added, in an undertone: "Have you met Maud Minor? She's one of the new girls."

Lloyd shook her head.

"Then I'm going to introduce you as soon as I can. She knows Malcolm MacIntyre."

"Knows Malcolm!" exclaimed Lloyd, in amazement. "Where on earth did she ever meet him?"

"At the seashore last summer. She can't talk about anything else. She thinks he is so handsome and has such beautiful manners and is so adorably romantic. Those are her very words. She has his picture. Evidently he has talked to her about you, for she's so curious to know you. She asked a string of questions that I thought were almost impertinent."

"Where is she?" asked Lloyd.

"There, that girl in white crossing the room with the fat one in lavender."

Lloyd gave a long, critical look, and then said, slowly: "She's the prettiest girl in the room, and she makes me think of something I've read, but I can't recall it."

"I know," said Betty, "but you'll laugh at me if I say Tennyson again. It's from 'Maud' —

"I kissed her slender hand.
She took the kiss sedately.
Maud is not seventeen,
But she is tall and stately."

"But she is not as sedate as she looks," added Betty, truthfully. "I'd like her better if she didn't gush. That's the only word that will express it. And it seemed queer for her to take me into her confidence the minute she was introduced. Right away she gave me to understand that she'd had a sort of an affair with Malcolm. She didn't say so in so many words, but she gave me the impression that he had been deeply interested in her, in a romantic way, you know."

Lloyd looked at Maud again, more critically this time, and with keener interest. Then her thoughts flew back to the churchyard stile where they had paused in their gathering of Christmas greens one winter day. For an instant she seemed to see the handsome boy looking down at her, begging a token of the Princess Winsome, and saying, in a low tone, "I'll be whatever you want me to be, Lloyd."

Juliet's voice broke in on her reverie. "Miss Sherman, allow me to present Miss Minor."

Maud was slightly taller than Lloyd, but it was not her extra inches alone which seemed to give her the air of looking down on every one. It was her patronizing manner. Lloyd resented it. Instinctively she drew herself up and responded somewhat haughtily.

"My dear, I've been simply *dying* to meet you," began Maud, effusively. "Ever since I found out that you were the girl Malcolm MacIntyre used to be so fond of."

Lloyd responded coldly, certain that Malcolm had not discussed their friendship in a way to warrant this outburst from a stranger.

"Do you know his brothah Keith, too?" she asked. "We're devoted to both the boys. You might say we grew up togethah, for they visited in the Valley so much. We've been playmates since we were babies. You must meet the Walton girls. They are Malcolm's cousins, you know."

Before Maud realized how it came about, Lloyd had graciously turned her over to Allison and Kitty, and made her escape with burning cheeks and a resentful feeling. Maud's words kept repeating themselves: "So adorably romantic. The girl Malcolm *used to be* so fond of!" They made her vaguely uncomfortable. She wondered why.

For another hour she went on making acquaintances and adding to her store of information about Warwick Hall. They couldn't have chafing-dishes in their rooms, one frivolous sophomore told her. The insurance companies objected after one girl spilled a bottle of alcohol and set fire to the curtains. But once a week those who pined for candy could make it over the gas-stove in the Domestic Science kitchen. Those who were too lazy to make it could buy it Monday afternoons from Mammy Easter, an old coloured woman who lived in a cabin on the place. She was famous for her pralines, the sophomore declared. "We have jolly charades and impromptu tableaux up in the gymnasium sometimes. Oh, school at the Hall is one grand lark!"

"Don't you believe it," said the spectacled junior who monopolized Lloyd next. "It's a hard dig to keep up to the mark they set here. But I must say it is an agreeable kind of a dig," she added.

"It's good just to wake up in the morning and know there's going to be another whole day of it. The classes are so interesting, and the teachers so interested in us, that they bring out the very best in everybody. Even a grasshopper would have its ambition aroused if it stayed in this atmosphere long."

She peered at Lloyd through her glasses as if to satisfy herself that she would be understood, and then added, confidentially: "I can fairly feel myself grow here. I feel the way I imagine the morning-glories do when they find themselves climbing up the trellis. They just stretch out their hands and everything helps them up, – the sun and the soil, the wind and the dew. And here at Warwick Hall there's so much to help. Even the little glimpses we get over the garden wall into the outside world of Washington, with its politics and great men. But those two people over there help me most of all." She nodded toward Madam Chartley and Miss Chilton, the teacher of English, who were now seated together on a sofa near the door.

"When I look at them I feel that the morning-glory vine must climb just as high as it possibly can, and shake out a wealth of bells in return for all that has been given toward its growth. Don't you?"

"Yes," answered Lloyd, slightly embarrassed by the soulful gaze turned on her through the spectacles. "Betty would enjoy knowing you," she exclaimed. "She is always saying and writing such things."

"Oh, I thought that you were the one that writes," answered the junior. "Aren't you the one the freshmen are going to elect class editor for their page of the college paper?"

"No, indeed!" protested Lloyd, laughing at the idea. "Come across the room with me and I'll find Betty for you."

"There won't be time to-night," responded the junior, "for there goes the music that means good night. They always play 'America' as a signal that it's time to go."

"What makes you so quiet?" asked Betty, a little later, as they slowly undressed. She had chattered along, commenting on the events of the evening, ever since they came to their room, but Lloyd had seemed remarkably unresponsive.

"Oh, nothing," yawned Lloyd. "I was just thinking of that fairy-tale of the three weavers. I'll turn out the light."

As she reached up to press the electric button, she thought again, for the twentieth time, "I wonder what it was that Malcolm told Maud Minor." Then she nestled down among the pillows, saying, sleepily, to herself: "Anyway, I'm mighty glad that I nevah gave him that curl he begged for."

CHAPTER III

AN EXCURSION

It was a Sabbath afternoon in October, sunny and still, with a purple haze resting on the distant woodlands across the river. A warm odour of ripe apples floated across the old peach orchard, for a few rare pippin-trees stood in its midst, flaunting the last of their fruitage from gnarled limbs, or hiding it in the sear grass underneath.

Here and there groups of bareheaded girls wandered in the sun-flecked shade, exchanging confidences and stooping now and then to pounce joyfully upon some apple that had hitherto evaded discovery. Betty, who had been reading aloud for nearly an hour to a little group under one of the largest trees, closed her book with a yawn. Lloyd and Kitty leaned lazily back against the mossy trunk, and Allison, with her arms around her knees, gazed dreamily across the river. The only one who did not seem to have fallen under the drowsy spell of the Indian summer afternoon was Gay. Up in the tree above them, she lay stretched out along a limb, peering down through the leaves like a saucy squirrel.

"What a Sleepy Hollow tale that was!" she exclaimed. "It just suits the day, but it has hypnotized all of you. Do wake up and be sociable."

She began breaking off bits of twigs and dropping them down on the heads below. One struck Lloyd's ear, and she brushed it off impatiently, thinking it was a bug. Gay laughed and began teasingly:

"There was a young maiden named Lloyd,
Whom reptiles always annoyed.
An innocent worm would cause her to squirm,
And cloyed – toyed – employed —

I'm stuck, Betty. Come to the rescue with a rhyme."

"So with germicide she's overjoyed," supplied Betty, promptly.

"That's all right," said Kitty, waking up. "Let's each make a Limerick. Five minutes is the limit, and the one that hasn't his little verse ready when the time is up will have to answer truthfully any question the others agree to ask."

"No," objected Lloyd. "I'd be suah to be it. I can make the rhymes, but the lines limp too dreadfully for any use."

"We won't count that," promised Kitty, looking at her chatelaine watch. "Now, one, two, three! Fire away!"

There was silence for a little space, broken only by the soft cooing of a far-away dove. Then Betty looked up with a satisfied smile. The anxious pucker smoothed out of Lloyd's forehead, and Allison nodded her readiness.

"Lloyd first," called Kitty, looking at her watch again.

A mischievous smile brought the dimples to the Little Colonel's face as she began:

"There's a girl in our school called Kitty,
Evidently not from the city.
With screeches and squawkin's
She upset the nerves of poah old Hawkins.
Oh, her behaviour was not at all pretty."

A burst of laughter greeted Lloyd's attempt at verse-making, for the subject which she had chosen recalled one of Kitty's outbreaks the first week of school, when the temptation to upset

Hawkins's dignity was more than she could resist. No one of them who had seen Hawkins's wild exit from the linen closet the night she hid on the top shelf, and raised his hair with her blood-curdling moans and spectral warnings (having blown out his candle from above), could think of the occurrence without laughing till the tears came to their eyes.

"Now, Allison," said Kitty, when the final giggle had died away. "It's your turn." Allison referred to the lines she had scribbled on the back of a magazine:

"There is a young maiden, they say,
Who grows more beloved every day.
When we talk or we ramble, there's always a scramble
To be next to the maid who is *Gay*."

"Whew! Thanks awfully!" came the embarrassed exclamation from the boughs above, and Betty cried, in surprise: "Why, I wrote about her, too. I said:

"Like the bow on the strings when she plays,
So she crosses with music our days.
Our hearts doth she tune to the gladness of June,
And the smile that brings sunshine is *Gay's*."

"My dear, that's no Limerick, that's poetry!" exclaimed Kitty, and Gay called down: "It's awfully nice of you, girls, but please change the subject. I'm so covered with confusion that I'm about to fall off this limb."

"Well, here's something mean enough to brace you up," answered Kitty. "It's about Maud Minor. It's hateful of me to write it, but I happened to see her going down the terrace steps and it just popped into my head:

"There is a young lady named Maud,
Whose manners are overmuch thawed.
She'll beat an oil-well. When they'd gushed for a spell
It would take a back seat and applaud."

"What's the matter, Kitty?" asked Betty, "I thought you admired her immensely."

"I did that first week, but it's just as I say. She gushes over me so, simply because I am Malcolm's cousin. I know very well that I am not the dearest, cutest, brightest, most beautiful and angelic being in the universe, and she isn't sincere when she insists that I am. She overdoes it, and is so effusive that I want to run whenever she comes near me. I wish she wasn't going on the excursion to-morrow."

"She doesn't worry me," said Gay. "I meet her on her own ground and fire back her own adjectives at her, doubled and twisted. She has let me alone for some time."

The discussion of Maud led their thoughts away from Gay's Limerick, and Kitty forgot to ask for it. They sat in silence again, and the plaintive calling of the dove sounded several times before any one spoke.

"It's so sweet and peaceful here," said Betty, softly. "It makes me think of Lloydsboro Valley. I could shut my eyes and almost believe I was back in the old Seminary orchard."

"I'm glad we're not," said Allison. "For then we'd miss to-morrow's excursion. And I like having our holiday on Monday instead of Saturday, as we did there."

"What excursion are you talking about?" asked Gay, lazily swinging her foot over the limb.

Betty explained. "We're going to see some rare old books and illuminated manuscripts. Miss Chilton has a friend in Washington who has one of the finest private collections in the country, and

she offered to take any of the freshman class who cared to go. Ten of us have accepted the invitation. We're going to the Congressional Library in the morning, take lunch at some restaurant, and then call on this lady early in the afternoon. It will be the only chance to see them, as she is going abroad very soon, and the house will be closed for the winter."

"There are other things in the collection besides books," said Allison "Some queer old musical instruments, – a harpsichord and a lute, and an old violin worth its weight in gold. Some of the most noted violinists in the world have played on it."

"Oh, I know!" cried Gay, raising herself to a sitting position and throwing away the core of the apple she had been eating. "That's the excursion I missed last year when I sprained my ankle. I never was so disappointed in my life. I'm going right now to ask Miss Chilton to take me, too. I'm wild to get my fingers on that violin."

Swinging lightly down from the limb to the ground, she twisted around like a contortionist in a vain attempt to see her back.

"There!" she exclaimed, feeling her belt with a sigh of relief. "For a wonder there's nothing torn or busted this trip. I must be reforming Girls, what do you think! I haven't lost a single thing for a whole week."

"Don't brag," warned Lloyd. "Mom Beck would say you'd bettah scratch on wood if you don't want yoah luck to change."

Gay shrugged her shoulders at the superstition, but she reached over and lightly scratched the pencil thrust through Betty's curly hair.

"There goes the first bell for vespers," said Kitty, as they strolled slowly back toward the Hall, five abreast and arm in arm. With one accord they began to hum the hymn with which the service always opened, – "Day is dying in the west."

"It's going to be a fair day to-morrow," prophesied Gay, pausing an instant on the chapel steps. "There's Miss Chilton. I'll run over and ask her now."

"It's all right," she whispered several minutes later, when she slipped into the seat next Lloyd. "I can go. It'll be the greatest kind of a lark."

As Sybil Green passed through the hall next morning, where the excursionists were assembling, Gay stopped her and began slowly revolving on her heels. "Now view me with a critic's eye," she commanded. "Gaze on me from chapeau to shoe sole, and bear witness that I am properly girded up for the occasion. See how severely neat and plain I am. See how beautifully my belts make connection in the back. Three big, stout safety-pins will surely keep my skirt and shirt-waist together till nightfall, and there's not a thing about me that I can possibly lose."

She was still turning around and around. "Not a watch, ring, pin, or bangle! Not even a pocketbook. Miss Chilton is carrying my car-fare, and my handkerchief is up my sleeve."

"You might lose your balance or your presence of mind," laughed Sybil. "You'll have to watch her, girls. How spick and span you all look," she added, as they trooped past, behind Miss Chilton, most of them in freshly laundered shirt-waist suits, for the Indian summer day was as warm and sunny as June.

"It would be just about Gay's luck to run into a watering-cart or lean up against a freshly painted door, in that pretty pongee suit," she thought, watching them out of sight.

But for once Gay's lucky star was in the ascendant. The trip to the library left her without spot or wrinkle, and as she followed Miss Chilton into the restaurant she could not help smiling at her reflection in the mirror. It looked so trim and neat.

The restaurant was crowded. The waiters rushed back and forth, balancing their great trays on their finger-tips in a reckless way that made Gay dodge every time they passed.

"Oh, you needn't laugh," she exclaimed, when some one jokingly called attention to her. "I'm born to trouble; and I have a feeling that something is going to happen before the day is over."

Something did happen almost immediately, but not to Gay. Two of the pompous coloured men collided just as they were passing Miss Chilton's table. One tray dropped to the floor with a tremendous crash of breaking dishes. The other was caught dexterously in mid-air, but not before its contents had turned a somersault and wrought ruin all around it. A bowl of tomato soup splashed over Lloyd's immaculate shirt-waist and ran in two long red streaks across the shoulders of her duck jacket, which she had hung on her chair-post. Her little gasp of dismay was followed by one from Maud Minor, whose dainty gray silk waist was spattered plentifully with coffee.

There was a profusion of apologies from the waiters and a momentary confusion as the wreck was cleared away. In the midst of it, Miss Chilton was pleased and gratified to hear a low-pitched voice at the table behind her say: "Those are Warwick Hall girls. I recognize their chaperon, but I would have known them anywhere from the ladylike way they treated the affair. So quiet and self-controlled, not a bit of fuss or excitement, and it probably means that the day's outing will be spoiled for two of them."

The girls proceeded with their dessert, but Miss Chilton sat considering.

"If you girls were only familiar with the city," she said at last, looking at her watch, "I could let you go to some shop and get new shirt-waists, and you could meet me at my friend's afterward. But even if you could find your way to the shop, I would be afraid to risk your finding her house. You would have to change cars and walk a block after leaving the last one. I must keep my engagement with her promptly, for she is an extremely busy woman, and has granted this view of her library as a personal favour to me."

"Do let me take them, Miss Chilton," urged Gay, eagerly. "I'm the only old girl in the crowd. I learned my way all about town during last Christmas vacation. We could meet you in time to see part of the things. All I care for is that violin. *Please* say yes. I'll be the strictest, most dignified chaperon you ever heard of."

Miss Chilton laughed at the expression of ferocity which Gay's face suddenly assumed to convince her that she could play the part she begged for.

"Really that seems to be the only way out of the difficulty," she answered. "I'll give you a note to the department store which Madam Chartley always patronizes, so that you can have your purchases charged."

"What if we can't find anything to fit," suggested Maud, "and it should take such a long time to alter them that we'd be too late to meet you?"

Miss Chilton considered again. "It's almost preposterous to imagine that, but it is always well to provide for every emergency. If anything unforeseen should happen to delay you, or you can't find the proper things to make yourselves presentable, just go to the station and take the first car back to the school. I'll inquire of the ticket agent, and if you've left a card saying 'gone on,' I'll know that you are safe. If you've left no word, I'll put these girls on the car for home, and come back and institute a search for you."

While the others busied themselves with finger-bowls, she wrote a hasty note on a leaf torn from her memorandum book, which she gave to Maud. Then she handed a card to Gay.

"You are the pilot, so here is my friend's address on this card. I've marked the line of cars you're to take, and the avenue where you change."

"Better let Lloyd take it," suggested Kitty. But, with a saucy grimace, Gay folded it and slipped it under her belt.

"There!" she said, fastening it with a big black pin she borrowed from Allison. "I've woven that pin in and out, first in the ribbon and then through the card, till it's as tight as if it had grown there."

"Can't you take us down an alley?" asked Lloyd. "It mawtifies me dreadfully to have to go down the street looking like this."

"The car-line that passes this door goes directly to the department store," answered Gay. "It's only a few blocks away, but we'll take it. That tomato soup on you certainly does look gory."

Maud had taken the veil from her hat and thrown it over her shoulders in a way to hide the coffee stains. "Never mind," she said, carelessly, as they left the restaurant. "Just hold your head up and sail along with your most princess-like air, and people will be so busy admiring you that they won't have time to look at your soupy waist."

"Ugh! It smells so greasy and horrid," sniffed the Little Colonel, ignoring Maud's remark. "It's just like dishwatah and bacon rinds. I want to get away from it as soon as possible."

"Misses' white shirt-waists?" repeated the saleswoman in the big department store, when they reached it a few minutes later. "Certainly. Here is something pretty. The newest fall goods."

She led them to a counter piled high with boxes, and they made a hasty selection. Some alteration was needed in the collar of the one Lloyd chose, and in the sleeves of Maud's. While they waited in the fitting-room, turning over some back numbers of fashion-plates and magazines, Gay amused herself by wandering around the millinery department, trying on hats. Presently she found one so becoming that she ran back to them, delighted.

"It isn't once in a thousand years that I find a picture hat that looks well with my pug nose!" she cried. "But gaze on this!"

She revolved slowly before them, so radiantly pleased over her discovery that she looked unusually pretty. Both girls exclaimed over its becomingness. Then Lloyd's gaze wandered from the airy structure of chiffon and flowers down Gay's back to her waist-line.

"Mercy, child!" she exclaimed. "You've lost your belt. Every one of those three safety-pins is showing, and they each look a foot long!"

Gay's hand flew wildly to the back of her dress, but she felt in vain for a belt under which to hide the pins. She turned toward them with a hopeless drooping of the shoulders.

"How did I lose it?" she demanded, helplessly. "It had the safest, strongest kind of a clasp. When do you suppose I did it, and where? I must have been a sight parading the street this way like an animated pincushion."

She passed her hand over the obtrusive pins again. "I certainly had it on when we left the restaurant. Yes, and after we got on the car to come here, for I remember just after you paid the fare I ran my fingers down inside of it to make sure that Miss Chilton's card was still safely pinned to it."

Then she rolled up her eyes and fell limply back against the wall.

"Girls!" she exclaimed, in a despairing voice, "the card is lost with it, too. I've no more idea than the man in the moon where Miss Chilton's friend lives, or what her name is, or what car-line to take to get there. Do either of you remember hearing her say anything that would throw any light on the subject?"

Neither Lloyd nor Maud could remember, and the three stood staring at each other with startled faces.

"Maybe you dropped your belt coming up in the elevator," suggested Maud. "You might inquire. As soon as we get our clothes on, we'll help you hunt."

Gay flew to lay aside the picture hat for her own, and, with her hands clutching her dress to hide the unsightly safety-pins, started on her search through the store.

"We came straight past the ribbon counter and the embroideries to the silks, and then we turned here and took the elevator," she said to herself, retracing her steps. But inquiries of the elevator boy and every clerk along the line failed to elicit any information about the lost belt.

"No, it was only an ordinary belt that no one would look at the second time," she explained to those who asked for a description. "Just dark blue ribbon with a plain oxidized silver clasp. But there was an address pinned to it that is very important for me to find."

The floor-walker obligingly joined in the search, going to the door and scanning the pavement and the street-crossing at which they had left the car, but to no purpose.

"I can buy a new belt and have it charged," she said to Lloyd, when she came back to report, "but there is no way to get the lost address. If I could only remember the name, I could look for it in the directory, but I never heard it. Miss Chilton always spoke of the lady as 'my friend.'"

"I heard her speak it once," said Lloyd, "but I can't remembah it now."

"Go over the alphabet," suggested Maud. "Say all the names you can think of beginning with A and then B, and so on. Maybe you will stumble across one that you recognize as the right one."

Lloyd shook her head. "No, it was an unusual name, a long foreign-sounding one. I wondahed at the time how she could trip it off her tongue so easily."

"Then we're lost! Hopelessly, helplessly undone!" moaned Gay. "All our lovely outing spoiled! You won't get to see the books, nor I the violin. I know you are hating me horribly. There's nothing to do but go back to Warwick Hall, and leave a note with the ticket agent for Miss Chilton."

The tears stood in her eyes, and she looked so broken-hearted that Lloyd put her arms around her, insisting that it didn't make a mite of difference to her. That she didn't care much for the old books, anyhow, and for her not to grieve about it another minute.

Maud's face darkened as she listened. Presently she said: "I don't care particularly about the books, either, but I don't see any use of our losing the entire holiday. You know your way about the city, Gay; I have some car-fare in my purse, and so has Lloyd. We can go larking by ourselves."

The dressmaker came back with Maud's waist. She put it on, and Gay went for her belt. While Lloyd was still waiting for her waist, Maud sauntered out of the fitting-room, and asked permission to use the telephone. She was still using it when Gay joined them.

"Wait a minute," Maud called to her invisible auditor, and, still holding the receiver, turned toward the girls.

"Such grand luck!" she exclaimed, in a low tone. "I just happened to think of a young fellow I know here in town – Charlie Downs. He is always ready for anything going, and, when I telephoned him the predicament we are in, he said right away he would meet us down here and take us all to the matinée."

"Charlie Downs," echoed Gay. "I never heard of him."

"That doesn't make any difference," Maud answered, hurriedly. Then, in a still lower tone, with her back to the telephone: "He's all right. He's a sort of a distant relative of mine, – that is, his cousin married into our family. I can vouch for Charlie. He's a young medical student, and he's in old Doctor Spencer's office. Everybody knows Doctor Spencer, one of the finest specialists in the country."

She turned toward the telephone again, but Gay stopped her. "It's out of the question, Maud, for us to accept such an invitation. It's kind of him to ask us, but you're in my charge, and I'll have to take the responsibility of refusing."

"Well, I never heard the like of that!" said Maud, angrily, looking down on Gay in such a scornful, disgusted way that Lloyd would have laughed had the situation not been so tragic. Gay, trying to be commanding, reminded her of an anxious little hen, ruffling its feathers because the obstinate duckling in its brood refused to come out of the water.

"Madam Chartley wouldn't like it," urged Gay.

"Then she should have made rules to that effect. You know there's not a single one that would stand in the way of our doing this."

"Yes, there is. It's an unwritten one, but it's the one law of the Hall that Madam expects every one to live up to."

"May I ask what?" Maud's tone was freezingly polite.

"The motto under the crest. It's on everything you know, the old earl's teacups, the stationery, and everything – 'Keep tryst.'"

"Fiddlesticks for the old earl's teacups!" said Maud, shrugging her shoulders. "It's unreasonable to expect us to keep tryst with Miss Chilton now."

"Not that," said Gay, ready to cry. "We're to keep tryst with what she expects of us. She expects us to do the right thing under all circumstances, and you know the right thing now is to go home. We were recognized at the restaurant as Warwick Hall girls, and we might be again at the matinée. What would people think of the school if they saw three of the girls there with a strange young man without a chaperon?"

"You're the chaperon. If you'd do to take us shopping, you'd do for that."

"Oh, Maud, don't be unreasonable," urged Gay. "It's entirely different. Don't be offended, please, but we can't go. It's simply out of the question."

"Indeed it isn't," answered Maud, turning again to the telephone. "Go home if you want to, but Lloyd and I will do as we please. I'll accept for us."

This time Lloyd stopped her. "Wait! Let's telephone out to the Hall and ask Madam."

Maud shrugged her shoulders. "You know very well she'd say no if you asked her beforehand." Then the two heard one side of her conversation over the telephone.

"Hello, Charlie! Sorry to keep you waiting so long."

"The girls are afraid to go."

"What's that?"

"I don't suppose so."

"I'm perfectly willing. I'll ask them."

Then turning again, with the receiver in her hand: "He says that the matinée will probably be over before the second train out to the Hall, and, if it isn't, we can leave a little earlier and be at the station before Miss Chilton gets there, and she need never know but what we've just been streetcar riding, as we first planned."

"Then that settles it!" exclaimed Lloyd. "If he said that, I wouldn't go with him for anything in the world."

"Why?" demanded Maud. Her eyes flashed angrily.

"Because – because," stammered Lloyd. "Well, it'll make you mad, but I can't help it. Papa Jack said one time that an honourable man would never ask me to do anything clandestine. And it would be sneaking to do as he proposes."

Maud was white with rage, and the hand that held the receiver trembled. "Have the goodness to keep your insulting remarks to yourself in the future, Miss Sherman."

"Please don't go," begged Gay. "I feel so responsible for getting you home safely, and it *would* be sneaking, you know, to pretend we'd been simply trolley-riding when we'd been off with him."

"You're nasty little cats to say such things!" stormed Maud. "I don't want to have anything more to do with either of you. Go on home and leave me alone. Hello! Hello, Charlie!"

They heard her make an engagement to meet him at the drug-store on the next corner. Then she sailed out of the store past them, without a glance in their direction. Gay began fumbling up her sleeve for her handkerchief. The tears were gathering too fast to be winked back.

"It's all my fault," she sobbed. "Oh, if I hadn't lost that unlucky belt. To think that I begged to be a chaperon, and then wasn't fit to be trusted."

Lloyd tried vainly to comfort her. A little later two disconsolate-looking girls took the first afternoon train out to Warwick Hall, and stole up to Lloyd's room. As Betty was with Miss Chilton, no one knew of their arrival, and they spent several uncomfortable hours agonizing over the question of what they should say when they were called to account. They decided at last that they would give no more information about Maud than that a distant relative had called for her.

At five o'clock, Miss Chilton reached the ticket-office with her little brood, and found Lloyd's card with the words "gone on" scribbled in one corner. Lloyd and Gay, watching at the window for their arrival, saw with sinking hearts that Maud was not with them. They hoped that she would come on the same train, and would be forced to make her own explanations. But they were not called upon

to explain her disappearance. Miss Chilton, almost distracted with an attack of neuralgic headache, went to her room immediately, and sent down word that she would not appear at dinner.

"She'll surely come on the next train," Gay whispered to Lloyd, but the whistle sounded at the station, and they watched the clock in vain. Ample time passed for one to have walked the distance twice from the station to the Hall, but no one came.

It was half-past six when they filed down to dinner. The halls were lighted, and all the chandeliers in the great dining-room glowed.

As they passed the window on the stair-landing, Lloyd pressed her face against the pane and peered out into the darkness. Gay, just behind her, paused and peered also.

"What do you suppose has happened?" she whispered. "It's as dark as a pocket, and Maud hasn't come yet."

CHAPTER IV

"KEEP TRYST"

Lloyd and Betty were starting to undress when there was a light tap at the door, and Gay's head appeared. In response to their eager call, she came in, and, shutting the door behind her, stood with her back against it.

"No, I can't sit down," she answered. "It's too late to stop. I only ran in to tell you that Maud got home about five minutes ago. 'Charlie' came with her as far as the door and Madam has just sent for her to demand an explanation. She told her roommate that she knew she was in for a scolding, and that, as one might as well be killed for a sheep as a lamb, she made her good time last as long as she could. After the matinée they had a little supper at some roof-garden or café or something of the kind, where there was a band concert. Then he brought her out on the car, and they strolled along the river road home. The moon was just beginning to come up. She's had a beautiful time, and thinks she has done something awfully cute, but she'll think differently by the time Madam is through with her."

"Will she be very terrible?" asked Lloyd, pausing with brush in hand.

"I don't know," answered Gay. "Nothing like this has happened since I have been at the Hall, but I've heard her say that this is not a reform school, and girls who have to be punished and scolded are not wanted here. If they can't measure up to the standard of good behaviour, they can't stay. As long as this is the first offence, she'll probably be given another trial, but I'd not care to be in her shoes when Madam calls her to judgment."

No one ever knew what passed between the two in the up-stairs office, but Maud sailed down to breakfast next morning as if nothing had happened. The only difference in her manner was when Lloyd and Gay took their places opposite her at the table. They glanced across with the usual good morning, but she looked past them as if she neither saw nor heard.

"Cut dead!" whispered Lloyd. Gay giggled, as she unfolded her napkin. "I'm very sure she has no cause to be angry with us. We are the ones who ought to act offended."

Soon after breakfast they were called into Miss Chilton's room, but to their great relief found that she already knew what had happened, and that they were to be questioned only about their own part in the affair. So presently Gay passed out to her Latin recitation, and Lloyd wandered around the room, waiting for the literature class to assemble.

Miss Chilton's room was the most attractive one in the Hall. It looked more like a cheerful library than a schoolroom. Low book-shelves lined the walls, with here and there a fine bust in bronze or Carrara marble. Pictures from many lands added interest, and the wicker chairs, instead of being arranged in stiff rows, stood invitingly about, as if in a private parlour. There were always violets on Miss Chilton's desk, and ferns and palms in the sunny south windows. The recitations were carried on in such a delightfully informal way that the girls looked forward to this hour as one of the pleasantest of the day.

This morning, to their surprise, instead of questioning them about the topic they had studied, Romance of the Middle Ages, she announced that she had a story which Madam Chartley had requested her to read to them, and she wished such close attention paid to it that afterward each one could write it from memory for the next day's lesson.

"I have a reason for wishing to impress this little tale indelibly on your minds," she said, "so I shall offer this inducement for concentrating your attention upon it: five credits to each one who can hand in a full synopsis of the story, and ten to the one who can reproduce it most literally and fully."

There was a slight flutter of expectancy as the class settled itself to listen, and, opening the little green and gold volume where a white ribbon kept the place, she began to read:

"Now there was a troubadour in the kingdom of Arthur, who, strolling through the land with only his minstrelsy to win him a way, found in every baron's hall and cotter's hut a ready welcome. And while the boar's head sputtered on the spit, or the ale sparkled in the shining tankards, he told such tales of joust and journey, and feats of brave knight errantry, that even the scullions left their kitchen tasks, and, creeping near, stood round the door with mouths agape to listen.

"Then with his harp-strings tuned to echoes of the wind on winter moors, he sang of death and valour on the field, of love and fealty in the hall, till those who listened forgot all save his singing and the noble knights whereof he sang.

"One winter night, as thus he carolled in a great earl's hall, a little page crept nearer to his bench beside the fire, and, with his blue eyes fixed in wonderment upon the graybeard's face, stood spellbound. Now Ederyn was the page's name, an orphan lad whose lineage no man knew, but that he came of gentle blood all eyes could see, although as vassal 'twas his lot to wait upon the great earl's squire.

"It was the Yule-tide, and the wassail-bowl passed round till boisterous mirth drowned oftentimes the minstrel's song, but Ederyn missed no word. Scarce knowing what he did, he crept so close he found himself with upturned face against the old man's knee.

"How now, thou flaxen-haired,' the minstrel said, with kindly smile. 'Dost like my song?'

"Oh, sire,' the youth made answer, 'methinks on such a wing the soul could well take flight to Paradise. But tell me, prithee, is it possible for such as *I* to gain the title of a knight? How doth one win such honours and acclaim and reach the high estate that thou dost laud?'

"The minstrel gazed a little space into the Yule log's flame, and stroked his long hoar beard. Then made he answer:

"Some win their spurs and earn the royal accolade because the blood of dragons stains their hands. From mighty combat with these terrors they come victorious to their king's reward. And some there be sore scarred with conquest of the giants that ever prey upon the borders of our fair domain. Some, who have gone on far crusades to alien lands, and there with heart of gold and iron hand have proved their fealty to the Crown.'

"Then Ederyn sighed, for well he knew his stripling form could never wage fierce combat with a dragon. His hands could never meet the brawny grip of giants. 'Is there no other way?' he faltered.

'I wot not,' was the answer. 'But take an old man's counsel. Forget thy dreams of glory, and be content to serve thy squire. For what hast such as thou to do with great ambitions? They'd prove but flames to burn away thy daily peace.'

"With that he turned to quaff the proffered bowl and add his voice to those whose mirth already shook the rafters. Nor had he any further speech with Ederyn. But afterward the pretty lad was often in his thoughts, and in his wanderings about the land he mused upon the question he had asked.

"Another twelvemonth sped its way, and once again the Yule log burned within the hall, and once again the troubadour knocked at the gate, all in the night and falling snow. And as before, with merry jests they led him in and made him welcome. And as before, was every mouth agape from squire's to scullion's, as he sang.

"Once more he sang of knights and ladies fair, of love and death and valour; and Ederyn, the page, crept nearer to him till the harp-strings ceased to thrill. With head upon his hands, he sat and sighed. Not even when the wassail-bowl was passed with mirth and laughter did he look up. And when the graybeard minstrel saw his grief, he thought upon his question of the Yule-tide gone.

"Ah, now, thou flaxen-haired,' he whispered in his ear. 'I bear thee tidings which should make thee sing for joy. There is a way for even such as thou to win the honours thou dost covet. I heard it in the royal court when last I sang there at the king's behest.'

"Then all aquiver with his eagerness did Ederyn kneel, with face alight, beside the minstrel's knee to hear.

"'Know this,' began the graybeard. "'Tis the king's desire to 'stablish round him at his court a chosen circle whose fidelity hath stood the utmost test. Not deeds of prowess are required of these true followers, with no great conquests doth he tax them, but they must prove themselves trustworthy, until on hand and heart it may be graven large, "*In all things faithful*."

"To Merlin, the enchanter, he hath left the choice, who by some strange spell I wot not of will send an eerie call through all the kingdom. And only those will hear who wake at dawn to listen in high places. And only those will heed who keep the compass needles of their souls true to the north star of a great ambition. The time of testing will be long, the summons many. To duty and to sorrow, to disappointment and defeat, thou may'st be called. No matter what the tryst, there is but one reply if thou wouldst win thy knighthood. Give heed and I will teach thee now that answer.'

"Then smiting on his harp, the minstrel sang, so softly under cover of the noise, that only Ederyn heard. Through all the song ran ever this refrain. It seemed a brooklet winding in and out through some fair meadow:

"'Tis the king's call. O list!
Thou heart and hand of mine, keep tryst —
Keep tryst or die!"

"Then Ederyn, with his hand upon his heart, made solemn oath. 'Awake at dawn and listening in high places will I await that call. With the compass needle of my soul true to the north star of a great ambition will I follow where it leads, and though through fire and flood it take me, I'll make but this reply:

"'Tis the king's call. O list!
Thou heart and hand of mine, keep tryst —
Keep tryst or die!"

"Pressing the old man's hand in gratitude (he could say no word for the strange fulness in his throat that well-nigh choked him), he rose from his knees and left the hall to muse on what had passed.

"That night he climbed into the tower, and, with his face turned to the east, kept vigil all alone. Below, the rioters waxed louder in their mirth. The knife was in the meat, the drink was in the horn. But he would not join their revels, lest morning find him sunk in sodden sleep, heavy with feasting and witless from wine.

"As gray dawn trailed across the hills, he started to his feet, for far away sounded the call for which he had been waiting. It was like the faint blowing of an elfin horn, but the words came clearly.

"Ederyn! Ederyn! One awaits thee at nightfall in the shade of the yew-tree by the abbey tower! Keep tryst!"

"Now the abbey tower was the space of forty furlongs from the domain of the earl, and full well Ederyn knew that only by especial favour of his squire could he gain leave of absence for this jaunt. So, from sunrise until dusk, he worked with will, to gain the wished-for leave. Never before did buckles shine as did the buckles of the squire entrusted to his polishing. Never did menial tasks cease sooner to be drudgery, because of the good-will with which he worked. And when the day was done, so well had every duty been performed, right willingly the squire did grant him grace, and forthwith Ederyn sped upon his mission.

"The way was long, and, when he reached the abbey tree, he fell a-trembling, for there a tall wraith stood within the shadows of the yew. No face had it that he could see, its hands no substance, but he met it bravely, saying: 'I am Ederyn, come to keep the king's tryst.'

"And then the spectre's voice replied: 'Well hast thou kept it, for 'tis known to me the many menial tasks thou didst perform ere thou couldst come upon thy quest. In token that we two have met, here is my pledge that thou may'st keep to show the king.'

"He felt a light touch on the bosom of his inner vestment, and suddenly he stood alone beside the gruesome abbey. Clammy with fear, he knew not why, he drew his mantle round him and sped home as one speeds in a fearsome dream. And that it was a dream he half-believed, when later, in the hall, he served at meat those gathered round the old earl's board. But when he sought his bed, and threw aside his outer garment, there on his coarse, rough shirt of hodden gray a pearl gleamed white above his heart, where the wraith's cold hand had touched him. It was the token to the king that he had answered faithfully his call.

"Again before the dawn he climbed into the tower, and, listening when the voices of the world were still, heard clear and sweet, like far-blown elfin horn, another summons.

"'Ederyn! Ederyn! One awaits thee at the midnight hour beside black Kilgore's water. Keep tryst!'

"Again to gain his squire's permission he toiled with double care. This time his task was counting all the spears and halberds, the battle-axes and the coats of mail that filled the earl's great armament. And o'er and o'er he counted, keeping careful tally with a bit of keel upon the iron-banded door, till the red lines that he marked there made his eyes ache and his head swim. At last the task was finished, and so well the squire praised him, and for his faithfulness again was fain to speed him on his way.

"It was a woful journey to the waters of Kilgore. Sleep weighed on Ederyn's eyelids, and haltingly he went the weary miles, footsore and worn. But midnight found him on the spot where one awaited him, another wraith-like envoy of the king, and it, too, left a touch upon his heart in token he had kept the tryst. And when he looked, another pearl gleamed there beside the first.

"So many a day went by, and Ederyn failed not in his homely tasks, but carried to his common round of duties all his might, as if they were great feats of prowess. Thus gained he liberty to keep the tryst with every messenger the king did send.

"Once he fared forth along a dangerous road that led he knew not where, and, when he found it crossed a loathly swamp all filled with slime and creeping things, fain would he have fled. But, pushing on for sake of his brave oath, although with fainting heart, he reached the goal at last. This time his token made him wonder much. For when he wakened from his swoon, a shining star lay on his heart above the pearls.

"Now it fell out the squire to whom this Ederyn was page was killed in conflict with a robber band, and Ederyn, for his faithfulness, was taken by the earl to fill that squire's place. Soon after that, they left the hall, and journeyed on a visit to a distant lord. 'Twas to the Castle of Content they came, where was a joyous garden. And now no menial tasks employed the new squire's time. Here was he free to wander all the day through vistas of the joyous garden, or loiter by the fountain in the courtyard and watch the maidens at their tasks, having fair speech with them among the flowers. And one there was among them, so lily-like in face, so gentle-voiced and fair, that Ederyn well-nigh forgot his oath, and felt full glad when for a space the king's call ceased to sound. And gladder was he still, when, later on, the earl's long visit done, he left young Ederyn behind to serve the great lord of the castle, for so the two friends had agreed, since Ederyn had pleased the old lord's fancy.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.