

Speed Nell

At Boarding School with the Tucker Twins



Nell Speed

**At Boarding School
with the Tucker Twins**

«Public Domain»

Speed N.

At Boarding School with the Tucker Twins / N. Speed — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

CHAPTER I.	5
CHAPTER II.	10
CHAPTER III.	14
CHAPTER IV.	18
CHAPTER V.	22
CHAPTER VI.	26
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	29

Speed Nell

At Boarding School with the Tucker Twins

CHAPTER I. LEAVING HOME

Leaving home to go to boarding school was bad enough, but leaving on a damp, cold morning before dawn seemed to be about the worst thing that could befall a girl of fifteen. I have noticed that whatever age you happen to be seems to be the age in which hardships are the most difficult to bear.

Anyhow, there I was, only fifteen, facing the necessity of saying early morning farewells, the first one of all to my comfortable bed, where I had slept off and on, principally on, for those fifteen years. And now I and my bed must part.

"Day done bus'ed, Miss Page. The doctor is stirrin' an' you'd better rise an' shine," and kind old Mammy Susan leaned yearningly over me. "I hate to wake up my lamb. I knowd dis day would come when dey'd take you 'way from me, but I nebber did think 'twould be 'fo' dawn wif all de long day 'head er me to be studyin' 'bout you. What yo' mammy goin' ter do 'thout you, chile?"

"Well, Mammy, we'll have to grin and bear it. I'll be home Christmas, and that isn't so far off." I jumped out of bed and pulled my hat-tub into the middle of the floor, ready for my daily cold sponge bath. Probably I had inherited the habit of the cold bath from my English grandfather along with the big hat-tub.

"Law, chile, can't you leave off punishin' yo'self jes' dis onct? You can't be to say dirty, an' dis here water is pow'ful cold."

Mammy and I had had this discussion about my cold bath every morning since I had been old enough to bathe myself. It was only after many battles that she had stopped sneaking warm water into my big can. That morning I let it pass, although the water was lukewarm.

"Y'ain't mad wif yo' ole Mammy, is yer, honey chile? Looks like I didn't have de heart to plunge my baby lamb into sho'nuf cold water on sech a dark chilly day, wif her a-leavin' an' all. 'Tain't ter say warm now. I jes' tempered it a leetle."

"That's all right, Mammy. 'God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb' and you, it seems, temper the water. They say there are lots of bathrooms at Gresham, and I can have the water as deep and cold as I want it."

"Well, don't you go drown yo'self in any er dem new-fashioned plumbin' tubs, an' fer de lan's sake, Miss Page, don't you let yo'self be drawed down inter none er dem was'e pipes," and Mammy Susan hurried off to bring in the all too early breakfast.

I dressed in my usual haste, putting on my nice blue traveling suit, ordered by mail from New York. It was quite long, well down to my shoe tops, and I felt very stylish and grown-up. I had never given any thought to my appearance, and no one else in my life seemed to have except Cousin Sue Lee and Mammy. I don't know just what Cousin Sue thought about me, but Mammy thought I was the most beautiful creature in the world and freely told me so. That morning as I put on the little black velvet toque, also purchased by mail, I looked at myself very critically in the mirror.

"Page Allison, are you pretty or not? I, for one, think not. You've got freckles on your nose and your mouth is simply huge. I'd like to say something about your eyes to take the conceit out of you, but they look so like Father's that I'd feel just like I was sassing him if I did. Anyhow, I'm glad your hair curls."

I had intended to sentimentalize over leaving my room and going out into the world, but I forgot all about it, and grabbing my ready-packed suitcase, also a mail order, I raced downstairs as Mammy Susan rang the breakfast bell.

Father was already in the dining-room, standing with his back to the little wood fire that Mammy had kindled to cheer us up with. Mammy always seemed to feel that when we were in any distress she must warm us and feed us whether we were cold and hungry or not. That morning we were neither, but we warmed by her fire and tried to choke down a great deal of her batter bread and roe herring to show her we appreciated her efforts.

Father looked up as I came in and for a moment regarded me in speechless amazement.

"Why, honey, you almost took my breath away! You look so grown-up in the new dress and hat. I didn't know you were so like your Mother, child," and he drew me to him and kissed me.

Father and I were as a rule not very demonstrative, but I clung to him for a moment and he held me close with his long, wiry arm.

"I wish I could take you to Gresham, honey, but old Mrs. Purdy is very low and she expects me to be with her at the end."

"That's all right, Father, don't you worry. There are certain to be other girls on the train who are going to Gresham and I'll butt in on them," I answered much more bravely than I felt. It did seem terribly lonely and forlorn to be going off and installing myself in boarding school. "I think it's fine that you can drive me over to Milton and put me on the train. Last night when I heard such a knocking at the door I was afraid I wouldn't see you in the morning because you'd be off on some life or death mission. What was the matter?"

"Oh, just Sally Winn's bread pills had given out and she was afraid she would not last through the night without them." Father always took me into his confidence about the bread pills he administered to the hypochondriacs.

"Do you know, Father, I believe if you charged midnight fees for those bread-pill and pink-well-water prescriptions, that Sally Winn and some more just like her would at least wait until morning to die."

"Oh, well, little daughter, Sally's got lots of good in her, and trying to die is the only excitement she has ever had in her whole life."

"Well, I won't begrudge it to her but I do hate to have your rest broken. Mammy," I said to Mammy Susan as she came in bearing a plate of red-hot flannel cakes, "don't you let Father be too late getting into his heavy underwear; and make a row every time he drives the colt until he will stop it from sheer weariness. And, Father, you make Mammy take her tonic; and don't let her go out in the wet dew waddling around after her ducks. She will catch her death."

"Susan, you hear Miss Page? Don't dare go in anything but dry dew. A few inches on her skirt and her curls tucked up under her bonnet make her think she's been taking care of us all these years instead of our taking care of her."

"Law, ain't she the spit of her Ma, Doc Allison? 'Cep fer yo' eyes. Ain't quite so tall; but she's young yit in spite er sich a long trailin' skirt. I's sorry to be de one to break de news, but de colt is out dere a-prancin' an' pawin', an' ef you's a-goin' you'd better go."

I had often pictured my going away and had always seen myself with difficulty restraining my tears; but now the time had come and the colt was cutting up, so I forgot to cry even when I told the dogs good-by; and just as I was giving Mammy Susan a last hug, and if tears were ever to come they must hurry, Father called to me to jump in, for he couldn't hold the colt another minute. And in I was and away and not crying at all but laughing, as we turned around on one wheel and went skimming down the drive.

The sun was all the way up at last and it wasn't a cold, damp day at all, but promised to be fair and clear. We had a six-mile drive to the station at Milton and the colt saw to it that we got there in plenty of time.

"Now, Page, be certain when you make the change at Richmond, if you have to ask any questions to ask them of a man in brass buttons."

"Yes, Father," and I smiled demurely, remembering how I always acted as courier when we went on our trips. Father, being the most absent-minded of men except where his profession was concerned, was not to be trusted with a railroad ticket.

Moving away on the train at last and waving good-by to his long, sad face, made me realize that the knot was cut. What a good father he was! How had we ever been able to make up our minds to this boarding school scheme? Nothing but the certainty that my education was a very one-sided affair and that I must broaden out a bit had determined Father; and as for me, I longed to know some girls.

I, who yearned for friends, was growing up without any. Fifteen years old and I had never had a real chum! I couldn't remember my mother, but I am sure she would have been my chum if she had lived. Mammy Susan did her best and so did Father, but a little girl wants another little girl. We had neighbors in plenty, but our county seemed to be composed of old maids and childless widows with a sparse sprinkling of gray-bearded men.

My mother's people were English and she had no relatives on this side of the water. Father belonged to a huge family, all of them great visitors, but so far as I knew, no children among them. All kinds of old maids: rich and poor, gentle and stern, soft and hard, big and little, they all managed once a year to pay their dear cousin, Dr. Allison, a visit at Bracken. I did not mind their coming. The soft ones seemed to have been little girls once, which was something. I used to think when I was quite a little thing that the hard ones must have been little boys, because of the statement in my Mother Goose that little boys were made of "Snaps and snails and puppy dog tails," – not nice soft collie pups' tails, either, but the tight, hard kind that grew on Cousin Park Garnett's pug.

Cousin Park Garnett was the rich, hard one whom I visited in Richmond the winter before. On her annual visitation to us she had remarked to my father:

"Cousin James, are Page's teeth sound? White teeth like that are, as a rule, not very strong. Her mouth is so enormous you had better look to it that her teeth are preserved," and she pursed up her own thin lips and put on her green persimmon expression.

"Perfectly sound, I think, Cousin Park. Of course her teeth must be preserved. As for her mouth being big, she'll grow up to it." But the outcome of the conversation was that I had to visit Cousin Park and take in the dentist. Think of the combination! Cousin Park took me to the Woman's Club in the afternoon where we listened to a lecture on "The Influence of Slavic Literature on the Culture of the Day." I was longing for the movies but managed to keep my big mouth shut and listen to the lecture, so I could tell Father about it and make him laugh. I stayed in Richmond three days and did not speak to one single soul under fifty. Even the dentist was old and tottering, so shaky that I was afraid he would fall into my mouth.

I saw loads of nice girls my own age skating on the sidewalk or walking arm-in-arm chattering away very happily, but Cousin Park didn't know who they were or did know and knew nothing to their credit. I was glad to get back to Bracken where there were no girls to know. There were at least the dogs at Bracken that I could talk to and race over the hills with. Even Cousin Park could not doubt their royal pedigrees.

It was dear little Cousin Sue Lee who persuaded Father and me both that I ought to go to boarding school. Cousin Sue was the best of all Father's female relatives. She was gentle and poor and had a job in the Congressional Library in Washington. With all her gentleness, she was sprightly and had plenty of what Father called "Lee spunk"; and with all her poverty, she wore the sweetest clothes and always brought me a lovely present every year and a nice shawl for Mammy or a black silk waist or something or other to delight the old woman's heart. Cousin Park never gave me anything, – not that I wanted her to. She would visit us two weeks and then present Mammy with a dime, using all the pomp and ceremony that a twenty-dollar gold piece would have warranted.

"Jimmy," Cousin Sue had said one day (she was the only one of all the cousins who called Father Jimmy), "I know you and Page will think I am an interfering old cat, but that child ought to go to school. I am not going to say a word about her education. She has an excellent education in some things. I have never seen a better read girl of her age. But the time may come when she will regret knowing no French, and she tells me she stopped arithmetic last year and never started algebra."

"Well, what good did algebra ever do you or me?" quizzed Father.

"Now, Jimmy, don't ask such foolish questions. It's just something all of us have to have. What good does your cravat do you? None; it's not even a thing of beauty, but you have to have one all the same."

"Oh, you women," laughed Father, "there's no downing you with argument."

"But as I was saying," continued Cousin Sue, "it is not dear little Page's education I am thinking of. It's something much more important. I want her to know a whole lot of girls and make a million friends. Why, I'm the only young friend the child has, and I am getting to be nearer fifty than forty."

And so we wrote for catalogues of schools and settled on Gresham. And Cousin Sue sent for a bolt of nainsook and yards and yards of lace and insertion and made up a whole lot of pretty underclothes for me.

"Girls need a lot of things in this day and generation," I heard her say to Father. "A great deal more than they used to when I was young. I am determined Page shall not go off to school looking like an 'Orphan Annie.'"

"But, Sue, your holiday won't do you any good if you spend it all sewing on the machine for my child," objected Father.

"We'll get in Miss Pinky Davis to help and in a week's time Page will have enough clothes to last her until she gets married, – that is, if she does not follow the traditions of the family and be an old maid."

It was a pretty well known fact that Cousin Sue had been a belle in her day, and even now when she came back to visit in the County several weather-beaten bachelor farmers would manage to have business at Bracken. I have always noticed that an old maid who is so from choice does not mind joking about it, but the others do.

A country doctor is seldom a bloated bond-holder; so Cousin Sue and I ordered, with great care and economy, the necessary things from New York: suit, hat, gloves, shoes, up-to-date shirt waists and plenty of middies, a raincoat, umbrella, etc.

"Now, my dear," said my sweet cousin, "you can be perfectly sure that your outfit is appropriate at least. Your clothes are stylish, well-made and suitable to your age. I have always felt that young people's clothes should be so right that they do not have to think about them."

As I sped away on the train to Richmond, I remembered what Cousin Sue had said before she went back to the grind in Washington, and had a feeling of intense satisfaction that my little trunk in the baggage car held such a complete wardrobe that I would not have to bother my head about it any more. Up to this summer, clothes had been my abomination, but I had at last waked up to the fact that it made some difference how I looked; and now I was going to look all right without any trouble to myself.

Train pulling into Richmond and still not a tear! "What is the matter with you, Page Allison? When girls leave their childhood's home in books they always weep suds. Don't you love your home as much as a stick of a heroine in a book?" I knew I loved my home, but somehow it was so delightful to be going somewhere and maybe getting to know a million people, as Cousin Sue said I must.

An hour's wait in Richmond! I rechecked my trunk, having purchased a ticket to Gresham; then I seated myself to possess my soul in patience until the 10.20 train should be called. The station in Richmond was familiar enough to me, as Father and I took some kind of a trip every year and always had to come through Richmond. As I have said before, I attended to tickets and baggage when I traveled with Father, so I was not in the least nervous over doing it now.

"I must keep my eye open for girls who are likely to be going to Gresham," I thought. "They'll all have on dark blue suits." That was a rule of the school, the dark blue suit. "There's one now! But can she be going?" And I thought of what Cousin Sue had said of "Orphan Annie."

The girl was seated opposite me in the waiting room. She had just come up the steps lugging a huge telescope, stretched to its greatest capacity, and looking nervously around had sunk on a bench. She searched feverishly through a shabby little hand-bag she was carrying and having satisfied herself that the ticket she had just purchased was safe she seemed to be trying to compose herself; but one could see with half an eye that she was nervous and frightened. She glanced uneasily at the clock every few minutes and constantly compared with it an Ingersoll watch which each time she had to search for in her bag. Several trains were called and every time she got up and made a rush for the gates, but each time came back to her seat opposite me.

Her blue dress was evidently homemade. The skirt dragged in the back and the jacket was too short for the prevailing fashion. Her hat had been worn as mourning and still had a little fold of crêpe around the edge, making a suitable setting for that tear-stained face. I couldn't tell whether she was pretty or not, her features were so swollen with weeping. Helen of Troy herself looked homely crying, I am sure. I noticed that her throat was milk white and that the thick plait of hair that hung down her back, mercifully concealing somewhat the crooked seams of the ill-made jacket, was as yellow as ripe wheat.

"Poor thing," I thought, "I believe I'll speak to her and see if I can cheer her up some." But my philanthropic resolution was forgotten because of the entrance into the waiting room and into my life, I am glad to add, of the three most delightful and original persons I have ever seen or known.

CHAPTER II. ENTER THE TUCKERS

Two girls about my age and a youngish man were the arrivals. The girls were dressed in blue serge, and I felt in my bones that they were going to Gresham. They had an independent, easy way with them, and evidently considered the youngish man a person whom they had a right to boss.

"Let's sit here, Zebedee, and you go get the milk chocolate for me," exclaimed one of the girls.

"Don't forget my salted peanuts and a copy of 'Life,'" called the other, as Zebedee hurried off to make the purchases at the newsstand in a corner of the waiting room.

"Elder brother," thought I, "and pretty good-natured to wait on those girls so much." What nice looking girls they were, though. At the first glance, they looked singularly alike, but as I examined them more closely while Zebedee was gone, I saw points of dissimilarity. "They are twins, for sure," I said to myself, "but I believe I am going to be able to tell them apart." The one whom her sister called Dum had red lights in her almost black hair and her eyes were hazel, while the one who answered to the name of Dee had blue lights in her coal black hair and her eyes were gray. Both of them had sharply defined brows, straight noses, and broad, laughing mouths. Dum's chin was square and determined, but in Dee's there lurked a dimple. They were exactly the same height and both of them had fine athletic figures.

"There you are, Tweedles," said the youngish man, addressing them both as he pitched his purchases into their laps. "Who's going to wait on you at boarding school, I'd like to know?"

"Well, if you will make us have a roommate, I reckon she'll have to," laughed Dee.

"By the way, Zebedee, that is something I want to discuss with you," and Dum squared her chin. "You make a great mistake in forcing a roommate on Dee and me. We are not used to it, and we are not going to stand it."

Zebedee squared his chin, too, and his blue eyes took on a stern expression. "Not going to stand it, eh? Well, I say you are going to stand it. We have discussed the matter threadbare already, and you must trust me to know what is best for you sometimes."

The stern light went out of his eyes and into them came a look of infinite tenderness as he put an arm around Dum and held her close to him. I certainly liked the looks of Zebedee, but what a name! He, too, had an athletic figure, but not very tall, not much taller than the girls, who were very well grown for fifteen. He had Dum's red black hair, also her square chin, but Dee's dimple had found a place in the middle of that determined chin. The three mouths were so alike that they might have belonged to triplets, but his eyes were his own; ice blue they were in color but there was nothing cold about them. They were the kindest, merriest eyes; they seemed to see everything and feel everything. Just now they were feeling very sorry for Dum, and as he hugged her, big tears gathered in them.

"Oh, Dum," exclaimed Dee, "now you have made him cry!"

"No such thing. I'm not crying," and he shamelessly blew his nose.

I afterwards learned that one of the characteristics of this delightful trio was that they thought there was no more shame in crying than laughing. They laughed in church if there was anything to laugh at, and cried at a picnic or farce-comedy if anything turned up to move them to tears. "We don't bawl," Dee said to me once, "we just leak. It is all a matter of tear ducts. We can't help it any more than you could help sneezing if someone shook pepper in your face."

A train was called. It was not ours, but "Orphan Annie" jumped nervously from her seat. She dropped her shabby little hand-bag, which she had just opened for the hundredth time to make sure her ticket was safe or to compare her Ingersoll watch with the clock in the station, and the contents of the bag rolled to the floor. I dived to assist her and the person called Zebedee did the same. Of course

we bumped heads, and while we were apologizing, Dum and Dee picked up the scattered belongings and returned them to the poor, abashed girl.

"I just knew you were going to Gresham," said Dee, handing her the much-thumbed ticket, "and wondered how long it would take us to get to the point of speaking to you."

"You are for Gresham, too," said Dum, turning to me. "I have been longing to know you. I might have known that old Zebedee would end by butting in."

Here Zebedee took off his hat and bowed to "Orphan Annie" and me as though we were of the blood royal, and said with a most engaging manner:

"We had best introduce ourselves and then all the conventionalities will be observed. Conventionality is a mighty important thing for boarding school girls to observe. These are the Tucker twins, called Tweedles when you want both of them or aren't particular which one answers. This red-headed one is Dum; this blue-headed one, Dee. They have other official names, but somehow I can't remember them to-day. I am Jeffry Tucker, at your service, the father of the Heavenly Twins."

"Father! You, their father!" I gasped.

"Certainly. Whose father did you think I was?"

"James' and John's," I answered flippantly.

"That's the reason we called him Zebedee," chorused the twins. "You know the old gag: 'Who is the father of Zebedee's children?' No one ever believes he is really a parent."

I burst out laughing and so did "Orphan Annie." I was certainly glad to see that she could laugh. Already the genial atmosphere that surrounded the Tuckers had had its effect on her. The drawn expression was leaving her countenance and the hearty laugh dispelled the mist in her eyes. The knowledge that there were two other passengers for Gresham set her mind at rest, and she evidently felt relieved.

"My name is Page Allison."

"Daughter of Dr. James Allison of Milton, I bet anything," ventured Mr. Tucker. "Oh, do you know my father?" I asked joyfully.

"Of course I do. We are of the same fraternity. Your eyes are so like his, I came mighty near slipping you the grip. He was in the class of '85 and I was in that of '99, but we have met at many fraternity conventions. I am certainly glad to know his daughter." And while he did not give me the fraternity grip, he gave me some kind of a grip that tingled all the way up to my heart.

"And won't you tell us your name?" said Dee kindly to the other stranger.

"Annie Pore," said the girl in a voice singularly full and rich. "I have never been anywhere alone and I am so afraid I'll miss my train. That is the reason I dropped my bag. I am so much obliged to all of you for picking up my things."

Her timidity seemed to disappear as she realized she was making friends. As for me, I have never known what it was to be timid, and I felt at home with the three Tuckers from the moment they entered the waiting room; and from the time that Mr. Tucker and I bumped heads, I counted them as the first three on the list of the million friends that Cousin Sue said I must make.

"Well, since we are all going to Gresham, suppose you young ladies hand over your tickets to me and I will be courier for the crowd," said Mr. Tucker.

I gave him my ticket, also my reservation in the parlor car. It made no difference how poor payments were, Father and I always traveled in comfort. "It saves in the end to ride in a clean, comfortable coach," Father declared. "Saves wear and tear on clothes and nerves."

Annie Pore handed him her crumpled ticket.

"This is all you have?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, isn't that all right?" she entreated. "The man at the ticket window assured me it was right."

"Of course it is all right. Now there are five minutes before the train will be called, so if you young ladies will excuse me, I'll run downstairs to see that Tweedles' trunks are safe. By the way, have you attended to your luggage?" he asked me. "And you?" turning to Annie Pore.

"Thank you, yes," I answered; but the other girl looked piteously at her bursting telescope. "I haven't a trunk," she said simply.

I felt mighty sorry for Annie. The Tucker twins did, too. I could tell by their eyes. Dee's filled and Dum turned and walked to the steps with her father.

Dee whispered to me as she pretended to show me a picture in "Life":

"He's gone to get her a ticket in the parlor car. Just like him! Such a thoughtful Zebedee as he is! We mustn't let him know we are on. That would make him raging. He will carry it off perfectly naturally, and he is fully capable of any deceit to keep Annie Pore from finding it out."

He had done exactly as Dee said he would do: got a chair in the parlor car for "Orphan Annie." Right there I took myself to task for thinking of the poor girl as "Orphan Annie," and I determined to control my thoughts if possible and give her her proper name in my mind. Not that Annie Pore sounded much more cheerful than the name I had given her.

Our train was called and our kind courier bundled up bag and baggage and hustled us through the gates and into the chair car before Annie Pore had time to ask about it; and then he gave the Pullman conductor our tickets and settled us and the train started, and the girl never did know she was being treated to a privilege her ticket did not give her.

We had a jolly trip and before it was over I knew a great deal about the Tuckers, and they, in turn, a great deal about me, in fact, about all there was to know. It was many a day, however, before we broke through Annie Pore's reserve and learned that she was of English parentage, that her mother had recently died and her father had a country store in a lonesome little settlement on the river. No wonder the girl was so scary. This was actually her first railroad journey. What traveling she had done had been by boat, an occasional trip to Norfolk or Richmond when her father went to town to buy his stock.

There was an unmistakable air of breeding about her. Her accent was pure and her English without flaw. In spite of her timidity, she had a certain *savoir faire*. For instance, when Mr. Tucker announced that we were to have lunch with him and ordered the porter to bring two tables and put them up, Annie accepted the invitation with a quiet grace that many a society woman could not have equaled. When she took off her ugly hat, disclosing to view a calm white forehead with heavy, ripe-wheat hair rippling from a part, I had no doubt of the fact that Annie Pore, if not already a beauty, was going to be one when she grew up.

It was only a buffet luncheon and there was not much on the menu to choose from: baked beans, canned soup, potted meats, etc.

"Not much to eat here," grumbled Mr. Tucker.

"Eat what's put before you, Zebedee, and stop grouching," admonished Dum.

"Well, it's a pretty hard state of affairs when a fellow wants to give a party and there is nothing to eat but these canned abominations."

"I have a lunch box in my grip," I ventured; "maybe that would help out some."

"Trot it out, do!" cried Dee.

And then Annie had the hardihood to untie the rope around her telescope and bring out a bag of the very best and rosiest wine-sap apples I ever tasted. She also produced a box of doughnuts she had made herself which were greeted with enthusiasm. My lunch had been put up by kind old Mammy Susan, and in her tenderness she had packed in enough to feed a regiment.

"Fried chicken!" exclaimed Dee, clapping her hands.

"Columbus eggs!" shouted Dum.

"Not really country ham?" questioned Mr. Tucker. "That is too good to be true. You must excuse Tweedles and me, but we have been living in an apartment and eating in the café, and some

real home food has just about got us going. When I asked you young ladies to lunch, I did not dream that I would be able to treat you so royally."

"Look, Zebedee, look! Clover-leaf rolls!" chorused the twins.

"Stop tweedling and look over the menu and see what we shall order to supplement with." Mr. Tucker called it tweedling when the girls spoke in chorus as was their habit.

We decided on cream of tomato soup, iced tea and butter, with Neopolitan ice cream to top off with. I was certainly glad that, as usual, Mammy Susan had paid no attention to my commands, and had done her own sweet will in giving me enough lunch for half a dozen girls.

"It's bes' to err on de side er plenty, honey baby," the old woman had said when I demurred at the size of the lunch boxes. "Even ef you is goin' to a land flowin' wif milk an' honey, a few rolls to sop in de honey won't go amiss an' some chicken an' ham to wash down wif de milk won't hurt none."

CHAPTER III. GRESHAM

Gresham at last after a very pleasant trip! We had picked up blue-coated girls all along the road, and by the time we reached the little town on the outskirts of which our school was situated, the train seemed to be running over with girls.

"There must be a million of them," I thought; but as Gresham could only accommodate one hundred and twenty-five, I was wrong. Some of them had mothers or fathers with them, and some of them big brothers or sisters. Most of them had some one; at least, most of the new girls.

The old pupils hugged and kissed one another and all seemed to be glad to get back to school. The new girls looked sad and miserable, even the ones who had their mothers with them. And a few lonesome ones who had brought themselves, like "Orphan Annie" (there, I slipped again and called Annie Pore by that obnoxious name!) or me, looked like scared rabbits. I wasn't scared a bit, and when I saw the old girls hugging and loving one another, flaunting their intimacies, as it were, I said:

"Don't you mind, Page Allison. You are going to know all of those girls and like a lot of them, and a lot of them are going to like you; and they are just a few of the million friends you are going to make."

In the crowded confusion at the little station, I was separated from the Tuckers and noticed that poor Annie was put in a bus filled with Seniors, who looked at her rather askance. Her ungainly telescope was piled up with the natty suitcases by the driver's seat, and I saw him point at it and wink at the driver of the bus where I had found a seat.

The girls in the bus with me were very kind and friendly. There were several mothers along and they looked at me cordially, and in a few minutes I knew the names of all the passengers and they knew mine. By the time the straining horses had pulled the heavy bus through the crooked streets of the quaint little town, up and down the many hills and finally up the last long hill to Gresham School, the whole load of girls and mothers had been jolted into an enforced intimacy.

Bracken, my home, was situated in what persons from the mountains call a flat country but which we call rolling, as it is when compared to the tidewater counties. So the hills of Gresham seemed wonderfully steep to me, and as we pulled to the top and stopped in front of the school, and I realized we could actually see the mountains, I gave voice to a long-drawn "O – h!" of delight.

We piled out of the bus, and for a moment I stood looking at the wonderful view before I even noticed the school building.

"I am so glad you like it," said a soft voice at my side. It belonged to a quiet-looking girl who had come up with us. She looked a little older than the rest of the girls and certainly was much more dignified. "I find if a new pupil notices the mountains first, she is pretty apt not to kick because they have dessert only twice a week. One can't have everything in this world, and a mountain view is more filling in the big end than dessert."

"It is splendid! You have been here a long time?" I asked.

"Yes, many years; and now I am a pupil teacher. This place seems more like home than any other in the world to me," and she took me by the arm. "Come on with me, Page. I am going to call you Page and I do wish you could call me Margaret, but now that I am a near teacher I have to be called Miss Sayre. I am going to introduce you to Miss Peyton, the principal."

"Oh, you are kind to me and I am so much obliged!"

"Give the bus driver your trunk check and in his good time he will deliver your trunk. Come on, so you can get into the office before the rush of Seniors."

Just then the vehicle with Annie Pore in it, looking too forlorn for words, came rattling up. Her hat was knocked over one eye and she had lost all of the cheerfulness that she had gained on the train

with the delightful Tuckers. No one had paid any attention to her on the ride, except to look her up and down and make whispered jokes at her expense. I have found out that girls can be the most cruel creatures in the world, just from pure thoughtlessness and lack of imagination. They don't know how to "Put yourself in his place." They don't mean to hurt, but they do hurt all the same. I found during the ensuing year that that same busload of Seniors included many a fine character, but not one of them seemed to have imagination enough to know what Annie Pore was suffering.

"Miss Sayre," I said impulsively, "please take this girl with you. I met her on the train and she seems so forlorn."

"We'll miss our chance to reach Miss Peyton ahead of the others, unless we hurry," she said, looking a little impatient at my request.

"I'm sorry. I think I ought to wait for her, but don't let me detain you," and I went forward to meet poor Annie.

Of course, Miss Sayre came, too. "I might have known that a girl who noticed the mountains first thing would have character enough to do what she thought was right," she whispered as she followed me.

"This is Annie Pore, Miss Sayre," I said, as I helped the cramped girl out of her uncomfortably small quarters. Miss Sayre shook her hand cordially and I hoped Annie did not hear the titter as one of the Seniors nudged another and said in an audible whisper: "Annie Pore, poor Orphan Annie." I hated myself for having had the same thought.

"Where is your trunk check, Annie? Give it to the bus driver," said Miss Sayre, kindly.

"I haven't a trunk," said Annie faintly, "just a telescope."

"By their luggage ye shall know them," said a stylish girl who was clambering out of the vehicle. She spoke in a rasping tone with a nasal touch.

Annie Pore made a ten strike right then and there with me and with all of the girls who heard what she said, and those girls who did not hear it soon heard about it. She drew herself up, no longer timid but with what Dum Tucker afterwards called "Annie's stage presence," and in her singularly clear, full voice, that voice that we were all to be so proud of, said:

"Not by their luggage ye shall know them, but by their voices." And with a dignity that a sagging skirt and crooked-seamed jacket could not lessen, Annie Pore walked to the front of the carry-all and demanded from the grinning driver her bursting telescope.

A shout went up from the Seniors. "Annie, Annie, 'rah, 'rah, 'rah!"

"So, Mabel Binks, she got your goat that time," laughed a bright-looking, auburn-haired Senior.

"I don't know what you mean, Sally Coles. Orphan Annie's remark seemed to me to be without point," and Mabel Binks haughtily demanded a very swell new alligator bag from the front seat.

"Well, if you don't know that your voice needs greasing, it is not for me to break it to you, Mabel." Mabel flounced off, and all her stylish clothes, beautifully-hanging skirt, well-cut jacket, and jaunty velvet sailor hat, did not give dignity to her.

Pandemonium reigned as we entered the spacious hall of the main building. Girls, girls, girls! Little and big; fat and thin; pretty and plain; laughing and crying; alone and attended, they swarmed over everything.

"We have lost our chance to get first at the principal, but I wouldn't have missed seeing Annie Pore take down that common, purse-proud Mabel Binks for a million, as poor as I am," whispered Miss Sayre. "You girls sit here and wait for me, and as soon as there is an opening we'll slip in."

"Oh, how could I ever have made up my mind to leave my Father and come here?" wailed Annie, crumpling up into an ignominious heap, all her dignity gone.

"Now look here, Annie Pore," I scolded, "anyone who could jaw back at a Senior as you did just a moment ago has got backbone, and you have just got to get a brace on you and cheer up."

"Oh, but you are different. You make friends so readily. I am so easily embarrassed," and the poor thing wept anew.

"I don't make friends a bit more easily than you do. I just want to make them, that's the difference. Haven't you made friends with me?"

"Oh, have I really?"

"Of course you have. Would I be ragging you this way if I didn't consider myself your friend? Haven't you made friends with all three of the Tuckers, and now with Miss Sayre?"

Annie was somewhat consoled and tried to take a more cheerful view of life. We had completely lost sight of our traveling companions. They had evidently been admitted among the first to the principal's office. All of the girls who were accompanied by their parents or guardians were given preference in having their rooms assigned them, so that their loved ones could see where the daughters were to be placed and then take their departure on the outgoing trains.

We were so hidden by the swarming girls, we despaired of ever being found again by Miss Sayre; but I persuaded Annie that we would certainly be placed by bedtime as both of us had been registered during the summer; and in the meantime, it was rather fun to watch the girls and try to guess where they came from and if any of them were to be in our classes.

Mabel Binks backed up against us, talking to an overdressed girl of about nineteen. Both were dressed in the latest style. I knew what those styles were from the fashion books that Cousin Sue Lee had bought when we were planning my modest wardrobe.

"I am thankful to say this is my last year at Gresham," said Mabel. "The place has lost tone so. We came up in the bus with a most remarkable-looking person. I am sure Mamma would not permit me to remain if she knew Miss Peyton was allowing such ordinary girls to come here."

Annie Pore's face was crimson and she looked ready to burst into tears, but the overdressed girl, whose name, I afterwards learned, was Josephine Barr, and who was a thoroughly kindly person, remarked:

"Oh, yes, I heard about that girl. Sally Coles tells me she is wonderfully pretty and quite a lady, also that she got a yell from the Seniors for her quickness in responding to a sally from you."

I pinched Annie's arm and whispered: "What did I tell you? Two more new friends, Sally Coles and this big girl who has just punctured Mabel Binks' conceit."

"Come along, girls," and Miss Sayre pushed her way to our retreat. "I think we can get into the office now. How do you do, Josephine? I am glad to see you back," and she shook the big girl's hand cordially. "I want to introduce you to two new girls and ask you to see that they meet the crowd."

"All right, Margaret, what you say goes. I was a freshy myself once and know how it feels." She gave us a cordial grip and assured us we must call on her if we needed anything, friendly counsel or protection or even soothing syrup.

"Jo is a fine old girl," said Miss Sayre, as she hooked one arm in mine and the other in Annie Pore's and drew us into the office. (I noticed that she had completely ignored Mabel Binks.) "She would fight to the finish for her friends. Her clothes are impossible, but we mustn't judge the poor thing by her clothes. They've got so much money, they don't know what to do with it. I'm real sorry for her."

It seemed a queer cause for pity to Annie and me, but Miss Sayre was introducing us to Miss Peyton and we could not ask her why riches were to be pitied. I liked Miss Peyton from the minute I saw her and I believe she liked me. Her countenance was a noble one, her manner frank, and her voice sounded like music.

"I am going to put you into the room with some sisters, Page. I hope you will get along well together. If everything is not pleasant, come directly to me. You are No. 117 in Carter Hall. I will see all the girls to-morrow and classify them. Miss Sayre, will you please get someone to show Page her room? Now I will talk to Annie Pore and assign her her roommate." And Miss Peyton went on quietly with what might have been a confusing task, but which she managed as calmly as a Napoleon marshaling his troops.

I found my way to 117 Carter Hall with the help of an old girl. I was naturally quite interested to know what the sisters were to be like who were to be my roommates for the year. The door to 117 was open and I heard sobbing.

CHAPTER IV. MY ROOMMATES

"Heavens, I'm tired of tears!" I thought as my conductor left me with a significant smile. "I'm actually damp from all of the weeping going on around me."

A stormy voice was raised in the room that I was about to enter, and I stopped in the hall, not knowing just what to do.

"Now what did I tell you?" said the stormy, sobbing voice. "Didn't I tell you all along I was going to make myself just as disagreeable as I could if you would put someone in with us? Aren't we going to be miserable enough without you, without having some old stick-in-the-mud hoisted on us from the country, to sleep in the room with us; and just as like as not want the window shut at night; and rub her chapped face all over with mutton-suet? Paugh, I can smell it now, the horrid stuff."

"Now, Dum, cut it out. You don't even know that your roommate gets chapped," said a whimsical voice.

"The Tuckers!" I exclaimed, but naturally had a delicacy in entering, after what I had heard Dum say about a roommate from the country. "Could she know that I am the one?" I asked myself.

"Well, how are Dee and I to fight it out the way you have brought us up to do if we have got some old mutt in here with us? We might just as well have left our boxing gloves at home."

"Oh, Dum, you are making it hard for me," said poor Mr. Tucker.

"That's good, I want to make it hard," sobbed the wretched Dum.

"I have told you over and over that I think it best for you and Dee to have to control yourselves more, and the only way to do it is to realize how your tantrums affect other people. You are the best old Tweedles in the world, but you have no self-control. I am surely sorry for your roommate, whoever she may be."

"Well," broke in Dee, "I think it all depends on who she is. I must say it is some lottery. Roommates ought to be carefully chosen; one should not just trust to this grab-bag method."

"Well, how do you know Miss Peyton has not chosen someone she feels will be suitable? I wish it would turn out to be somebody like the little girl on the train. Don't you, Tweedles?"

"Yes, yes!" tweedled Tweedles. "But no such luck."

This reassured me and I knocked on the open door. There was perfect silence, broken only by the sound of Dum's blowing her nose and Mr. Tucker's clearing his throat; and then a faint little "Come in," from both girls.

"Oh, it's you! How good of you to come look us up!" exclaimed Mr. Tucker. "We were afraid it was the hated roommate. Tweedles are treating me so terribly because I insist on their having a roommate so they can broaden out a bit and learn to control themselves some, which they will never do so long as they stay together all the time. I'll leave it to you, Miss Page, don't you think it will be best?"

"Well, I have a delicacy in saying," laughed I. "You see, I am that poor unfortunate, despised roommate. This is 117 Carter Hall, isn't it?"

Then all the weeping was turned to laughter and the irrepressible Tuckers, father and all, grabbed hands and danced around me singing, "Gayly cheer the bride." They made such a racket that a sad, crooked face was poked into the door, evidently feeling a duty to admonish, but Zebedee in his most Zebedeeish humor, sang out in a friendly voice:

"Will you, won't you, will you, won't you, will you join the dance? Will you, won't you, will you, won't you, won't you join the dance?"

Then the strangest thing happened to that long, sad, crooked face. The plain features were illuminated by a smile, the person who owned the face came impulsively into the room, and after

she had carefully shut the door, she caught hold of hands with the crazy trio and the dance went on; and all of us sang:

"'Will you walk a little faster!' said a whiting to a snail,
'There's a porpoise close behind us and he's treading on my tail.
See how eagerly the lobsters and the turtles all advance!
They are waiting on the shingle – will you come and join the dance?'"
Then the chorus: "Will you, won't you, will you, won't you, will you
join the dance?"

I refused to play "frog in the middle" any longer and broke into the dance, soon dropping into the unfamiliar tune but very familiar words of the Lobster Quadrille. We sang all four of the verses from that immortal nonsense.

"'What matters it how far we go?' his scaly friend replied,
'There is another shore, you know, upon the other side.
The farther off from England, the nearer is to France.
Then turn not pale, beloved snail, but come and join the dance.'"

The owner of the long, sad, crooked face was also owner of a singularly clear, true, well-trained voice, and Mr. Tucker's fresh baritone fitted in finely, while Dum and Dee and I did the best we could with what Nature had seen fit to endow us in the way of voices. Finally we girls sank exhausted on the bare, uncovered beds, but Mr. Tucker and the mysterious visitor stood clasping hands.

"Jeff Tucker, what in Heaven's name are you doing at a young ladies' boarding school?"

"Entering my girls: Tweedles. And you, Jinny Cox, what are you doing here?" And Mr. Tucker kept on shaking her hand.

"I teach singing here. Have been here for years. And to think of your girls being old enough to go to boarding school! It seems only yesterday that you and dear little Virginia were leading the Germans at the University. I haven't seen you since you married. I meant to write you when Virginia died, but somehow I just couldn't."

"That was all right, Jinny. I knew how you felt without hearing from you. She only lived a year, you know. Tweedles were just a few weeks old when she died." And the dear man who a moment before had been so cheerily singing the Lobster Quadrille, now wiped his eyes and seemed given over to melancholy.

"I want you to know our girls. This is Virginia," indicating Dum, "and this, Caroline," meaning Dee. I was rather amused at the fact that earlier in the day he could not remember their official names, as he called them. "I named this one Virginia, thinking she was going to have her mother's eyes, but the little monkey changed them on me and in a twinkling turned herself into a hazel-eyed monster," and poor Zebedee forgot to cry any more and began to laugh. "This is the much dreaded roommate, Miss Page Allison, of Milton, Virginia. The wild orgy which you so tactfully joined was in honor of the discovery that this young lady was the roommate."

"Well, girls, I am glad to see all of you and hope we can be great friends. My name is Jane Cox. I can't remember any one having the hardihood to call me Jinny for some sixteen or seventeen years. I haven't danced for at least ten years. I don't know what the management or the girls would think or say if they knew I had cut up this way. I don't know what made me do it. I came to the door to stop the racket and when I saw Jeff Tucker whirling around with three girls singing, 'Will you, won't you, won't you, will you, will you join the dance?' my discretion flew to the four winds. I just did have sense enough left to shut the door. I forgot I was an old maid, teaching singing in a boarding school."

"It was simply splendid of you to come in and help us out," exclaimed Dee. Dee was usually the one who knew what to say and when to say it. Some persons call it tact, but I have always thought it was just a kind heart that made her know what people wanted her to say. Cousin Sue Lee was the same kind of natural-born social wonder. "I think your voice is beautiful, and how on earth did you happen to know our tune?"

"Why, child, your father and I made up that tune on a picnic once years before you were born. Do you remember, Jeff, when we went to Monticello, and how it rained? We composed the tune and improvised a Lobster Quadrille to cheer up the bedraggled crowd. How Virginia did laugh! I haven't thought of that tune for ages. Perhaps it is because I have not been with the kind of people who would enjoy 'Alice in Wonderland.'"

"Zebedee has put us to sleep with it ever since we were born," said Dum. "I mean the tune."

"And I have been reading Alice in Wonderland ever since I was born," I ventured.

"Well, I'm certainly glad to meet some kindred spirits at Gresham," said Miss Cox, "and now, girls, I'm going to ask a great favor of the three of you. I want you to keep to yourselves that I broke loose as I did. I have hard enough work as it is keeping order during study hour when that task falls to me, and if the girls ever found out that I was capable of such high-jinks, I'd lose all control of them." We promised, but I, for one, thought that the more human you find your pastors and masters to be, the more apt you are to want to make things easy for them. Miss Jane Cox was much older than I, but she had yet to learn that wisdom.

"We'll all promise," we declared in unison.

"But please break loose again, sometimes, Jinny," begged Mr. Tucker. "The idea of your calling yourself an old maid! I bet you are not thirty-five yet. I'm only thirty-six myself, and, goodness knows, I am nothing but a kid!"

"Teaching is a very aging occupation," sighed Miss Cox. "I don't mind the singing, but it's teaching mathematics to the backward pupils that adds ten years a season to my already full years. Do your girls sing, Jeffry?"

"Not so's you can notice it. Dum, here, is going to be a great sculptor; and Dee is uncertain whether she wants to be a trained nurse or a veterinary surgeon."

"Vet'rinary surgeon? Surely you wouldn't let her go into such a profession?" exclaimed Miss Cox with her twisted smile.

"Why not? I'll let my girls go into any profession that appeals to them. Dum loves to make mud pies and Dee loves to nurse sick puppies. Both of them rather dirty arts, but 'Every man to his taste.'"

Miss Cox had to leave us and go to attend to various duties, but before going she assured Mr. Tucker that she would take especial care of all three of his girls. You can fancy what it meant to me to be included. I almost called him Zebedee, but I was afraid it might make him feel like the father of triplets, so I refrained.

It was almost time for the train which Mr. Tucker was to catch, as he intended to take a sleeper back to Richmond that night. I felt the tactful thing for me to do would be to leave the girls alone with their father, so I told him good-by and went off to see how Annie Pore was faring.

I found her sitting in a forlorn heap in one of the neighboring rooms, her hat and jacket still on; her disreputable telescope in the middle of the room; and the expression on her face suited to the tragic muse.

"Who's your cellmate, Annie?" said I, bursting in on her.

"I don't know, but I know she will hate me."

"Hate you, indeed! No one could hate you. Why don't you unpack and get your things in order? I am going to stay with you until Mr. Tucker leaves, so Tweedles can get a chance to be alone with him for a while. I am rooming with them, you know. Our room is quite near you and we can all be real chummy."

The rooms were all perfectly bare and bleak-looking: white walls, white iron beds, curtainless windows and carpetless floors. The pupils were supposed to decorate their own rooms if they wanted them decorated. Annie Pore had been put into a two-girl room a bit smaller than the one assigned to the Tuckers and me, but otherwise exactly like it.

"I am dreading a roommate," sighed the girl. "I have never slept in the room with any one in my life."

"Neither have I, but I am crazy about it. Just think what fun it will be to have some one to talk to and giggle with."

I could not fancy giggling with Annie Pore in her present melancholy frame of mind, but I was sure that was a phase that would pass and she would end by being as girlish as the next. She had too keen a sense of humor to be lost in gloom forever.

CHAPTER V. LETTERS

From Caroline Tucker to her father, Jeffry Tucker

Gresham, Sept. 18, 19 – .

Dearest Zebedee:

You would have to be your own daughter to know how much you can be missed. After you left the other day, Dum and I cried so much we came mighty near getting sick, but Page Allison came back and was so ridiculous in her description of Annie Pore sitting up in the bus full of Seniors with her crêpe hat cocked on one side, that we got to laughing; and you know how easy it is to be cheerful if someone only starts the ball a-rolling. Page is splendid and takes the most interest in life of anybody I ever saw. She makes a lot of fun, but somehow it is never at anyone but always with them. She loves dogs, too, so I am sure to get on with her.

I do think it was wise in you, dearest Zebedee, to make us have a roommate, since that roommate happens to be Page, because she certainly does do us good; and already I find I am trying to "exert more self-control," as you say when you are trying to be Mr. Tuckerish. She hates blubbing and never cries except when the dogs die or her father reads poetry to her. I tell her that we don't usually cry, either, that is, we don't bawl, but just leak a bit. She says just leaking is rather fascinating and shows temperament, and she wishes she wasn't so dry-eyed and could express her emotions in such a graceful way.

Page has read a whole lot and knows reams and quires of history, but never has studied any French at all and has to go with the kids in mathematics. She is real spunky about it, though, and doesn't say a word about how humiliating it must be to have to sit in a class with children of twelve and even younger.

She can write Latin like a house afire, but when she translates we can hardly keep from giggling outright, as she uses the funny old pronunciation that Grandpa Tucker does. It seems she has learned Latin entirely from her father. Miss Sears, the Latin teacher, is trying to get her out of this pronunciation, but she compliments her very much on her knowledge of English derivatives. Page says that is the side of Latin that interested her father and he consequently taught it to her.

Dum and I have had only one serious set-to since you left us. I licked her. I wish you would send Dum a dollar box of plasticine. She is restless sometimes and I know she is itching to create, and if she had the mud she could do it. Dum is being awfully good about holding on to herself, and is just as nice and polite to Page as can be, although she did vow and declare that she was going to make it so hot for any roommate we got that the poor thing would have to leave. Of course that was before we knew it was going to be our luck to draw such a prize. There's the bell, so good-by, dear old Zebedeedlums.

Your own Tweedledeelums.

Virginia Tucker to her father, Jeffry Tucker

Gresham, Sept. 19, 19 – .

My darling Zebedee:

Dee wrote yesterday so I waited until to-day, although she declared she was not writing the kind of thing to you that I was going to. I don't see how she knew what I was going to write when I don't know myself.

There is one thing I want to say and that is: "the old man always knows best." A roommate is a great institution when she is as bully as Page Allison. I was awfully afraid Dee was going to be rude, but she hasn't been a bit. As for me, I have been a little tin angel. You can ask Dee if I haven't.

I am mighty sorry for Dee. She not only misses you just as much as I do, but she misses old Brindle almost as much as she does you. I don't see why they won't let a bulldog go to boarding school. I asked Dee if she gave you any more directions about how to take care of Brindle, and she said she hadn't even mentioned him she was so afraid of splashing on her letter.

Your friend Miss Cox has been in to see us and was just as jolly as could be, but when the other girls are around she treats us like perfect strangers. The truth of the matter is she is afraid of girls and does not understand them, nor do they understand her. I got that from Page, who is very analytical. Page says if she would let herself go she would be the most popular teacher in school, but as it is, while she is not unpopular, she is not regarded at all. She is awfully interesting but the girls don't know it. They know she has a good voice and teaches with good method but she might as well be a phonograph for all the human interest they have in her. She is coach for the backward and wayward in Math. I believe Page Allison will have to have her, and I bet on Page for drawing her out.

I tell you that girl has done wonders with Annie Pore. Every time she finds her crying she makes her laugh, and you know no one but old Zebedee can laugh and cry at the same time without going into hysterics. Right to her face she calls her "Melancholy Dane" and "Old Rain in the Face" and all kinds of ridiculous names, and Annie simply has to smile. There is one thing about Page: you can always know she is going to say what she's got to say right to your face. Usually when people are that way their conversation is "yea, yea, and nay, nay," but Page is not that way a bit.

Dee and I have had only one bout and then Dee knocked me out. It was a funny thing the way I let down my guard, but I got to thinking about Dee's dimple in her chin and how some day I was going to make a stunning bust of her. You see Dee looks mighty handsome when she boxes, with her head thrown back, her neck like a column. I had sure got her going that day and she had backed way up in the corner, when the idea of making the bust took possession of me – well, Dee made a stunning bust of me, that's all. She tapped me on the nose and drew the claret.

The row was all about you. Dee said you must be pretty near middle-aged and I said she was all the way a plumb idiot, you were no such thing and never would be. The fact that she tapped me does not prove that you are or ever will be any such thing. Page came in at the crucial moment and was somewhat shocked to see us boxing, and was broken up over the gore; but when she heard what the row was about, she sympathized with me and offered to put on the gloves and fight it out with Dee; but she decided in her amusing way to argue it out instead.

She said: "If the pen is mightier than the sword, surely the tongue is mightier than a pair of boxing gloves." She proved to Dee's perfect satisfaction that age was a matter of temperament and that yours was eternal youth. Dee was convinced and offered the *amende honorable*, confessing herself beaten in argument. I begin to think trial by combat not such a good way of settling things, after all. It seems to me a quiet debate is much the better way.

Write to us soon. I heard one of the Seniors say you were the most attractive-looking man she ever saw. She thought you were our big brother and meant for me to hear it and of course wanted me to repeat it to you. Good-bye, my darling old Zebedeedidlums. I am sorry I made you cry twice on the day you brought us up here.

*Your own,
Dumplingdeedledums.*

Annie Pore to her Father, Mr. Arthur Pore, Price's Landing, Va

Gresham, Sept. 19, 19 – .

My dear Father:

I am writing to you at my earliest opportunity. I made the journey without any mishaps and in great comfort. I was astonished to find how luxurious traveling by rail is. I shall have to confess to you that I talked to some persons I met on the train. They were all of them going to Gresham and were very kind to me. I found myself conversing with them before I remembered your admonitions to be very careful about making acquaintances. I know in England it is very bad form, but I felt somehow it would have been much worse form to hold myself aloof when they were one and all so kind to me.

The Institute of Gresham is admirable in every particular. My instruction has been so thorough, thanks to your unceasing efforts, that I find I can take a very good stand. I have not divulged that an Oxford graduate has been my teacher. I am well up in Algebra, Latin and French, although my French accent is not all that it should be.

Miss Cox, the singing teacher, takes a great interest in my voice but evidently has no personal feeling for me. I am very grateful to you for the sacrifices you have made to send me to boarding school, and am endeavoring to take advantage of every opportunity to perfect my education.

*Very respectfully,
Annie de Vere Pore.*

Page Allison to her father, Dr. James Allison, Milton, Va

Gresham, Sept. 19, 19 – .

My dear old Father:

I can hardly believe it is only a few days since I left Bracken. It seems ages and eons. I have a million things to tell you. I made friends with some delightful people on the train, Mr. Jeffry Tucker and his twin daughters, Dum and Dee. Mr. Tucker says he knows you; and my eyes were so like yours he came mighty near giving me the fraternity grip. He is the youngest man to be grown up and have almost grown-up daughters I ever saw. Their mother is dead, too. So many mothers seem to be dead.

We made friends with another girl on the train, Annie Pore from Price's Landing. She had never been on the train before, but although she seemed terribly shy and was dressed in a most pathetic get-up, still she had all the bearing and carriage of a *grande dame*. She is a half-orphan, too, and I have a kind of idea that her father is not so intimate with his daughter as some other fathers who shall be nameless. She has been writing to her paternal parent for the last hour, and she actually copied the letter and seemed to be writing with as much care as though it had to be handed in. You don't want me to write that way to you, do you?

Gresham is splendid. It is a beautiful building, red brick with great white columns, giving it the look of a modern Parthenon. It is on top of a hill overlooking the little town and has a beautiful lawn with great chestnut trees and oaks. But best of all is the view of the mountains. When it is clear they seem quite close, almost as though we could walk to them, and at other times they disappear altogether.

The first day or two the girls seemed to think if they did not do a lot of bawling and blubbing some one might think they did not love their homes. Some of them cried because they could not help it, but some of them, I verily believe, rubbed onions in their eyes like the heartless sisters in "Beauty and the Beast." I know no home could be more beautiful than Bracken and I'll wager anything that there isn't a dad in the world better or more beloved than mine. And was there ever a mammy like mine? I'm not even mentioning the dogs, although they are not the least of my blessings. And still, not a visible tear have I shed.

The first morning when I waked up in the strange room and stared at the blank bare wall, it seemed to me as though I simply could not stand it. I was dreaming about Mammy Susan. I thought she was pouring hot water into my tub again. My roommates were still asleep, having wept themselves into a state of coma. (I haven't told you that I am rooming with Dum and Dee Tucker and I like it a lot.) Well, I got up and went to the bathroom and had the coldest bath I ever had in my life and then I dressed in a hurry. I felt as though I must get out before any one saw me. If I could have a little run, maybe I could stave off the great wave of homesickness that was going to swallow me up in a minute. I raced along the corridor.

I got onto a covered walk connecting the dormitory with the main building, and there serene and beautiful were the mountains stretched before me. I didn't want to cry any more. A feeling of deep peace and happiness came to me. I chanted aloud: "I will look unto the hills from whence cometh my help," etc. You mustn't think I don't love you and Mammy Susan just as much as ever, for I do; but I am having a good time and am going to learn a few things, and am going to make loads and loads of friends.

My love to all the dear dogs and please give them an extra bone for me. And tell dear Mammy Susan that all of us on the train would have starved to death if she hadn't put up all that good lunch. I'll tell you about what I am studying in my next letter. Good-by,

Your own Page.

CHAPTER VI. THE FOUNDLING

"Well, Miss Peyton is some mobilizer," sighed Dee as she snuggled down in her bed after our first study hall had been lived through at Gresham. "Just to think, here we are hard at work when we have been here only two days."

"Well, I'm glad, for one," said Dum. "If they work us hard enough, we won't get Zebedee-sick. That's what Dee and I call homesick. Wherever Zebedee is, is home for us."

"My Father and Bracken and Mammy Susan and the dogs are so mixed up in my mind that I can't tell what or which or whom I miss most," and I scrambled into bed in a great hurry just as the bell rang to warn us that lights must be out in five minutes. I had not been twenty-four hours with other girls before I had learned many things that girls know. One of them was that the last one up has the chores to do, such as raising the window at the bottom and pulling it down at the top, a mighty chilly performance when clothed in nothing but a nightgown; also, the tardy one has the light to put out.

"Oh, you foxy creatures!" cried Dum. "I bet you haven't cleaned your teeth, you've been in such a hurry to beat me to bed."

"Deed we have," we declared, "while you were calling on Annie Pore."

"You haven't said your prayers, then," persisted Dum.

"I have," I said. But Dee had neglected this means of grace and had to crawl out of her nice, warm bed; and she and Dum knelt together. There was silence for about three minutes; then Dum bounced into bed and pulled the covers up to her square chin. There she lay, with eyes closed.

"Dum Tucker, you skipped something. I don't believe you said a single thing but 'Nowllayme,'" and Dee stood over her sister like an avenging angel.

"What's it to you?" yawned Dum. "That's a matter between me and my conscience. Open the window; and turn out the light; and crawl into bed before our room gets reported."

"Well, it was a matter between my conscience and me whether I said my prayers at all; and you went and butt in on us. Now you take that toploftical stand about you and your conscience! Well, you and your conscience can just lie on the floor together." With which tirade, Dee yanked Dum and all her bed clothes out on the floor. She then whisked off the light and, quickly raising the window, jumped into bed.

I wondered what would be the outcome of this battle and if it would have to be settled according to the Tuckers' code of honor: a duel with boxing gloves. But just then there was a sharp rap on the door.

"Less noise, please," said a determined voice outside, "or I shall have to report 117 to the principal."

Dum lay on the floor convulsed with giggles. "Sh-h - ." I warned. "Be careful, or we'll all have to write pages from the dictionary for two hours."

"You won't have to, surely, when Dum and I made all the racket," whispered Dee.

"The teacher said '117,' and that means me, too. Can you get back into bed? Is the foot untucked?"

"I believe I can if I don't start giggling again," and Dum began to squirm out of the covers.

"Let me help," said the penitent Dee, and Dum was soon back in her cot and silence reigned supreme. After a while I heard Dum whisper:

"Say, Dee, I did skip. Conscience bids me confess to thee."

"Well, Dum, I'll give it to you that you and your conscience are perfect gentlemen," said Dee admiringly.

"Thanks awfully," yawned Dum. "I know one thing, I'm a mighty sleepy gentleman;" and in a trice the quiet breathing from the disheveled bed told that Dum and her conscience were at rest.

There were constant surprises in store for one who shared a room with the Tucker twins. They certainly had the gift of infinite variety in the kind of scrapes they could get themselves into. They usually got out of scrapes as easily as they got into them by a certain frankness and directness that would disarm Miss Peyton herself. They didn't break rules, because they did things that nobody had ever thought of making rules about. The principal at Gresham was not so farseeing as the teacher in "Mary Had a Little Lamb," who seems to have made a rule about lambs in school:

It followed her to school one day,
Which was against the rule.
It made the children laugh and play
To see a lamb in school.

One day when we were taking a sedate walk, the school out in full force with two teachers to keep order along the blue-coated, black-hatted lines, we saw by the roadside a little kitten, so young its eyes were hardly open.

"Poor little foundling!" "I wonder where it came from!" "I'd like to pick him up!" ejaculated several of the girls, but Dee Tucker was the one who acted. She was bringing up the rear with Miss Sears, the Latin teacher. As they were passing the forlorn little feline, Miss Sears stepped forward to admonish a couple who were talking too loudly. Dee stooped and quickly scooped into her muff the poor pussy. No one saw her and kitty very considerately said nothing. He lay there warm and contented, dreaming he was back with his soft, loving mother, and forgetting the rude hand that had put him into a bag with his brothers and sisters. The bag had had a merciful hole, and he, being the runt of the family, had fallen through before the proposed drowning came off.

We marched on, all unconscious of the addition to our ranks. When we got back to school and went up to our room to take off our hats, etc., I noticed that Dee had very shining eyes and her dimple seemed to be deeper, but she did not divulge to Dum and me what she had up her sleeve, or rather her muff. I also noticed at supper that she swiped some bread and very adroitly concealed it in her middy blouse. She also very cleverly called the attention of every one at our table to the autumn moon, that was peeping into the dining room window, and while they were looking the other way, she filled a little vial with milk from her glass.

Naturally I said nothing, but adopted the watchful, waiting attitude, certain that sooner or later I'd find out what Dee was up to. And I did, all right.

After supper we had an hour before study hall which we usually spent in the gymnasium dancing. Dum and Dee had undertaken to teach Annie Pore and me the new dances. All dances were new to poor Annie and me. I could cut the pigeon wing and dance "Goin' to Church," which is a negro classic (but the Tango and Maxixe with all of the intricate steps and side-stepping seemed very difficult). But I must learn, and learn I did. As for Annie, her sense of rhythm was so great that she took to dancing as a duck does to water. She had to get over a certain self-consciousness that was her ruling fault, but when the Victrola was started in one of the tunes that would make a dead darkey want to get up and pat, why, Annie would forget all about Annie and her ill-fitting clothes and would sway to the music with the utmost abandon.

I believe I have forgotten to tell whom Annie got for a roommate. It was none other than Josephine Barr, the good-natured, dressy Senior, for whom Miss Sayre felt so sorry because of her great wealth. I fancy Jo, as we soon called her, was not very well pleased at first at having to share a room with such a seemingly dismal person; but it was either Annie or Mabel Binks, as all the other rooms were filled and Jo had not registered in time to have much choice.

She couldn't bear Mabel Binks; and she did feel sorry for the poor little new girl who seemed so ready to dissolve into tears. Jo was the best old thing in the world, with a heart as big as all outdoors and an optimistic nature that was bound to influence Annie and make her more cheerful; at the same time, Annie's breeding and careful speech had its good effect on the husky Jo. Before the year was up, they were as intimate as a Senior and Sophomore could be.

On that famous evening which was afterward known as the "Kitten Evening," Dee kept disappearing between dances. She would come back, flushed and a little troubled-looking, but would go on with the dance with a do-or-die expression. Study hour in the assembly hall from eight to ten and then half an hour to get to bed before the bell rang for lights out: that was the order of procedure. As we studied, I noticed how Dee kept fidgeting and twisting. Dum noticed it, too, and the fidgets seemed to be catching. We were on our honor not to speak during study hour, and of course that settled the matter for the Tuckers and me. Dee could squirm herself into a bowknot and Dum and I could die of curiosity, and still honor forbade our making a sign to find out what was the matter.

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.