

Chase Josephine

**Marjorie Dean, College
Freshman**



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Chase Josephine Marjorie Dean, College Freshman

CHAPTER I. – A LONELY LOOKOUT

“Oh, dear! I wish Jerry would come home! I want to see her! I’ve always missed her terribly during vacations, but this summer I’ve missed her more than ever. I’m simply starved for a sight of her dear jolly face! Here it is, the twenty-fourth of August, and no Jerry Jeremiah Geraldine Macy!”

Marjorie Dean had addressed this little series of wistful remarks to no one in particular. She stood at one of the long French windows of the living room, her nose flattened against the pane, little-girl fashion, watching a very wet outdoors. All morning, the rain had been beating down with a sullen persistency which Marjorie found distinctly disheartening. She was as near to having a case of the blues as was possible to one of her care-free, buoyant nature. Wet weather did not often interfere with her happiness. Given her particular girl friends within telephone call and she could discount a rainy day.

Today she was without that source of entertainment and consolation. None of her chums had returned to Sanford from their summer outings. Susan Atwell, Irma Linton, Muriel Harding, Constance Stevens, Jerry Macy – all were missing from the town into which Marjorie had come, a stranger, but of which she now was, to use her own expression, “a regular citizen.”

Marjorie’s thoughts were dwelling on her absent schoolmates as she pensively watched the rain. She wondered if, wherever they were, they were penned in by the rain too. It seemed rather queer to her that she should be the only one of the sextette of girls, who had founded the Lookout Club, to be spending the summer in Sanford. She was not a real Sanfordite by birth. With the exception of Constance Stevens, the others claimed Sanford as their native town.

Readers of the “Marjorie Dean High School Series” have already an acquaintance with Marjorie Dean, and have followed her course as a student at Sanford High School. They have seen her through both sad and happy days, the events of which have been chronicled in “Marjorie Dean, High School Freshman,” “Marjorie Dean, High School Sophomore,” “Marjorie Dean, High School Junior,” and “Marjorie Dean, High School Senior.”

“There goes that old mail carrier and he isn’t going to stop here!” This time Marjorie’s tones were not wistful. Their disgusted energy indicated her patent disappointment. Her red lips drooped in dejection as she saw the unfeeling object of her hopeful anticipation plod stolidly past the gate without so much as a glance at the mailbox at the foot of the driveway.

“Not one single solitary letter,” mourned the watcher. “Why doesn’t Jerry write?”

“When did you hear from Jerry last, Lieutenant?” Mrs. Dean had entered the room in time to hear Marjorie’s plaint.

“Oh, Captain, I’m *so* glad you came to the rescue! I was *so* lonely! You asked me when last I heard from Jerry. Why, it’s almost two weeks. She wrote me it was awfully hot at the beach and – Are you going to stay here awhile and talk to me, Captain?”

Marjorie interrupted herself with this question. Her downcast face had begun to brighten.

“If you are,” she continued, “I’ll run up to my house and get Jerry’s last letter. I’d love to read it to you.”

“I’ll oblige you by staying awhile.” Mrs. Dean sat down in her own particular wicker rocker, her eyes resting fondly on Marjorie.

“You’re a dear. Be back in a minute.” A rush of light feet on the stairs proclaimed that Marjorie had gone to her “house,” as she chose to call her pretty pink and white room, for her letter.

"I can't find it," presently announced a disappointed voice from above stairs. "Have you seen a square gray envelope with large writing on it anywhere in the living room, Captain?"

"I am looking straight at one now," came the reassuring information. "You left it on the mantelpiece, Lieutenant."

"Oh, thank you." A moment and Marjorie was heard making a vigorous descent of the stairs.

"I came down stairs at a positive gallop," she said lightly, as she crossed the room and secured her letter. "I was afraid I had left it in the table drawer in the pagoda. If I had, that would have meant a wading trip for me. I suppose I'd have gone after it, but I am glad it's here."

"You are overflowing with repressed energy, Marjorie," Mrs. Dean said, looking a trifle anxious. "I wonder if a quiet summer at home has really been best for you. While there is no place I know more comfortable than our own home, the change would have been beneficial to you. I believe we should have spent, at least, two weeks at the beach or in the mountains."

"Please don't feel that you haven't done the very best for me, Captain!" was Marjorie's instant response. "You know it was my fault that we didn't go away this vacation. I said I had rather stay at home. We didn't care to go anywhere for an outing without General, and, so long as he couldn't be with us, we decided that home was nicest. That's the way things were. How can you say you were to blame?"

Marjorie was hanging over her mother's chair now, soft hands patting the face she loved most in the world.

"I wanted particularly to be at home this summer on account of my going to college in the fall. Ever since we came to Sanford to live I have had one long succession of good times. Most of them have taken me away from you. If I had a party, then I had to be with my guests. If I was invited to one, that took me away from you."

"But my own dear lieutenant, your captain wished you to have these good times with your school friends," reasoned her mother. "I could hardly expect to keep you tied to my apron string."

"I know you have been the most unselfish mother in the whole world," stoutly asserted Marjorie. "I know I haven't appreciated you half so highly as I ought. It all comes over me now just because it is growing nearer the time to go to college. I can't bear to think about it."

The merry light had faded from Marjorie's features. Her lips had begun to quiver. Her two hands dropped inert to her captain's shoulders and rested there. She had no words for all that was in her heart.

Leaving her captain to go to Hamilton College was bound to be the greatest cross Marjorie had, thus far in her happy young life, been called upon to bear. She always missed her general keenly when he went away on long business trips. This in the warm shelter of her mother's devotion. But to part from Captain! Not to see her every day; not to hear her beloved voice! Marjorie sometimes tried to dwell on this sad feature of entering college. She found it unendurable and frequently entertained the desperate wish that her parents might suddenly discover that they could not afford to send her to college. That would be a legitimate excuse for staying at home.

A brief interval of silence followed her woeful declaration. It was broken by a stifled sob. The little lieutenant had struggled hard to keep back her tears, but had failed. Without a word she bundled herself in to her mother's arms. Heavy showers were due to fall indoors as well as out.

CHAPTER II. – A TALK WITH CAPTAIN AND A SURPRISE

Presently clearance came. With a long sigh, Marjorie raised her head. She was just in time to see her mother wiping her own eyes and making a valiant effort to smile. It pulled the little lieutenant together as nothing else could have done.

“Oh, Captain, forgive me!” she cried out in contrition. It was unusual to see tears in her mother’s soft eyes. “I’m a nice kind of soldier!”

“No harm done,” was the tender response. “This little tear shower was bound to fall, sooner or later. I am all right now.” Her mother’s wavering smile steadied itself.

“I’ve tried to keep away from the sad side of going away to college,” Marjorie said somberly, “but how many girls are there who have the dear beautiful home life that I have? And this summer alone with you! It’s been great happiness and sadness all jumbled together. Every once in awhile when I am very happy, I suddenly remember that there’s a shadow. I have to stop for a minute to think what it is. Then I know – I am going away from my captain before long.”

“You must also stop to remember that you can’t go through life only half educated,” practically reminded Mrs. Dean, with a view toward lightening the lieutenant’s pessimistic views. “At least, General and I do not propose that you shall. Suppose you wished more than all else to go through college and we could not afford to send you? That would really be a case for lamentation.”

“I’ve thought of all that,” Marjorie returned soberly. “I know it is splendid that I have the opportunity. I am thankful for all my benefits, truly I am. I ought to be glad I haven’t Lucy Warner’s problem to solve.”

“I don’t believe either General or I could truly accuse you of being ungrateful.” Mrs. Dean smiled down upon the flushed face so near her own. “Do you think Lucy Warner will try to enter Hamilton College this fall?” She asked this question with a double object in view. First, to take Marjorie’s mind off herself. While on the subject of college, she wished also to draw from Marjorie, if possible, Lucy’s present attitude toward the world in general. When, occasionally, Marjorie had entertained Lucy at the house that summer at luncheon or dinner, Mrs. Dean had accorded her the same friendly courtesy she would have extended to Jerry or Muriel. She had never quite forgiven Lucy for the unhappiness she had caused Marjorie during both her junior and senior years at high school. She had not yet come to a point where she could repose faith in the odd, green-eyed girl of whom Marjorie had grown so fond.

“She would like to, but she is worried about the expenses. They are so high at Hamilton.” Marjorie’s face clouded momentarily. “She could draw whatever sum of money she needs from the Lookouts’ treasury, but she won’t. I may tell you, Captain, but no one else – Lucy feels dreadfully yet, over that misunderstanding we had last year. She blames herself for not having believed in me. She says the other girls would not have doubted me, and she had no right to be so hard on me. She thinks she isn’t worthy of help from the club. She told me this, privately, because she felt it was my right to know.”

Mrs. Dean’s long-harbored sense of injury against Lucy Warner took sudden flight. She understood at last the peculiar girl’s innate honesty of character, and could not do else than respect her for her drastic stand.

“Lucy feels afraid she may not find any kind of work at Hamilton to help her out with her personal expenses,” Marjorie continued. “She can tutor in either Latin or mathematics. She has saved nearly two hundred dollars from her work last year and this summer. If she should enter Hamilton this fall her mother will do practical nursing. Then she will be earning quite a good deal of money

and she won't be so lonely. That's the way things are with Lucy. I wish she would enter college with the rest of us. It would be easier for her and nice for us to be freshmen together."

"Would Lucy accept financial help from you? You may offer it to her if you think best, Lieutenant." Mrs. Dean's generous proposal arose from a relieved mind. She could make it with absolute freedom of spirit.

"No, Captain. I am the last one Lucy would allow to help her. If Ronny were here she might be able to make Lucy see things in the right light. Ronny is the only one, I feel sure, who could convince her. She would not give up until she had. But goodness knows when we shall see Ronny again!"

An anxious little pucker appeared between Marjorie's brows. Not since the first of July had she heard word from Veronica Lynne, Miss Archer's God-child. Ronny had left Sanford a few days after Commencement, and had written her a lengthy train letter, en route for California. This Marjorie had answered, using a San Francisco address Ronny had given her. For one reason or another, Ronny had not replied to it.

"I wish Ronny would write me," she said. "She promised me she'd write *me* if she didn't write anyone else. I know she will keep her word; but when?"

During their confidential talk, Marjorie had remained seated on her mother's lap. Tardy recollection that she was altogether too heavy for comfort brought her to her feet.

"Poor, dear Captain!" she exclaimed. "You can't help but be tired from holding a great, heavy elephant like me! We had so much to talk about. I forgot everything except how nice it was to snuggle close to you and be comforted. That's the very hardest part of being away from you. I won't have my superior officers near by to report to."

"You will have to tuck your reports away in your mind and have a reporting session when you come home on your vacations," her mother suggested.

"Yes; and I promise you, Captain, that all my vacations will be spent with *you*." Marjorie pointed an emphatic finger at her mother. "I'll never desert my Captain and my General when I have a furlough. No, sir!"

"I think I shall hold you to that promise, Lieutenant. You have made it of your own accord. I would rather have it a free will promise. You will be away the greater part of the year. Those precious vacations belong to us. I know General feels the same."

"I wish you both to be very stingy of me. Then I shall be sure you love me a lot," Marjorie replied with playful emphasis. She no longer felt like crying. While outdoors the rain continued to beat down; indoors the sun had broken through the clouds.

"Once, oh, very long ago, you spoke of reading me Jerry's letter," Mrs. Dean presently reminded. "Then the rain descended and the floods came, and –"

"We forgot all about it," supplemented Marjorie. "All right, my dearest Captain, I will proceed to read it to you this minute." This time she picked it up from the floor. It had dropped from her hand when she had briefly descended into the valley of woe. Settling herself in an easy chair, she unfolded the letter and promptly began:

"Magnificent Marjoram:

"I want to go home! It is hot here. This part of the globe is getting ready to burn down. The beach is hot; the hotel is hotter and the sun is hottest. It was nice and cool here until about a week ago. Then the sun came rambling along and started to smile. After that he beamed. Now he is on the job all day with a broad grin. Maybe we don't notice it! Still our family love to linger in this hot berg. Hal hates to give up the bathing. Mother and Father are deep in a series of old-fashioned whist. They meet the same friends here each year, and they always play whist. They are anxious to stay for the last game in the series.

"I'm the only one who longs for home. I offered to go home by myself and keep Lonesome Hall. Mother said, "Nay, nay!" I pleaded that you would feed and nourish me and let me sleep in your

garage until she came home. That didn't go. Here I languish while some of the Macys swim in the surf and others of them hold up a hand at whist.

“Everyone at Severn Beach is growling about the heat. It has never been like this before. While I'm sitting squarely in front of an electric fan, I'm moderately cool. The minute I move off from it, I'm wilted. The last leaf of the last rose of summer was beautiful as compared to me at the end of a perfect day down here.

“Next year, we are going to the mountains. I don't know which mountains the folks intend to put up on, but I know where Jeremiah is going. I'm going straight to the top of Mount Everest, which our good old geography used to inform us was the highest peak on earth. Five miles high! Think of it! I shall go clear to the top and roost there all summer. I shall have my meals brought up to me three times a day. That means five miles per meal for somebody. I certainly shall not go after them myself. It will be a wonderful vacation! So restful! Tell you more about it when I see you. You may go along if you happen to need perfect peace and rest.

“Oh, Marjorie, I am so anxious to see you and talk my head off! There isn't a single girl at the beach this year that amounts to a handful of popcorn. They are so terribly grown-up and foolish; idiotic I might better say. They make eyes at poor old Hal and he gets so wrathful. Every time he sees one coming towards him, when he is down on the main veranda, you ought to see him arise and vanish. Sometimes, when he gets so disgusted he has to talk, he comes around and tells me how silly he thinks they are. Then, to tease him, I tell him he shouldn't be so beautiful. You ought to hear him rave. If there is anything he hates it is to be called “beautiful.”

“By the way, how are you enjoying this letter? Great, isn't it? I am trying to tell you all the news, only there is none to tell. Oh, I almost forgot. I must tell you of the lovely walk I had one day last week. I came in from bathing one morning and thought I would take a walk around the town. It had been raining early in the morning and then had grown quite cool for this furnace.

“I dressed up in a new white pongee suit, which is very becoming to Jeremiah, and I wore my best round white hemp hat. It is imported and cost money.

“I started out and walked briskly up one avenue and briskly down another. Fast walking is supposed to be good exercise for people who weigh one hundred and forty pounds, when they are hoping to weigh one twenty-five. I won't speak of myself. The streets of this town were paved just after paving was invented, as an advertisement, I suspect, and they have never been touched since. With this explanation, as Miss Flint was fond of remarking, I will proceed with my story.

“I was about half way across one of these ancient, hobblety-gobble outrages, when I came to grief. My feet slipped on a slimy brick and I landed flat on my back in a puddle of dirty water. I hit my poor head an awful bang. I'm speaking of myself all right enough now. I was so mad I couldn't think of anything to say. All my choicest slang flew away when I whacked my head. My nice round hemp hat was saved a ducking. It jumped off my head and almost across the street. Some little jumper, that hat! An obliging breeze caught it, and it scuttled off around the corner and would have been home ahead of me if it hadn't collided with a horse block. It sat down with a flop and waited for me.

“The spectators to Jeremiah's fall were three children, a horse, and an old green and yellow parrot. The kiddies weren't impressed, but the parrot yelled and ha-ha-ed and enjoyed himself a whole lot. He was in a cage hung on a porch right near where I fell. I don't know what the horse thought. He behaved like a gentleman, though. He didn't either rubber or laugh. That's more than I can say of the other witnesses to my disaster.

“But, on with my narrative. I'll leave you to imagine how I looked. My white pongee suit was no longer suitable. It was a disgrace to the noble house of Macy. I had to get home, just the same, so I faced about and hit up a pace for the hotel. I had gone about two blocks when I met a jitney. I never enjoyed meeting anyone so much before as that jitney man. Of course the hotel verandas were full of people. It was just before luncheon and folks were sitting around, hopefully waiting for the dining rooms to open.

“Fortunately it was my back that had suffered injury from the mud. I gave one look to see who was behind me. There was no one but an old man in a wheel chair and a couple of spoons. They were so busy beaming on each other that I was a blank to them. I made a dash for the side entrance to the hotel and caught the elevator going up. I went with it. Thus ends the tale of Jeremiah’s fateful walk. Thus ends my news also. When you hear from me again, it will probably be in person. I shall hit the trail for Sanford, first chance I have. I must stop now and go to dinner. I send you the faithful devotion of a loyal Lookout. That is no mean little dab of affection. Remember me to your mother and pat Ruffle for me. Now that I’m ending this letter, I can think of a lot of things to tell you. Oh, well, I’ll write ’em another day or else say ’em.

“Lovingly your friend,

“Jerry Macy.”

Marjorie had stopped reading to laugh more than once at Jerry’s droll phrasing. “Isn’t Jerry funny, Mother?” she exclaimed. “Hal is funny, too. Still he isn’t so funny as Jerry. I think – ”

Whatever Marjorie might have further said regarding Jerry’s letter remained unspoken. Her gaze chancing to travel to a window, she sprang to her feet with an exclamation of surprise. Next she ran to the window and peered curiously out. A taxicab from the station had stopped before the gate. From the house it was not easy to distinguish, through the driving rain, the identity of the solitary fare, for whom the driver had left his machine to open the gate. It was a slim girlish figure, too slender to be Jerry. Through the mist Marjorie caught the smart lines of a navy blue rain coat, buttoned to the chin and a gleam of bright hair under a tight-lined blue hat.

Could it be? Marjorie’s heart began a tattoo of joy. It didn’t seem possible – yet the blue-clad figure, making for the house at a run, was unmistakable.

“Captain, it’s Ronny!” she shrieked in a high jubilant treble. “She just got out of a taxicab and she’s here!”

Without stopping to make further explanation, Marjorie rushed to the front door to welcome the last person she had expected to see on that stormy morning, Veronica Lynne.

CHAPTER III. – THE REAL RONNY

“Ronny Lynne, who would have expected to see you?” rejoiced Marjorie. “I can’t believe my own eyes.” Two welcoming arms embraced the beloved visitor, regardless of her dripping rain coat.

“Oh, I know I’m the great unexpected,” laughed Veronica, warmly returning Marjorie’s embrace. “Now break away, reckless child, before you are quite as wet as I. See what you get for hugging a rushing rivulet. Oh, Marjorie Dean, but I’m glad to see you! I can’t begin to tell you how much I have missed you. I received your letter and meant to answer at once. Then I – ”

Veronica broke off in her abrupt fashion. This time it was to greet Mrs. Dean, who, after leaving the two girls together during the first enthusiasm of meeting had now come forward to welcome Ronny.

“A bad day for traveling, but a happy one for us,” she said, as she affectionately kissed Miss Archer’s God-child. “Help Ronny out of that wet rain coat, Lieutenant. Better go straight upstairs with Marjorie, Veronica. She will soon make you comfortable with one of her negligees and house slippers. I will bring you a cup of consommé. I know you must be hungry.”

“I am hungry, and I would love to dress up in some of Marjorie’s clothes,” Ronny made reply. Marjorie was already busy undoing the buttons of her friend’s coat.

“Come right along upstairs then,” Marjorie invited. “I’ll soon have you fixed all nice and comfy. I am so happy, Ronny. I’ve been thinking of you as away off in California, and here you have been hustling across the continent to visit me.”

“And all the time I have been congratulating myself on the blessed fact that I would really have a chance to be chummy with you when I finally arrived,” exulted Ronny, as she ran lightly up the wide open staircase behind her hostess. Mrs. Dean had already hurried kitchenward to see to the consommé.

“We will be the best chums ever!” Pausing on the top step, Marjorie stretched forth a hand. “Welcome to my house and heart,” she said. Tucking her friend’s hand within her arms she drew her down a short hall and into her own particular domain. The door of Marjorie’s “house” stood open as though hospitably awaiting the arrival of the guest. Its dainty pink and whiteness shed a light and beauty, infinitely cheering on a dark day.

“And now to give you something to dress up in.” Loosing Veronica’s hand, Marjorie crossed the room and threw open the door of a large dress closet. “Yours to command,” she offered with a hospitable gesture. Pressing a button in the wall the wardrobe sprang alight, disclosing the finery of girlhood in all its rainbow hues.

“Oh, you choose a garment for me to luxuriate in,” Ronny returned. “I don’t know the whys and wherefores of your clothes.”

Marjorie peered thoughtfully at her array of gowns and selected a half-fitted negligee of old-rose silk. A moment’s search in a cunningly contrived shoe cupboard at one side of the closet, and she held up quilted satin slippers to match.

“Thank you, hospitable one.” Veronica was already clear of her dark blue bengaline frock and reaching for the silken comfort of the negligee. Her wet pumps soon removed, she donned the soft slippers and settled back in a willow rocker with a sigh of satisfaction. “I can’t begin to tell you how comfortable I am,” she said. “I had to change cars this morning before eight, and in the rain. All I had to console me was the thought that I would be in Sanford before noon. God-mother doesn’t know I am east. I didn’t write her because I was anxious to give her a surprise. I’ll go to see her tomorrow. I wanted to come to you first. I never had much chance to be here when I was ‘Miss Archer’s servant.’”

Ronny’s tones rippled with amused laughter. An answering smile rose to Marjorie’s lips. Memory recalled the sedate, reserved girl she had known as Veronica Browning. She was now

beginning to glimpse the real Ronny; brilliant, high-spirited, sure of herself, with the independence of those who have known the bitterness of poverty.

"You are so different, Ronny," she said. "I mean from last year. Once in a great while I used to see flashes of you as you are now. I remember the night you danced that wonderful butterfly number at the Campfire. You seemed happy and so much more like a real girl than as I saw you in school each day. You are like a butterfly who is so glad to be free of the chrysalis."

"How nice in you to compare me to anything so beautiful as a butterfly. I am glad to be free of the part I played last year. I am not sorry I played it, though. Is Mignon La Salle going to Hamilton College?" she asked, with an abrupt change of subject. "I hope not. I think I can never forgive her for the trouble she made you. I never minded in the least the way she treated me."

"No; Mignon is going to Smith College. She is all right now, Ronny," Marjorie earnestly assured. "When she faced about last spring she truly meant it."

"You deserve the credit for having hauled her through," was Ronny's blunt opinion. "I never would have had the patience. A good many times last year I was tempted to tell you who I really was. I did not care to have the other girls know, and Jerry was so curious about me. I was afraid it might make trouble for you if you knew and they didn't. The Lookouts would have been likely to ask you about me. Then, if I had pledged you to secrecy, it would have meant your refusal to answer any questions concerning me. This year – "

Veronica broke off in the old way which had always been so baffling to Marjorie. For an instant a vague sense of disappointment visited her. It was as though Ronny had once again suddenly dropped the curtain of mystery between them.

Her brown eyes fixed with unconscious solemnity on her guest, she became aware that Veronica was laughing at her. "I know what you are thinking," Ronny declared. "You think I am the same aggravating old mystery who used never to finish a sentence. Good reason why I chopped off a remark I was about to make. I almost told you a secret." Her tone was now purposely tantalizing. "Had I best tell you now or wait awhile?"

The entrance into the room of Mrs. Dean, bearing a lacquered tray, on which was a steaming cup of consommé and a plate of small crisp rolls, interrupted any confidence Ronny might have been on the point of making. Lingering for a few minutes' talk with Veronica, Mrs. Dean left the two girls with the reminder that the luncheon bell would soon ring.

Marjorie, meanwhile, had learned something new of Ronny. She realized that now her friend was only playing at secrecy. Ronny would never again be a mystery to her as in the past.

"I've learned something about you, Ronny Lynne," she commented in merry accusation. "You love to tease. Well, you can't tease me. As for your old secret you may do just as you please. You may tell me now or after while. I'm not a bit curious. Ahem! I won't say I am not *interested*. Wouldn't you like to tell me now?"

She laid a coaxing hand on Ronny's arm. The latter's radiant face was an index to pleasant news.

"Would I? Perhaps." Ronny pretended to deliberate. "Well, listen hard. Once upon a time there was a person named Ronny who decided to go to college. She had heard about a college named Hamilton, and – "

"You're going to Hamilton! You're going to Hamilton!" Marjorie had sprung from her chair and was performing a dance of jubilation about Veronica. "It is the best old secret I ever heard!"

"I hoped you would be pleased." There were tears just back of Ronny's eyes. She loved Marjorie with the great strength of a first friendship. Naturally she was moved by the hearty reception of her news.

"*Pleased!* That doesn't express it! This morning I was lonesome and wished something pleasant would happen. The girls are all away from Sanford. Lucy Warner and I are the only Lookouts at home. Lucy is secretary to Mr. Forbes, a Sanford lawyer, so I don't see her very often. I never dreamed that the rain would bring me you. And now comes the crowning happiness! You are going to be with me

at Hamilton. I think I am a very lucky Lookout.” Marjorie had paused in front of Veronica, hands resting lightly on the arms of the latter’s chair. “When you left Sanford last June, Ronny, had you any idea then of entering Hamilton?”

“No.” Ronny shook a decided head. “I was not sure of coming east again for a long while. Father missed me dreadfully last year. I could tell that from his letters. I thought he would ask me to stay at home and engage a tutor for me. After I had been at home awhile we went on a pony riding trip over some of his fruit ranches. We had lots of long talks and I told him a great deal about you. He was much interested in the Lookouts and asked a good many questions about the club. He asked which college you expected to enter, and if I would like to go east again to college. I found that he really wished me to go to an eastern college, provided I was of the same mind. He always gives me the privilege of choice. Of course, I chose Hamilton. So here I am. I shall divide my visits between you and God-mother until time to go to Hamilton, and then we’ll journey into the far country of college together along with as many of the Lookouts as shall decide for Hamilton.”

“Jerry is going to be a Hamiltonite,” returned Marjorie, her bright face showing her happiness. “Muriel Harding, too. I am not sure about Lucy Warner, Ronny. She may have to wait until next year to enter college. She won’t let anyone help her with her personal expenses.”

“I expected some such hitch in her plans,” was Ronny’s almost grim reply. “I would have offered her personal aid last June, but knew it would not be best then. I intended to write you about it. When I decided for college I knew I could talk things over with you and plan how to help Lucy while on this visit.”

“If anyone can persuade her that she really ought to enter Hamilton, this year, it will be you,” Marjorie asserted confidently.

“I will do my best,” promised Ronny. “I ought to have made that scholarship cover everything in the way of expense down to a shoestring. I was positive Lucy would win it. She is so proud. I merely tried to save her dignity by offering the regulation scholarship.”

The musical tinkle of a bell from below stairs announced luncheon. Marjorie caught Ronny’s hands and drew her up from her chair.

“There’s the luncheon bell,” she announced. “Come along, Ronny. We have some glorious news to tell Captain.”

Their arms twined about each other’s waists, the two friends walked slowly toward the half open door. There they stopped to talk. A second and louder jingling of the bells soon informed them that they were loiterers.

“That’s Captain,” laughed Marjorie. “She knows we’ve stopped to talk. Delia rang the bell first time. She only tinkled it a little.”

Accelerating their pace, the two gaily descended the stairs. More fully the joy of the occasion was borne upon Veronica. It was wonderful to her to be so near and dear to a girl like Marjorie. More, this happy state of affairs would continue all year. There would be no cloud of mystery between them as had been at high school. She was determined also that no clouds should obscure Marjorie’s college sky if she could prevent their gathering. If Marjorie’s strict adherence to truth and justice brought her the disfavor of the unworthy, she would not have to contend against them single-handed.

CHAPTER IV – CONCERNING JEREMIAH

Luncheon proved a merry little meal. When one has been suddenly lifted out of the dumps by the arrival of a friend from afar, and afterward doubly cheered by exceptionally good news, the dreariness of a rainy day is soon forgotten.

Returned to the living room after luncheon, Marjorie drew forward a deep, soft-cushioned chair with wide padded arms.

“Take this chair, Ronny,” she invited. “It’s the most comfortable old thing! In winter it is my pet lounging place at twilight. I love to curl up in it and watch the firelight. Captain likes that wicker chair near the table. General and I always fight over this one. If he gets it first, I try to tip him out of it. I might as well try to move a mountain. He braces his feet and sits and laughs at me. Ruffle, my big Angora cat, claims it, too. He always looks so injured if I lift him from it.”

“An extremely popular chair,” commented Ronny, smiling. Settling back in it, she added: “I don’t wonder you all fight for it. I shall enter the lists, too.”

“You are welcome to it. You’re company. It’s only the Deans who won’t respect one another’s claims, Captain excepted. By the Deans, I mean General, Ruffle and me.”

“Much obliged for clearing me of the charge,” her captain remarked with twinkling eyes. “You should hear those squabbles, Veronica. They are noisy enough to bring the house down.”

Veronica laughed, yet into her gray eyes sprang a wistful light. “My father loves to tease me like that,” she said. “We had such good times this summer at Mañana. That is the name of our largest ranch. We live there most of the time.”

“Mañana?” Marjorie looked questioningly at Ronny. “That means ‘morning’ in Spanish, doesn’t it? I know a few Spanish words. General speaks the language. His trips often take him to Mexico.”

“Yes, it also means ‘tomorrow,’” Ronny answered. “The full name of our Mañana is ‘Lucero de la Mañana.’ It means ‘Star of the Morning.’ I named it. Father bought it when I was twelve years old. The first time I saw it was one morning before seven. We were on a riding trip and could look down on it from a height. It was so beautiful, I asked Father to find out if it were for sale. It belonged to a Spanish woman, Donna Dolores de Mendoza. She was willing to part with it, as she wished to go to Spain to live. So Father bought it. I hope someday you will visit me there. I shall never be satisfied until the Dean family are under the Lynnes’ roof tree.”

“Someday,” Marjorie made hopeful promise. “General has said he would take us on a western trip sometime.”

“I hope that ‘sometime’ will be next summer,” returned Ronny. “When I grow to know your worthy General well, I shall interview him on the subject.”

Veronica’s allusion to her far western home furnished Marjorie with an opportunity she had long desired. She was anxious to hear more of Ronny’s life prior to her advent into Sanford. She had, therefore, a great many interested questions to ask which she knew Ronny would now be willing to answer. Formerly, while Ronny had been securely wrapped in her cloak of reserve, Marjorie had never attempted to question her personally.

Ronny, in turn, had an equal number of questions to ask regarding Sanford and the Lookouts. The afternoon slipped away before either of the reunited friends was aware that it had gone.

“Do you suppose we’ll ever catch up in talking?” Ronny asked in pretended despair, as the three women lingered over the dessert at dinner that evening.

“Oh, after a long while,” easily assured Marjorie. “You see I couldn’t get you to talk about yourself last year, so we lost a good deal of time. I am actually ashamed for asking you so many questions, Ronny. Still there were so many things I wanted to ask you last year and did not feel free to. Wait until you see Jerry. She will ask you more questions than I have. She said in her last letter

to me that she had no news to tell. Well, I shall have some news to tell her when she comes home. She will be so surprised when she – ”

“*Surprised?* Well, yes; *quite* a lot.”

The familiar voice that gave utterance to this pithy affirmation proceeded from the doorway leading into the reception hall. It electrified the placid trio at the table. Three heads turned simultaneously at the sound. Marjorie made a dive for the doorway.

“Jeremiah!” she exclaimed, with a joyful rising inflection on the last syllable. “Wherever did you come from? This is my third splendid surprise today. You can see for yourself who’s here. You’ve had one surprise, at least.” Marjorie clung to Jerry with enthusiastic fervor.

“I have, I have,” agreed Jerry, putting two plump arms around Ronny, who had come forward the instant she grasped the situation. “Now how in the world do you happen to be here, mysterious Mystery? You are the last person I thought would be on the job to welcome me to our city.”

“How long have *you* been here? That is what I should like to know,” Marjorie interposed, patting the hand she held between her own.

“Long enough to hear all you said about me. I’m simply furious. No; I am perfectly delighted, I mean. Now what do I mean?” Jerry showed her white even teeth in a genial grin.

“We didn’t say anything about you that would either delight you or make you furious. I know you didn’t hear a single thing we said, except maybe the last sentence. How did you get in? Not by the front door or we would have heard the bell. Now confess: Delia let you in by the back door.” Marjorie waved a triumphant finger before Jerry’s nose as she made this conjecture.

“I’ll never tell how I came in. No; that won’t do, Geraldine. You must try to be civil to these Deans. They may ask you to stay a few days and you – ” Jerry paused significantly, then sidled up to Mrs. Dean. “I’m so pleasant to have around,” she simpered. “You will positively adore me when you get used to my ways.” She put both arms around Mrs. Dean and gave her a resounding kiss.

“You may stay as long as you please, and the longer you stay the better pleased we shall be.” Her invitation thus extended, Mrs. Dean was now assisting Jerry to remove her long coat of tan covert cloth. “How did you manage to keep so dry, Jerry?” she inquired. “It has been raining steadily all evening. Veronica came to us thoroughly drenched.”

“The beautiful truth is, Delia hung my coat in front of the range and dried it. I had an umbrella, too, and I ran like a hunter the minute I left the taxi. I made the driver stop at the corner below the house and I ducked in at the side gate. I landed on your back porch just as Delia was going to serve the dessert. I asked her not to tell you I was here. It’s a great wonder she didn’t laugh and give me away.”

“I noticed she had a broad smile on her face when she came into the dining room. I thought it was in honor of Ronny. Here she was aiding and abetting *you*, Jeremiah Macy! She knows I have been anxiously waiting for you to come home. Just wait till I see her!”

Marjorie chuckled in anticipation of her interview with Delia. The latter would regard Jerry’s stealthy arrival as a huge joke in which she had played an important part.

“I thought a relative had come to see you,” Jerry continued. “Delia said it was a young lady from away off. That’s all she seemed to want to tell me. I didn’t quiz her. It was none of my business.”

“That is the time Delia fooled you,” Ronny asserted. “Delia knows me. She wanted to surprise you, too.”

“All right for Delia. Wait until *I* interview her for keeping so quiet about you.” All of which pointed to a lively session for Delia. “Anyhow I had some cherry pudding with whipped cream. I saw it the minute I struck the kitchen. I hoped it wouldn’t give out before it got around to me. There was enough, though, for Delia and me. We emptied the dish.”

“All this going on behind my back!” Mrs. Dean made an unsuccessful effort to look highly displeased. “I shall have to discipline the commissary department for smuggling vagrants into the house under my very nose. Not to mention distributing pudding with a free hand!”

“Vagrants! She means me.” Jerry rolled her eyes as though greatly alarmed. “I see I’ll have to swallow the insult. If I make a fuss I may be put out.”

“Promise good conduct in future and we’ll try to overlook the past,” Marjorie graciously conceded.

“Thank you, kind lady! I wasn’t always like this. Once I had a home – ” Jerry gave vent to a loud snivel. “I lost it. Now all I can say is:

“Into your house some tramps must fall,
Some Deans must be made aweary.”

Sobbing out this pathetic sentiment, Jerry endeavored to lean on Marjorie, with disastrous results. They were saved from toppling over by landing with force against Veronica.

“Here, here!” expostulated Ronny. “Don’t add assault and battery to vagrancy. Have some respect for me. I’m a real guest. I arrived by the front door.”

“Excuse me and blame Marjorie for being an unstable prop. Try to regard me as your friend.” Jerry leered confidently at Ronny.

“I’ll think it over. You are the funniest old goose ever. I’ll try to prevail upon the Deans to let you stay.”

“Oh, I think I can manage them,” Jerry returned in a confident stage whisper.

“Yes, we are going to be kind to our tramp now.” Marjorie gently propelled Jerry to the table and shoved her, unresisting, into a chair. “You had dessert. Now you had better have the rest of the dinner. While Delia is getting it ready you can tell us how it all happened. How did you get away from the beach before your folks were ready to come home?”

“I teased Mother good and hard and she finally said ‘yes.’ It took me about two hours to pack and wish the beach good-bye. The folks will be home Saturday. I’ll have three whole days with you girls. I hadn’t figured on the distinguished presence of Miss Veronica Browning Lynne.”

“Neither had I,” smiled Marjorie. “The best part of Ronny’s visit is that it is going to last until the very day I start for Hamilton. Ronny is going to Hamilton, too, Jerry.”

“Did I get that right?” Jerry placed an assisting hand to one ear. “Say it again, will you? Hooray!” Jerry picked up a dessert fork and waved it jubilantly. “The three of us; and Muriel Harding as a fourth staunch supporter! We can teach the Hamilton faculty how to act and revolutionize the whole college. Oh, yes! Lucy Warner makes a fifth. Ummm! She will have to be supported until she gets on her ear. Then she’ll freeze solid and support herself.”

Neither Ronny nor Marjorie could refrain from laughing at this view of Lucy. It was so precisely like her.

“Thank goodness there won’t be Mignon to reform.” Jerry sighed exaggerated relief. “Any more sieges like the four years’ siege of Mignon ahead of me, and I’d stay at home and go to night school for a change. Talk about the wars of the Trojans! They were simple little scraps compared with the rows we’ve had at Sanford High with various vandals.”

Delia appearing from the kitchen with a heavily laden tray, the three girls greeted her with a concerted shout. Not in the least dismayed, she only beamed more broadly, as each of the trio attempted to take her to task, and refused to commit herself.

After Jerry had made a substantial repast, she was triumphantly conducted to her room by Ronny and Marjorie.

“Have you a kimono or negligee in your bag, Jerry? If you have, put it on and be comfy. If you haven’t, speak now and you can have one of mine. Captain will be on guard duty in the living room this evening. If any one calls they won’t have the pleasure of seeing us. We are going to have an old-time talking bee in my house. Come along as soon as you are ready.”

"I have a kimono in my traveling bag. It has probably acquired about a thousand wrinkles by this time," returned Jerry. "Wrinkled or no, I shall hail it with joy. You may expect me at your house in about fifteen minutes."

"All right," Marjorie called over her shoulder, as she and Ronny left Jerry. "Don't be longer than that. Remember we have weighty matters to discuss this evening. If we began early enough we may have the affairs of the universe settled before midnight."

When within the prescribed fifteen minutes Jerry joined her chums, it was their own personal affairs that came up for discussion. Enough had happened during the summer in their own little sphere to keep them talking uninterruptedly all evening.

"There is one thing we must do before we leave Sanford for college and that is pass the Lookout Club on to the senior class at Sanford High. You know we planned to do so when we organized the club, Jeremiah," Marjorie reminded.

"That's so," Jerry agreed, "but how do we go about it? If we just hand it to the senior class, they may not carry it on as we would wish them to. It was really our own little private club. I'm not crazy to continue it as a sorority."

"We ought to, Jerry, just the same. The Lookouts have been a credit to Sanford High, and the influence we have tried to exert should be carried on each year by fifteen seniors." Marjorie spoke with conviction. "I have thought a good deal about it this summer. I believe the best way for us to do is for each of the Lookouts to propose the name of one member of the present senior class. As soon as the other girls come home we will have a meeting. The names of the candidates can be written on slips of paper and read out to the club in turn. If any one of us objects to another's choice, she must say so and state her reason. If it is sufficient, the name will be dropped and the Lookout who proposed it may propose another."

"That's a good idea. While we can be trusted, I hope not to pick lemons, slackers and shirkers, still it makes our choice surer to have it approved by the gang. So long as we are to be the ones to do the choosing, I begin to see light." Jerry had begun to show more enthusiasm.

"It's really organizing what one might call a new Lookout chapter. We are the charter members and will continue to run our chapter as we like. Next year the girls we choose will select their fifteen members for a new chapter, and so on, indefinitely," said Veronica.

"We need these new girls, Jerry," Marjorie earnestly pointed out. "We can't look after the day nursery and go to college, too. While we have hired help there, and Miss Allison, you know, is always ready to do all she can to help keep it running smoothly, we need the personal influence of the seniors at the nursery. There should be two club members to take their turn each day from four to six, as we did."

"Who has been looking after that part of it this summer?" Jerry demanded abruptly, her keen eyes on Marjorie. "I wrote and asked you that and you never answered my question. You are the one who has probably been making a slave of yourself at that same nursery while the rest of us have been having a lovely time."

"I have been down there twice a week from four to six," Marjorie replied. "Sometimes Captain went with me. Thanks to *that* generous person," she indicated Ronny, "we could afford to engage some one to amuse the children. Ronny put five hundred dollars in bank for a vacation fund and never said a single word about it. When she was half way to California I received a note from Mr. Wendell asking me to call at the bank. You can imagine what a surprise it was to me. It was fine in you to think of it, Ronny. The girls were worried, for we found out that all of the Lookouts except me, were going to be away from Sanford at about the same time."

"While we had quite a good deal of money in the treasury we didn't think of engaging anyone from outside," she continued. "It worked beautifully. Miss Stratton, a kindergarten teacher, needed the work on account of having an invalid sister to support. Then, Nellie Wilkins, one of the mill girls, had been sick for a long time and when she was well enough to go back to her work as a weaver there

was no position for her. She is a very sweet girl and knows all the children. She was a great help to Miss Stratton and I would like her to have the position permanently at the nursery. She knows all the songs and games now that Miss Stratton taught the children and is the best person one could have there.”

“Whew!” whistled Jerry. “Things have certainly been happening at the nursery. You are simply splendid, Ronny. You are always thinking of some way to help people. Just wait until I take my presidential chair as chief boss of the Lookouts. I will publish your noble deed abroad.”

“If you *don't*, I *will*,” emphasized Marjorie. “There isn’t much we can say to tell you how grateful we are to you, Ronny.”

“Don’t say anything.” A bright flush had risen to Ronny’s cheeks. “I knew the girls would be away. I thought you would be quite apt to worry about the nursery and spend a lot of time there for conscientious reasons. I was thinking more of you I presume than the nursery.”

“It was a great relief,” Marjorie made honest response. “Besides, it helped two splendid girls along.”

“Then let it rest at that. Never mind about publishing my, thus-called, noble deed at a club meeting. I prefer not to let my right hand know what my left happens to be doing,” declared Ronny. “What we must think of is getting the new Lookout chapter started. We ought to have it organized by the fifth of September so it will stand on its own feet. After the fifth you know what a rush there will be. We shall be going to farewell teas, luncheons and parties. At least I hope so. Last year I had very good times. This fall things have changed. Now I’d love to dance and be happy with the crowd of Sanford boys and girls who were so friendly with me when I was a senior. Marjorie said today, Jerry, that I was like a butterfly that had won free of the chrysalis. The butterfly is anxious to spread its wings for a few last delightful flights around Sanford.”

CHAPTER V. – THE BREAKING UP OF THE OLD GUARD

"This saying good-bye business is growing harrowing," complained Jerry one hazy September morning. She stood with her chums on the station platform, waving farewell to Florence Johnston, who was leaving for Markham College, a western university. "This is the third time for us at the station this week. Monday it was Mignon, Daisy Griggs and Gertrude Aldine, all bound for Smith. Wednesday it was Esther, Rita, Susan and Irma. I am not over the blues yet on account of losing Susan and Irma. I wish they had chosen Hamilton instead of Wellesley."

The seven Lookouts still left in Sanford were strolling soberly across the green station yard to the drive behind the station where Jerry had parked the Macys' ample touring car. She had elected to drive it that morning because of its capacity.

"Harriet and I are going to be the lonesome ones before long," remarked Constance Stevens, her blue eyes roving somberly from friend to friend. The private conservatory Constance and Harriet were to enter did not open until the latter part of October. This would make them the last to leave Sanford. "It is going to seem awfully queer for us without you girls, isn't it, Harriet?"

"Yes." Harriet was looking unduly solemn. "Still we knew long ago that it would have to come sometime; this breaking up of the old crowd."

"We must try to be together a lot during vacations. Most of us will be home for Thanksgiving, and all of us for Christmas and Easter," was Marjorie's philosophical consolation.

"Well, we're going to have one last good old frolic at Connie's tonight, anyway," was Jerry's cheering reminder.

"I can't come tonight, Constance," Lucy Warner announced in her brusque fashion. "I must give these last few evenings to Mother. Besides, I don't feel at home in your crowd when the boys are there. I don't care much about young men. I never know what to say to them," she added, coloring slightly.

"I understand the way you feel about it," Constance returned with a smile. She had once been visited by the same discomfiture in the first days of her friendship with Marjorie. The others were laughing at Lucy's blunt avowal. "I'll forgive you for turning down my party. You know we would love to have you with us, but if you were not at ease it would be hard for you."

"Yes, it would. Much obliged." Lucy's terse agreement provoked fresh laughter.

Ronny had promised Marjorie to take Lucy in hand and try to overcome her objections to entering Hamilton College that fall. Three times she besieged Lucy before success came. On the third interview, Ronny learned the real difficulty. Very solemnly Lucy told her the story of the Observer and her subsequent ingratitude toward Marjorie. Ronny had felt righteous anger flame within her as she had listened. She had almost wished she had never offered a scholarship in behalf of such an ingrate. Her brain clearing of its hasty resentment, she had been visited by the same divine pity for poor, embittered Lucy that had swayed Marjorie on the occasion of the Observer confession.

Very cleverly Ronny had seized upon the confession to move Lucy from her torturing resolve. She argued that, as it was Marjorie's wish to see Lucy enter college with herself and friends, she therefore owed it to Marjorie as an amend honorable. Her point gained, Ronny managed also to persuade Lucy to accept financial help from her if necessary. This she reluctantly promised to do, provided she were allowed to repay her young benefactor when in position to do so. Thus Lucy became the fifth Lookout, Hamilton-bound, greatly to Marjorie's delight.

"What you ought to do is practice hanging around with our gang until you are not the least bit scared at Hal or Laurie or the rest of our boys," Jerry advised. "They aren't ogres and hob-goblins. There is really nothing very awe-inspiring about a young man. If you had lived in the same house with Hal as long as I have, you would know how to talk to him all right enough."

"I haven't; therefore I don't," Lucy returned concisely, but with an open good nature which showed how greatly she had emerged from her shell since becoming a Lookout.

"There goes Flora Frisbee," suddenly called out Muriel, as she exchanged a gay salute with a girl who had just passed in an automobile.

"Where?" inquired three or four voices. A particularly well liked senior, Flora had acquired a further high standing with the Lookouts as the president of the new chapter.

"Too late. She is out of sight. I just happened to see her as she flashed by in her brother's roadster. I think she is going to make a dandy president. Don't you?"

"The very best." It was Jerry who answered. "I am certainly glad the new chapter is going so nicely. They have settled down to that nursery detail like veterans."

"I was so proud of them that day at Muriel's when we organized the new chapter," praised Ronny.

"They did as well as we when we began," commented Muriel. "If only they keep it up. We picked the best of the seniors."

Following a meeting at Jerry's home, at which the Lookouts had selected the candidates for the new chapter, a second meeting had been held at Muriel's. Each charter Lookout had gallantly escorted her choice there. Fifteen gratified seniors had listened to the rules of the club and promised to live up to them. They had pledged themselves to faithfully carry on the work of their absent elder sisters at the day nursery and be always ready to help those in need of friendly aid. They had then capably taken up the pleasant task of electing their officers and performed it with business-like snap.

Soon after their organization they had accompanied the charter members to the nursery and spent a merry afternoon getting acquainted with the little ones. From then on they had begun their regular duty tours accompanied, at first, by one of the old guard on each tour. Soon accustoming themselves to the routine, their elder sisters breathed more freely and set about attending to their own manifold affairs.

"We hope we picked fifteen winners. If we didn't we'll soon know it with a bang. That nursery will run on wheels, minus one trouble maker. Just one will throw the whole concern up in the air. While I don't doubt our new sisters, let time do its perfect work. So says Jeremiah. She says further, get into the car all of you. I'm going to take you straight home. I'm going to a party tonight and I have no time to waste standing talking on the corner. There will be young men at that party!" Jerry dropped her voice to a hoarse melodramatic whisper and stared wildly at Lucy, chin thrust forward.

"I can't help that. I – I should worry. I'm no buttinski." Lucy's unexpected use of slang raised a gale of laughter.

"I am afraid you learned that from me. You are growing up precautions. You need a guardian." With this Jerry bundled Lucy into the tonneau of the machine and turned her over to Marjorie and Muriel who had already climbed into the car.

In her usual energetic fashion she proceeded to drive her chums to their various homes, where she dropped them with scant ceremony. "I know you are all in a hurry to get home," she sweetly assured them. "If you aren't, I am. It's all one. Good-bye. Shall I see you this evening? You had better believe it."

The informal gathering at Gray Gables would comprise the remaining Lookouts of the charter and six or seven of the Sanford boys whom Constance knew best and who were intimate friends of Laurie Armitage's. Marjorie, in particular, was happy in the invitation. She thought it so beautiful that Connie, who had known the bitterest want, should be the hostess at their last frolic, commemorative of their high school days.

As she dressed for the party that evening, her thoughts traveled back to the eventful night of the freshman dance when Constance had worn the blue gown and made her entrance into the social side of high school under difficulties. At that time she had been a very humble person. Now she was perhaps the most admired young woman in Sanford on account of her beautiful voice. Things had

changed a good deal in four years for Connie, Marjorie reflected. She took a special pride in her appearance that night, not only in honor of Constance, but because she owed it to herself to look her best on that last happy evening with her friends.

When Veronica entered Marjorie's house, attired in her white lace Commencement Day frock, a pale blue evening cape composed of many ruffles of chiffon hanging over one arm, she found a pensive little figure in white occupying the pink and white window seat. Marjorie was also wearing her graduation gown and looking utterly lovely in it.

"I'm mooning," she announced, turning her curly head as Ronny entered, her eyes very bright. "It's a perfect night, Ronny. Almost warm enough to go without a wrap. Hal will be here for us. I forgot to tell you. He called me on the 'phone yesterday to ask me if he might take us over in his car."

Veronica smiled slightly at this frank announcement. It contained not a trace of self-consciousness. Long ago Ronny had glimpsed Hal Macy's mind regarding Marjorie. She knew the latter to be the likable young man's ideal and had seen boyish worship of Marjorie more than once in his clear blue eyes. She also understood that Marjorie was wholly fancy free. While she valued Hal as a near friend, any awakening to a deeper sentiment on her part belonged to a far distant day.

CHAPTER VI. – THE BOWKNOT OF AFFECTION

That evening as Hal assisted the two girls into the tonneau of the limousine, he was of the romantic opinion that he had merely persuaded a couple of stray moonbeams to ride with him. The light of the fair, increasing moon endowed the duo with a peculiar ethereal beauty which gave him a feeling of reverence. Girls were mostly like flowers was his boyish comparison. The most beautiful flower of them all was Marjorie. Someday he would dare tell her so, but not for a long time.

Arrived at Gray Gables Hal had no further opportunity to “moon.” The rest of the company had arrived and were impatiently awaiting them. The limousine had hardly come to a stop on the drive when out of the house they trooped, shouting the Sanford and Weston High School yells by way of welcome. Danny Seabrooke and the Crane then broke into the “Stars and Stripes” on mouth organs. Miles Burton rattled out a lively accompaniment on little Charlie Stevens’ toy drum.

“I had no idea I was so popular.” Hal bowed his thanks to the noisy musicians.

“You are not,” the Crane hastened to inform him. “That choice selection we just rendered was in honor of the girls. Don’t credit yourself with everything. It’s horribly conceited.”

“I’m glad you named it as a ‘selection,’” Hal made scathing retort.

“What, may I ask, would you name it?” queried Danny with a dangerous affability.

“Making night hideous, or, a disgraceful racket, or, the last convulsions of a would-be jazz band. Any little appellation like that would be strictly appropriate.” Hal beamed ironically on the three. “Nice little drummer boy you have there.”

Supposedly offended, Danny could not repress a loud snicker at this fling. Miles Burton stood six feet, minus shoes. With Charlie’s toy drum strung round his neck on a narrow blue ribbon, he was distinctly mirth-inspiring.

“Throw any more remarks like that about me and you’ll find out my real disposition,” warned Miles in a deep bass growl.

“Come ladies; let us hasten on before trouble overtakes us – me, I mean. Back, varlets. Grab your instruments of torture and begone.” Hal grandly motioned the objectionable varlets out of the way.

“That’s what I say,” called Jerry from the top step. “For once I agree with Hal. Let the girls come up on the porch, can’t you? You four sillies can stay outside and rave. Notice how well Laurie and Harry are behaving. Try to be a little like them, if you can.”

“You can’t know them as I do,” rumbled Miles.

“No; I *guess not*,” emphasized Hal. “Well, I’d rather be called a silly than a varlet.”

“That will do from all of you.” Jerry ran down the steps and with a few energetic waves of the arms drove the masculine half of the guests up onto the brightly-lighted veranda. There the entire company lingered to talk, presently strolling into the long old-fashioned drawing room which Constance used for dancing purposes when entertaining her friends.

“Be happy and make yourselves at home,” she said in her pretty, graceful fashion. “Father and Uncle John will soon be here to play for us. They are helping Mr. Beaver, the leader of the Sanford orchestra, organize some of the Sanford working boys into an orchestra. It’s a fine idea. I think Father and Uncle John will help him all they can whenever they are at home.”

Marjorie cast a quick, inquiring look toward Constance. Her eyes luminous with affection, she asked: “Has it come at last, Connie?”

“Yes, Marjorie,” Constance answered, in a proud, happy tone. “I would like you to know,” she continued, turning to the others, “that Uncle John is to be a first violin in Father’s symphony orchestra. You can understand just how glad we feel about it.”

Connie's news met with an echoing shout. All present cherished the warmest regard for gentle Uncle John, who had ever been so willing to play for them. Far removed from poverty, he had gradually regained the lost faculty of memory and could now be relied upon for symphony work.

"Oh, just wait until he gets home!" promised Hal. "Won't he get a reception, though?"

"Surest thing in the world!" Laurie's dark blue eyes were darker from emotion. Laurie had known for a very long time that, if Constance's adopted family were not his own, some future day, it would not be his fault.

"That explains why we haven't seen Charlie," smiled Marjorie. "He is actually helping, at last, to organize a big band. I meant to ask for him. There was so much sarcasm being hurled back and forth, my voice would have been lost in the uproar," she slyly added.

"He took his violin and music. The music was a lot of old stray song sheets. He will play them and put everyone out, if he has a chance," Constance predicted with an infectious little giggle.

The entrance of Miss Allison into the drawing room brought the young folks to their feet. Her fondness for youth made her a welcome addition at their parties. She particularly enjoyed Danny Seabrooke's antics and the sham penalties they invariably brought on him.

"You young gentlemen will soon be leaving for college as well as our girls," she remarked to Hal. "I am glad Laurie has decided to go through college before making music his profession. He really needs the college training. Constance, on the contrary, will do as well to begin her training for grand opera at once. She must study Italian and Spanish. That, with her vocal practice, will keep her fully occupied. How I shall miss my boys and girls! They have been life to me." Miss Allison's delicate features saddened unconsciously.

A muffled sob, too realistic to be genuine, rent the air at her right. Her sad expression vanished as her eyes lighted upon the mourner. Slumped into the depths of a big velvet chair, Danny was struggling visibly with his sorrowful emotions.

"To see us all here tonight, who would dream of the parting to come so soon-n; s-o s-o-o-o-on-n!" he wailed, covering his freckled, grief-stricken countenance with both hands. No one arising to assuage his sorrow, his gurgles and sobs grew louder.

"Won't some one please choke off that bellow?" Laurie viewed the perpetrator of the melancholy sounds with a cold, unrelenting eye.

"*De-lighted*." Hal rose from a seat on the davenport beside Marjorie and advanced with threatening deliberation upon Danny.

"You needn't mind. I am getting used to the idea of parting now." The "bellow" ceased like magic. Danny spoke in a small, sad voice that might have belonged to a five-year-old girl. "Soon I shall be able to contemplate it without a single tear. I could part from *you*," he suddenly recovered his own voice, "or that ruffian of an Armitage, and smile; yes, sir; actually *smile*. I'd rather part at any time, and from anybody than to be murderously 'choked off' by you two bullies."

Danny hastily arose, after this defiant declaration, and retreated to the lower end of the room. Crowding himself into a small rocking chair belonging to Charlie, he rocked and smirked at Hal, who had followed him to the chair and now stood over him.

"Move back a trifle, Mr. Macy. I refuse to be responsible for other people's shins. I have all I can do to take care of my own. If I were to kick you, *accidentally*, I should be *so* sorry!"

"Oh, undoubtedly! Wouldn't you, though?" Bending, with one swift movement of the arm, Hal upset the rocker and its grinning occupant. "Now will you be good?" he inquired sarcastically. Leaving the struggling wag to right himself, Hal strolled back to Marjorie.

The room rang with laughter at Danny's upheaval, nor did it lessen as he went through a series of ridiculous attempts to rise from the floor. In the midst of the fun Charlie Stevens marched into the drawing room, his little leather violin case tucked importantly under one arm, his music under the other. Behind him were Mr. Stevens and John Roland.

"What for is he doing to my chair?" Charlie asked very severely.

“He’s trying to part with it, Charlie, and he’s either stuck in it or pretending he is,” Harry Lenox replied to the youngster.

“You mustn’t ever sit in a chair that don’t look like you, Danny,” reproved Charlie. “That chair looks like me. You ought to know better.”

This was too much for the erring Daniel. With a shout of mirth he slipped free of the chair, and, catching up the little boy, swung him to his shoulder. “You’re the funniest little old kid on creation!” he exclaimed.

“That’s what I think,” returned Charlie, with an innocent complacency that again brought down the house. From that on Charlie divided honors with Uncle John, who was due to receive the sincere congratulations of the young folks he had so often made happy by his music. To see the white-haired, patient-faced old musician surrounded by his young friends was a sight that Miss Allison never forgot. When, a little later, she led Charlie from the room, bedward bound, there was thankfulness in her heart because she had found the lonely people of the Little Gray House in time.

With the musicians on the scene, dancing was promptly begun and continued unflaggingly until a late supper was served in the dining room. There a surprise awaited Marjorie. While the company were engaged in eating the dessert, she had a dim idea that something unusual was pending. She dismissed it immediately as a vague fancy.

Next she became aware that a silence had settled down upon the supper party. Then Hal Macy rose from his chair and said in his clear, direct tones: “I am going to read you a little tribute to a very good friend of ours. I know you will agree with me that Marjorie Dean is largely responsible for a great many pleasant times we have enjoyed since we have known her. By that I mean, not only the merry evenings we have spent at her home, but the happiness that has been ours because of her fine influence. As well as I could, for I am no poet, I have tried to put our sentiments into verse. While the meter may be faulty, the inspiration is flawless.”

Applause greeted this frank, graceful little preamble. When it had subsided, Hal read his verses. They fitly expressed, to the amazed, and all but overcome, subject of them, the strength of her friends’ devotion. When he had finished she had no words with which to reply. She was grateful for the fresh round of approbation that began. It gave her time to force back her tears. She did not wish to break down if she could help it. She felt that she owed it to Hal to thank him with a smile.

Hardly had quiet been restored when Constance took the floor. In her right hand she held an oblong box of white velvet. When she began to speak, it was directly to Marjorie.

“What Hal has said to you, tonight, Marjorie, is so true and beautiful that I couldn’t better it if I tried. He has expressed just the way we feel about you, and what your sunny, dear influence has been to us. We are afraid that someday you may run away and leave us, so we wish to tie you to us with a bowknot of affection.”

Constance flitted the length of the table and around the end to the side opposite from her seat. Pausing behind Marjorie’s chair, she slid a bare white arm over her chum’s shoulder and gently dropped the velvet box in front of her.

“I – I think I am going to cry,” quavered Marjorie, “and I don’t – want – to. Please – I – don’t think – I – deserve – ”

“I would advise you not to weep, Marjorie, or you may be treated as I was,” warned Danny’s bland tones. “It’s not safe to sob around here.”

Marjorie gave a half tremulous giggle that was the forerunner of recovery. Her tears checked, her hands trembled as she opened the white velvet box. Then her emotion became that of sheer wonder. Resting on its satin bed gleamed a string of graduated pearls from which hung a pearl pendant in the form of a bowknot.

“What made you do this?” she faltered. “It isn’t *I* who have ever done anything to make you happy. It’s *you* who have done everything to make me happy. I don’t know what to say, only you are all so dear to me and thank you.”

Constance standing beside Marjorie, an arm over her shoulder, Marjorie turned and childishly hid her flushed face in the frills of Connie's white organdie gown. While her thoughts were far from collected, she was experiencing a gladness of spirit because Constance could thus be her refuge at a time of overwhelming happiness.

CHAPTER VII. – ON THE THRESHOLD

The day after Constance's party brought Marjorie her General. With her father at home, after a lengthy absence, the sorrow of leaving her dear ones came forward again. Marjorie tried earnestly to keep all locked within and succeeded in a measure. Her General was not blind to the situation, however, and exerted himself on all occasions to keep his somewhat sober-faced lieutenant in good spirits.

On the morning of the day before Marjorie's departure for college, he announced his firm intention to help her pack. Nor did he swerve for an instant from his self-imposed duty. Breakfast over, he chased the lieutenant, screaming with laughter, up the stairs, landing in the middle of her "house" with a flying leap which an acrobat might have envied.

Regardless of his giggling daughter's ideas on the subject of packing, he swept down upon whatever lay nearest at hand and stowed it into one of the two open trunks. His efforts at being helpful were brief. Three determined pairs of hands intercepted his bold attempt to safely caché a small taboret, a large embroidered doyley, a satin chair cushion, a cut glass scent bottle and a Japanese vase. The energetic general's services were summarily dispensed with. He was banished from the room and the door shut in his face with a bang. In less than fifteen minutes he announced his return by a tattoo which threatened demolishment to the door. He was not re-admitted until he had given his word not to meddle with the packing. When Marjorie cautiously opened the door to him she found him staggering under a load of pasteboard boxes. He dumped them at her feet with a bow so profound that he all but stood on his head.

"There you are, unfeeling child!" he exclaimed. "How shocking to have a daughter who doesn't scruple to turn her poor old father out of her house!"

"Well, I let you into my house again, didn't I? Just please recall why you were turned out." Marjorie clasped both arms about her father's neck and swung on him gleefully. No one could be the least bit sad when General elected to be funny. Mrs. Dean and Ronny had already busied themselves with straightening the pile of boxes which had scattered when dumped to the floor.

"It's a good thing for you that you did," retorted Mr. Dean significantly. "I might have gone away from the door and never NEVER have come back again. Then think what you would have missed."

"Oh, you would have had to come back sometime," was the serene assurance, as Marjorie plumped down on the floor to explore her newly-acquired riches.

They were all the heart of a girl could wish. One box contained a white chiffon evening scarf, thickly embroidered with tiny pink daisies. It draped itself in graceful folds to the waist, the ends reaching to the hem of her gown. Another held a white velour sports coat, the cut and design of it being particularly smart. From another box tumbled a dozen pairs of kid gloves. There was also a box of silk hosiery, another of fine linen handkerchiefs with butterfly and bowknot corners, her favorite designs, a box of engraved monogrammed stationery, and a pair of black satin evening slippers.

One long wide box she had left until the last. The lid removed and the folds of white tissue paper lifted, Marjorie breathed a little "Oh!" She stared in admiration at an exquisite evening frock of delicately shaded Chinese crêpe. It might have represented a spring dawn, shading as it did from creamy white to pale, indeterminate violet, and from violet to faintest pink. It was fashioned with a cunning simplicity of design which made it of the mode, yet strikingly individual. About the hem of the skirt, around the square neck and short sleeves and on the ends of the separate sash trailed shadowy clusters of violets, stamped upon the crêpe with an art known only to the Chinese.

"Where did you find it, General?" she gasped, as she held up the lovely, shimmering frock for her captain and Ronny to see. "I never expected to own a dream gown like this."

"It is a spring poem in shades," declared Ronny, lightly touching an end of the sash. "I can guess where it came from. Only a high-grade Chinese bazaar could furnish a gown of its kind. There

are a few such shops west of the Mississippi. I never saw a gown so beautiful as this one even in San Francisco.”

“It did not come from a shop. A Chinese merchant sent to China for it as a gift to Marjorie. In Denver I have a good friend, Mah Waeo, the last of an ancient Chinese house. He looks like an Eastern nobleman in carved ivory. He is a fine elderly man of irreproachable business and social reputation. He is a tea merchant and has great wealth. He lives very simply and spends most of his business gains in trying to educate and uplift his own people. We have been fast friends for fifteen years.”

“I am familiar with that type of Chinese,” Ronny spoke eagerly. “At home, Father and I have a good Chinese friend, too; Sieguf Tah. He lives alone on the smallest of his fruit ranches and acts as a benevolent father to all the China boys around there. The China boys, as they like to be called, are faithful, wise, intelligent and industrious. Best of all, they are strictly honest.”

“I hope Mah Waeo will sometime make us a visit. I suppose you must have often invited him, General. He was a perfect dear to take such pains for a present for me.” Marjorie raised a radiant face to her father. “All this is about the nicest surprise you ever gave me. I can’t help liking my spring poem gown best of all. I shall write to Mah Waeo and tell him so and ask him myself to please make us a visit someday.”

“I don’t see how we are going to pack all these new treasures in your two trunks,” Mrs. Dean practically interposed. “We shall have to do some skilful managing.”

“They simply all *must* go,” decreed Marjorie. “I couldn’t leave one behind.”

“Which reminds me that I have something for you and Captain which I brought from the Golden West and have been saving until an appropriate moment. With your gracious permission, I will retire and return anon, as the old-style novelists loved to write.”

Attired in a full, half-fitted morning gown of soft white silk, Ronny spread her arms, bowed down to the floor, East Indian fashion, and made a quick backward exit from the room.

“I am going to make Ronny dance for us tonight,” planned Marjorie. “She isn’t going to pack that frock she has on. It will be a perfect dancing costume. We will have a little home party tonight; just the four of us. No; five. I want Delia to be with us, too. I’ve grown up under Delia’s wing. She has always worked so hard to do her best for me whenever I have had a party, and she’s been so good to me in all ways.”

“By all means let us have Delia at our party,” heartily indorsed Mr. Dean. “I shall ask her to dance the minuet with me. Do you think there will be music? I hope some one will be able to play a minuet fit to be heard. Did I hear you say that you had practised occasionally this summer?”

“No, you didn’t, you old tease!” Marjorie sprang to her feet and made a rush at her general.

“Careful! I’m very fragile,” he protested. Then he caught her in his strong arms and held her close. Her face buried against his shoulder, Marjorie knew that her father had loosed one arm from around her and drawn Captain into the circle of it

Thus Veronica found them when she returned with her love offerings. She halted in the doorway, her face alight with tenderness for these three who had succeeded more nearly than any other persons she had ever known in living the ideal family life.

In her hand Ronny held two small black leather cases. The one contained a ring of pure gold, artistically chased with a running vine, and set with one large, perfect sapphire. This was intended for Marjorie. For Mrs. Dean she had bought a gold and pearl pin of ancient Peruvian handiwork. Both pieces of jewelry were from an old Spanish collection. She had bought them at a private sale in San Leandro for her friends and now delighted to add her tribute to Marjorie’s happiness.

Standing very still in the doorway, her eyes meditatively sought the cases in her hand. Then she turned and stole noiselessly away from the little scene of adoration. Ronny knew that Marjorie was taking her real farewell of her general and captain.

CHAPTER VIII. – THE FIVE TRAVELERS

“Hamilton, did you say? Lead me to it.” Jerry Macy opened her eyes and peered through the car window with revived interest. For an hour or more she had been leaning back against the high green plush car seat dozing lightly. It was now five o’clock in the afternoon and active Jerry was feeling the strain of sitting still, hour after hour.

“No; I didn’t say Hamilton.” Muriel gently tweaked Jerry’s ear. “Wake up, sleepy head. That station we just passed was Harcourt Hill. What comes next?” Muriel opened a time table and frowningly perused it. “It’s hard to remember the names of these little stations. Now where was I at? Oh, yes; Harcourt Hill. Next comes Palmer; then Tresholme. After that, West Hamilton, and then Hamilton. Hamilton is the first stop this express makes, thank goodness!”

“Muriel, you have really been invaluable to us on this journey. Allow me to decorate you.” Ronny leaned forward and pinned a huge lace-paper rosette on the obliging Lookout. “Wear this for my sake.”

While Muriel had been industriously engaged in calling out the stations, Ronny had hastily ripped a piece of decorative lace-paper from a half emptied box of candied fruit, which the travelers had shared, and busied herself with it. The result of her effort she now generously tendered Muriel.

“I will – not.” Muriel intercepted the rosette before it found a place on the lapel of her brown taffeta traveling coat and crumpled it in her hand. “No such decorations for me when I’m so near Hamilton. Suppose I forgot about it and wore it off the train. Some college wag would be sure to see it and post me in the grind book. Freshmen are good material for grinds. Remember that and keep your old rosettes out of sight.”

“What would be written about you?” asked Lucy Warner curiously. “I can’t see anything in that to write about.”

“Don’t think for a minute that enough couldn’t be found in one foolish old paper rosette to make me feel silly for a half term, at least. I don’t know what the method of teasing me would be. I do know that I am not going to give strange students a chance to try it.”

“Then I shall hardly dare answer anyone, even if I am first addressed.” Lucy fixed her green eyes on Muriel with an expression of alarm.

Muriel burst out laughing as she met the steady stare. She had never taken prim Lucy seriously. Lucy’s austere solemnity always had an hilarious effect on keen-witted Muriel. Coupled with a direct stare from those peculiar greenish eyes, Muriel invariably felt a strong desire to laugh when in her presence. As a result, there was no strain between the two, as was the case with the majority of the Lookouts and Lucy.

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