

Chase Josephine

**Marjorie Dean, High School
Senior**



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Содержание

CHAPTER I – A PRETENSE OF FRIENDSHIP	5
CHAPTER II – A HUMBLE SENIOR	9
CHAPTER III – MISSING: A LETTER	13
CHAPTER IV – LAYING A CORNERSTONE	17
CHAPTER V – THE HARD ROAD OF DUTY	22
CHAPTER VI – STRICTLY LOCAL POLITICS	26
CHAPTER VII – A STEP TOWARD POPULARITY	28
CHAPTER VIII – THE RULE OF RULES	31
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	32

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CHAPTER I – A PRETENSE OF FRIENDSHIP

“Marjorie! Marjorie Dean!” The black-eyed girl in the runabout accompanied her high-pitched call by a gradual slowing down of the smart little car she was driving.

The dainty, white-gowned figure on the sidewalk tilted a white parasol over one shoulder and turned a pair of startled brown eyes in the direction of the voice. “Why, Mignon, I didn’t know you were home from Severn Beach! How do you do?” Advancing to the runabout, Marjorie Dean stretched forth a white-gloved hand.

“I’ve been in Sanford since Wednesday,” returned Mignon. Leaning out of the runabout, she lightly clasped the proffered fingers. “Get into my car and I’ll take you wherever you want to go. I’m glad I saw you. It’s been deadly dull in Sanford with most of the girls still away.” Her elfish eyes noting that Marjorie’s smart attire betokened a possible luncheon or tea, Mignon was consumed with a lively curiosity to learn the pretty senior’s destination. “You look as though you were going to an afternoon tea,” she continued artfully. “Say where and I’ll ride you there.”

“Thank you, but I don’t believe I’ll ride. I was out in the car all morning with General. It’s so lovely this afternoon I’d rather walk. I’m not bound for a tea, though. I am going to make a call.”

Mignon’s dark brows drew together in a faint frown. “Oh, pshaw!” she exclaimed. “Why not ride? Unless you don’t wish me to know where you are going?” she added suspiciously.

“I never thought of that,” was Marjorie’s honest protest. Yet now that Mignon had mentioned it, it struck Marjorie rather forcibly that she was not specially anxious to reveal her destination. “I am going to call on Miss Archer,” she informed her, making an effort to be casual.

“Then I’ll take you there. I should like to see her, too,” announced Mignon calmly. She had decided that to call on the principal in Marjorie’s company would be of great advantage to her. “Come on,” she urged.

Too well-bred to exhibit pointed reluctance, Marjorie resigned herself to the inevitable and stepped into the runabout. Her visit to Miss Archer was of a somewhat personal nature. Still, she reflected, it was nothing very secret, after all. Should her mission prove successful, Mignon would, under any circumstances, soon learn the result.

“How do you know Miss Archer will be at home?” inquired Mignon as she drove slowly down the shady avenue. “I thought she was still in the West.”

“She came home only yesterday. I telephoned her,” returned Marjorie. “This call of mine is really more like a business appointment. I would rather have waited until she had her house fairly opened again, but I couldn’t very well. It might be too late.”

“Oh!” Mignon was burning to demand further information, but the finality in Marjorie’s tones warned her to go slowly. Between herself and the latter there remained always a curious wall of reserve created by their mental attitude toward each other. Mignon did not believe that Marjorie’s friendliness toward herself was sincere. On the other hand, Marjorie sensed the note of unbelief. She felt that Mignon did not trust her and it made her uncomfortable when in the French girl’s presence.

It was a comparatively short ride to the spacious, old-fashioned house, set in the midst of giant elms, which the last three generations of Archers had called home. Of them all Miss Archer and an elder sister alone remained. The two women had arrived in Sanford from a visit to Western relatives on the previous day. Even in that short time the big house had taken on an air of new life. The shuttered windows and boarded-up doors were now open and a hospitable array of comfortable wicker and willow chairs on the wide veranda proclaimed that someone was at home.

“We’ll leave the runabout here,” decreed Mignon, as they brought up outside the tall iron gate. She alighted from it in her lithe, cat-like manner, her restless eyes fixed on the house. Quite forgetting that she was merely a second party to the call, Mignon motioned impatiently for Marjorie to follow and set off up the walk in her most imposing manner. Divided between amusement and vexation, Marjorie gave a little sigh and stepped quickly after the French girl.

By the time she had reached the veranda, Mignon had rung the door bell. A moment and it was answered by a young woman whose blue bungalow apron and dust cap marked her as maid of all work. “Good afternoon,” she said politely. To Marjorie she appeared a trifle embarrassed. “She must be a new maid,” was her first thought. “I wonder if Hulda has left the Archers.” As a frequent guest at Miss Archer’s, Marjorie had always delighted in Hulda, the good-natured Swedish maid. Impulsively she asked with a winning smile, “Isn’t Hulda here any more?”

“Hulda!” The young woman stared curiously at Marjorie, then replied quickly. “She will be here next week. I am trying to take her place until she comes.” A faint flickering smile touched the corners of her red lips as she said this.

“Kindly tell Miss Archer that Miss La Salle and Miss Dean are here” broke in Mignon haughtily. She had already decided that, for a servant, this girl appeared to feel herself above her position. It was partially Marjorie’s fault. It was always a mistake to treat a servant as an equal.

The maid favored Mignon with another strange, inscrutable glance. “Miss La Salle and Miss Dean,” she repeated. “Please come into the drawing room. I will tell Miss Archer that you are here.” Politely ushering them into the long, cool drawing room, the maid obsequiously bowed them to seats and vanished.

“What a pretty girl,” was Marjorie’s first remark when they were left to themselves. “She had such lovely golden brown hair and big gray eyes.”

“I didn’t notice. All maids look alike to me,” shrugged Mignon. “I thought she was altogether too presuming for a servant.”

“I thought she was sweet,” came Marjorie’s earnest reply. She had taken an instantaneous liking to the new maid. “After all, we’re just human beings, you know, and free and equal. Why, Delia is as much a part of our home as I am.”

“It’s very unwise to give servants too much liberty,” disagreed Mignon loftily. “Every one of ours has to keep his or her place. I see to that. My father is quite apt to let them do as they please. It takes *me* to manage them.”

Marjorie felt a strong return of her ancient dislike for Mignon sweep over her. Quickly she conquered it, adroitly turning the conversation into a more pleasant channel. It was at least ten minutes before the maid reappeared in the wide curtained doorway. Announcing that Miss Archer would be with them directly, she nodded almost curtly and disappeared.

“Good afternoon, Marjorie. I am very glad to see you again,” was the principal’s cordial salutation as she entered the room. “How do you do, Mignon?” Although she gave the French girl her hand, there was an almost imperceptible reserve in her greeting. To her, Mignon’s call was as unexpected as her sudden decision to pay it had been to Marjorie. “You must excuse the unsettled appearance of things. We have not yet found time to take the covers off most of the furniture. When we left for the West, I sent Hulda off on a visit to her father and mother. She will not return until next week. Fortunately, my sister and I have Veronica to help us.”

“Veronica,” repeated Mignon. “That is a queer name for a maid, isn’t it?”

“What’s in a name?” quoted Miss Archer lightly. There was a faint touch of amusement in her quiet tones that nettled Mignon. She concluded that, as she never had liked Miss Archer, she now merely liked her a trifle less.

“As you are so busy, Miss Archer, we must not detain you long. I really ought to apologize for breaking in upon you before you are rested from your long journey, but I had something quite

important to ask you. So I thought I had better not wait. This may seem like a very personal question, but – Have you engaged a secretary for this year?” Marjorie colored faintly at her own temerity.

“No.” An expression of annoyance leaped into Miss Archer’s fine eyes. “Miss Lansing, as you know, was graduated last June. That leaves her place vacant. I cannot tell you how much I have missed Marcia Arnold. She made an ideal secretary. As I have always selected my secretary from among those of the Sanford High School girls who are anxious to do extra work, I suppose I shall have to attend to it as soon as possible. Were you thinking of applying for the position, Marjorie?” she questioned humorously.

Marjorie laughed. “Oh, no; I am not clever enough. But I know a girl who is. She would like the position, too. I am speaking of Lucy Warner. She really needs the work, Miss Archer, and I am sure she could do it and keep up in her classes. She is *so* bright.”

“Lucy Warner. Ah, yes, I had not thought of her. She is a remarkably bright girl. I imagine she would suit me admirably. She seems extremely capable.” Miss Archer appeared signally pleased with the prospect of Lucy as her secretary. “What do you wish me to do, Marjorie? Shall I write her?”

“I shall be ever so glad if you will, Miss Archer.” Marjorie spoke as gratefully as though it were she who was the most interested party to the affair. “I am sure she will accept. Thank you for listening to my suggestion.”

After a little further exchange of conversation, Marjorie rose to make graceful farewell. Mignon followed suit, a trace of contempt lurking in her black eyes. She had confidently expected that their call would take on a purely social tone. As it was, Marjorie had held the floor, giving her no opportunity to make a favorable impression on Miss Archer. And all for that frumpy, green-eyed Lucy Warner! It was just like Marjorie Dean to interest herself in such dowdy persons.

“And is that what your wonderful business appointment was about?” she asked pettishly as the two girls strolled down the pebbled walk bordered on each side with clumps of sweet alyssum. “I can’t see why you should trouble yourself about a girl like Lucy Warner. She used to hate you. She told me so. I suppose the reason she turned around all of a sudden and began to be nice to you was because she thought you would use your influence with Miss Archer to get her that position. She knows you are Miss Archer’s pet.”

“I am not Miss Archer’s pet.” Marjorie’s voice quivered with vexation. “She likes ever so many other girls in Sanford High as well as she likes me.” Striving hard to regain her composure, she added, “Lucy hasn’t the least idea that I tried to get her the secretaryship. I know that at one time she didn’t like me. It was a misunderstanding. But it was cleared up long ago.”

“What was it about?” queried Mignon, always eager for a bit of gossip to retail at her pleasure. “You must tell me.”

“It lies between Lucy and me. I have never told anyone about it. I intend never to tell anyone.”

“Oh, I don’t care to know.” Mignon tossed her head. “I’m sorry now that I bothered myself to call on Miss Archer. I really shouldn’t have taken the time. I’ll have to drive fast to make up for it.”

“Don’t let me trouble you,” assured Marjorie evenly. “I won’t be going back the way we came. I intend to walk on to Gray Gables.” By this time they had passed through the gateway to the runabout.

“As you please,” returned Mignon indifferently. “Come over and see me before school opens, if you have time. Better telephone beforehand, though, else I may not be at home when you call.”

“Thank you.” Not forgetting courtesy, Marjorie added, “The same applies to you in regard to me.”

“Thank you. Good-bye,” returned Mignon coolly.

“Good-bye.” Marjorie turned from the French girl to begin her walk to Gray Gables. “It’s no use,” she told herself soberly. “We are both pretending to be friendly when really we can never be friends. I ought to feel awfully cross with Mignon. Somehow I feel sorry for her, just as I’ve always felt toward her. But for her father’s sake, he’s such a splendid man, I’m going to keep on trying. Poor

Mignon. It seems as though she must have started wrong when she was a baby and can never get set right. She may, perhaps, some day, but I'm afraid that some day is a long way off.”

CHAPTER II – A HUMBLE SENIOR

“Did you see that latest addition to the senior class?” Mignon La Salle’s voice rose in profound disgust as she hurled the question at Jerry Macy, who had entered the senior locker room directly behind her.

“Of course I saw her. I have eyes,” reminded Jerry gruffly. “Pretty girl, isn’t she?” This last comment was a naughty inspiration on Jerry’s part. The French girl’s contemptuous tone informed her that the newest senior had already become a mark for ridicule in Mignon’s eyes. She, therefore, took a contrary stand.

“*Pretty!*” Mignon’s tones rose still higher. “That staring-eyed, white-faced creature! *Your* eyes can’t be very keen. She’s a servant, too; a *servant*.”

“You can’t expect me to see that,” retorted Jerry. “All the more credit to her if she is. A girl who has to work for her living, but is smart enough to walk into a strange school and into the senior class is good enough for anybody to know. You’re a snob, Mignon, and you ought to be ashamed to say such things.” Coolly turning her back on the scowling girl, Jerry busied herself with her locker. Privately she wondered how Mignon happened to know so much about the newcomer.

Mignon watched her resentfully, longing to say something particularly cutting, but not daring to do so. When it came to an argument, Jerry Macy was capable of more than holding her own. As the seniors were now beginning to arrive in numbers, she had no wish to be publicly worsted. She could not resist saying satirically, however, as Marjorie Dean passed her: “Did you see that servant girl of Miss Archer’s in our section this morning?”

“Servant girl?” chorused two or three bystanders, crowding closer to their informant. “What do you mean? Whom do you mean?”

Marjorie’s sweet face clouded at the intentional cruelty of Mignon’s speech. How could she exhibit such heartlessness toward one whom she hardly knew? “Are you referring to Veronica Browning?” she asked in a clear, decided voice. “I am ever so glad she is going to be in our class. I think she’s a dear.”

“Veronica Browning,” repeated Mignon, laughing. “I wonder how she came by such a high-sounding name. Most servants are satisfied with a common, ordinary one, like Jane or Maggie. It seems to me – ”

A little flutter of dismay, which suddenly swept the group of seniors, checked Mignon’s caustic remarks. A gray-eyed girl had walked into the locker room just in time to get the full effect of them. Under heavy masses of golden brown hair her pale face looked out with a sweetly appealing air which made her extremely attractive. In her serviceable gown of plain brown linen, made in simple fashion, she was in wren-like contrast to the more gaily-dressed girls who stood about the locker room.

“How are you, Miss Browning?” greeted Marjorie genially. “I am glad you are going to be a senior. You gave me quite a surprise. Girls, this is Veronica Browning.” Marjorie named in turn those of her schoolmates who stood nearest to herself and Veronica. Among them were Jerry, Constance Stevens and Harriet Delaney. The trio greeted her in a far more friendly fashion than was shown by the others.

The newcomer bowed to them pleasantly, her calm face betraying no sign of the unkind speeches she must undoubtedly have overheard. Not troubling herself to greet Veronica, Mignon seized her hat, slammed the door of her locker shut and switched out, followed by several girls who were impatient to learn more of the stranger’s history.

“Won’t you walk down the street with us, Miss Browning?” asked Jerry. “The rest of our crowd will be here in a minute. Here they come now,” she added as Muriel Harding, Irma Linton and Susan Atwell appeared to the accompaniment of the latter’s jolly giggle.

“Thank you. I should like to walk with you,” smiled the girl in gentle, well-bred fashion. “I hardly expected to meet any of my classmates so soon. I am lucky, I think.”

“It’s our duty as good seniors to make you feel at home,” asserted Marjorie, proceeding to present the last three arrivals. “Now that you know a few of us, suppose we move on. If Miss Merton happens to come this way she will hear us talking and feel it her duty to scatter us.”

Those who have read “Marjorie Dean, High School Freshman,” “Marjorie Dean, High School Sophomore,” and “Marjorie Dean, High School Junior,” need no special introduction to her and her friends. They already know the many events, happy and unhappy, that transpired during Marjorie’s three years at Sanford High School. Transplanted from her home in B – at the very beginning of her freshman year, to the thriving little city of Sanford, Marjorie took up her school life there with a determination to find and hold fast to all that was finest and highest in it. Despite many trials and misunderstandings which fell to her lot, her resolve to be true to herself never faltered, and each year at high school brought fresh pledges of loyalty from those who had learned to know and love her.

Now, in the first week of her senior year, she was again exerting her kindly influence in behalf of the stranger within her gates.

As the bevy of girls moved through the corridor to the main entrance of the school, she slipped her arm through that of the new girl and said cheerily, “I am sure you will like Sanford High, Miss Browning. I felt quite lost when first I came here. Now I’d be more lost if I had to leave it. Where did you live before you came here?”

“In California,” answered Veronica. “I was born there. You know, I suppose, that I came East with – with – Miss – Archer.” She hesitated slightly on the last words. “I should like to tell you something,” she continued frankly. “I heard what that black-eyed girl was saying about me as I came into the locker room. Of course I wish to be friends with you and these nice girls you go with – but – well, perhaps you ought not to pay too much attention to – one – in my position.”

Marjorie gave Veronica’s arm a gentle little squeeze. “Now I am sure you don’t know us very well. We choose our friends for what they are, not because of social position or any such foolishness. You really mustn’t mind Mignon. She has been – well – brought up rather differently from the rest of us. We –” Marjorie stopped in confusion. “There are some things I can’t explain,” she went on slowly. “It seems rather queer in me to ask you to like Mignon, but if you will try to think of her as kindly as you can, it will help her a great deal. I’m afraid that’s not very clear,” she concluded in embarrassment.

“I think I understand,” nodded Veronica. A shade of the peculiar smile that Marjorie had noted on first sight of her at Miss Archer’s flickered briefly about her mobile lips. “After all, I am here for study. Under the circumstances I can’t really expect to take much part in the social side of high school. I have had so many –” She suddenly ceased speaking, with a little catch of breath.

“Oh, you must come to my home to see me and come to my parties, too,” put in Marjorie quickly. “I wish you to meet my mother and father. I call them General and Captain. I am a Lieutenant. So is Connie Stevens. We all belong to a little army of our own. It’s a game a friend of mine and I used to play when we were little girls and we’ve never outgrown it.”

“How pretty!” The fair, sensitive face of the other girl broke into radiant, smiling beauty.

Marjorie thought her more fascinating than ever when she smiled. “I must tell you a secret,” she confided impulsively. “I liked you the minute I saw you at Miss Archer’s. I am sure we shall be good friends.”

“Here is my hand to seal the bargain,” laughed Veronica. “You have come to mean a great deal to me already. I never thought that –”

“It’s not fair in you, Marjorie Dean, to monopolize our brand-new senior,” called Jerry Macy. They had now left the school building and were swinging down the street in pairs, Marjorie and Veronica bringing up the rear.

“Come on.” Seizing her companion by the arm, Marjorie propelled her forward until they bumped gently into Jerry and Irma, who were just ahead of them. “Here we are,” she announced mischievously.

“Such boisterous conduct.” Jerry drew down her plump face in imitation of Miss Merton. “I’m not complaining on my own account, but I have to protect Irma from your onslaughts.”

“That’s the same as saying I need a guardian, Jeremiah,” teased Irma. “You know it’s really the other way around.”

“They are such jolly girls,” commented Veronica. “When I was – ” She stopped. Abruptly changing the subject she began to remark on the beauty of the huge maples that stood sentinel-like on both sides of the street.

Marjorie agreed rather absently that they were indeed magnificent trees. Inwardly she wondered if Veronica had the habit of so abruptly chopping off her speeches. For all her apparent frankness there was a curious baffling side to her that Marjorie was at a loss to understand. It reminded her of the puzzling way in which Constance Stevens had behaved when first they met. She reflected that perhaps this girl felt the weight of poverty even as Constance had once felt its pressure. On the other hand, Veronica appeared outwardly to accept it with the utmost serenity.

Perhaps the other girl may have glimpsed something of what was going on behind Marjorie’s tranquil face. Casting a sidelong glance at her pretty companion, her strange smile lived again, to die in a fleeting instant. “I must leave you here,” she said, as they reached a cross street that led to the avenue on which the Archer homestead was situated. “Better think over what I told you. Remember I am Miss Archer’s ‘servant girl.’” She laughed musically as though she rather enjoyed thus reminding Marjorie of her humble status.

“You are my friend,” responded Marjorie gravely. “Please remember that. Good-bye. We’ll see each other again this afternoon.”

Nodding a smiling farewell to Marjorie and the others, Veronica Browning left them and hurried on toward home.

“Do you suppose she has to help with the luncheon?” asked Jerry, her round eyes fastened on Veronica’s rapidly retreating back.

“She’d hardly have time to do much work at noon,” declared Irma. “I don’t imagine she would be asked to do that. It’s splendid in Miss Archer to take a young girl like that to work for her and allow her to go to school.”

“Just who is she, Marjorie?” quizzed Jerry. “How did you and Mignon happen to get acquainted with her before school opened? Where did Mignon get all her information? She ought to be ashamed of herself for saying what she said before the girls. It’s lucky that we were there to help out.”

Quite willing to satisfy Jerry’s curiosity regarding the whys and wherefores of the new senior, Marjorie related the incidents pertaining to her call on the principal, ending with “The very first moment I saw her, I liked her. Of course I feel very kindly toward the different maids in you girls’ homes. But I feel differently toward Veronica. I suppose it is because she’s so sweet and pretty and about the same age as the rest of us. I’m glad she’s going to be a pupil at Sanford High. I know I needn’t ask you girls to be nice to her. I can see that all of you like her already.”

A chorus of hearty affirmatives went up from the six girls who had halted in the middle of the sidewalk to gather about Marjorie.

“She’s a *nice* girl.” Jerry placed the stamp of her emphatic approval upon the senior who had just left them. “But she is going to have troubles of her own with Mignon. You mustn’t forget that a number of girls besides ourselves were in the locker room and heard Mignon sneering about Veronica. I’m going to begin calling her Veronica. You know what that means. If I come to like her a good deal, I’ve already thought of a nice little pet name for her.”

Jerry’s cheerful grin went the rounds of her friends’ faces. It was a well-known fact among them that the stout girl never addressed a schoolmate as “Miss” unless she entertained a lively dislike for her.

“Everyone of us will stand by Veronica. That means she will have seven staunch supporters at least,” broke in Constance Stevens, her blue eyes purposeful. “That is really all we need care about. Besides, I don’t believe many of the seniors will snub her. If they do, they’ll be very sly about it. The fact that she lives at Miss Archer’s will make a good impression on most of the girls. If a few girls in Sanford High are hateful to her because she is working her way through school, I don’t imagine she will care very much.”

“I think you are right, Connie,” nodded Marjorie. “Veronica told me that she didn’t expect to see much of the social side of high school life. I suppose she feels that she ought to make the most of the chance to study and go to school.”

“How did she happen to come here, I wonder?” mused Jerry. “You said, Marjorie, that she said she’d lived in the state of California. I suppose she must have stayed with Miss Archer’s relatives and worked her way through the first three years of high school while she lived with them.”

“I suppose so,” agreed Marjorie. As she answered Jerry it suddenly flashed across her that during their talk Veronica had, after all, revealed very little about herself. Her attitude had been toward concealment rather than revelation.

“She’ll probably tell us more about herself when we get better acquainted with her,” suggested gentle Irma.

“If she doesn’t, then Jerry will have to take the trail and find out,” teased Muriel Harding.

“I can –” Jerry stopped speaking as her glance met Marjorie’s. In the latter’s brown eyes lurked a mute protest against Muriel’s proposal. No one read it there except shrewd Jerry. The abrupt halt in her speech signified her respect for it.

“You can do what?” asked Harriet Delaney, laughing.

“I can mind my own business,” evaded Jerry with a broad smile at Muriel which robbed her brusque comment of any implied rebuke. “Let Veronica Browning give out her own information. If I’m going to trail anyone, I choose to shadow Mignon and see that she doesn’t make things hard for this new girl.”

“Let us all solemnly agree to stand by her,” proposed Marjorie impulsively. “By that I don’t mean that we are to forget our promise to Mignon’s father. We must try somehow to help them both.”

After her chums had left her at her own gate, she wondered rather soberly as she went slowly up the walk to the house, how the difficult measure she had so strongly advocated could be carried out.

CHAPTER III – MISSING: A LETTER

When Marjorie returned to school that afternoon, her eyes widened in startled surprise as they became riveted on a square white envelope on her desk addressed to herself. For an instant her heart sank. Then she laughed softly, under her breath, as she recalled that although the script was unmistakably that of the Observer, she now had no need to dread it. The Observer had been laid to rest on a certain snowy afternoon of last winter. This note was from Lucy Warner, her friend.

Opening it, a quick light of pleasure dawned in her face as she read:

“Dear Marjorie:

“How can I ever thank you enough for what you have done for me? Miss Archer sent for me to come to her office this morning and, of course, you know why. I was so surprised and delighted. To be her secretary is a great honor, I think. Then, too, the salary, which is ten dollars a week, will help mother and me so much. I have almost enough credits now to graduate, for I have always carried six studies and taken the special reading courses, too. Now I am going to take only two studies each term. That will give me almost all my time free for secretarial work. I am going to rent a typewriting machine and study stenography by myself, so I shall soon be ready to do Miss Archer’s work in creditable fashion.

“Although I’ve never said a word to anyone about it, I have always wished for the position I now have. One reason, of course, is the salary; the other the experience. When school closes I can take an office position in Sanford, and by working hard save a little money toward some day going to college. It will take a long time, but I am determined to do it. If I can earn enough money to pay my tuition fees, then perhaps I can obtain secretarial work in whatever college I decide to go to. I only wish I had a chance to try for a scholarship. Doesn’t it seem strange that Sanford High School doesn’t offer at least one? Perhaps if it did, I could not win it, so there is no use in sighing over it.

“I hope you won’t be bored over this long letter. I know it has nothing in it but my own affairs, but, somehow, since that winter day when you forgave me for having been the hateful Observer I feel very near to you, and I wish you to know my ambitions for the future. You are so splendid and honorable that I know I can freely trust you with my confidence. Mother and I would be very pleased to have you come home from school with me some evening soon and take supper with us.

“Gratefully, your friend,

“Lucy Warner.”

Marjorie experienced a delightful glow of satisfaction as she finished the letter. How glad she was that Lucy and she now understood each other so fully, and what a clever girl Lucy was. Marjorie was lost in admiration of the quiet little senior’s brilliancy as a student. She wished she could help make Lucy’s dream of going to college come true as soon as her high school days were over. She knew that Lucy was too proud and sensitive to accept from anyone the money to continue her education. Yet Marjorie determined then that if ever she could become the means of helping to realize the other girl’s ambition, she would be happy.

A tender little smile lingered on her lips as she returned the letter to its envelope and tucked it inside her blouse. Very reluctantly she reached for her Cicero and was soon lost in preparing for her next hour’s recitation. Marjorie had not been able to arrange her senior program so as to have the coveted last hour in the afternoon for study. In the morning Advanced English and French Prose and Poetry took up the first two periods, leaving her the last one free. After luncheon the first afternoon

period was now devoted to study. During the next she recited in Cicero and the third and last period was given over to a recitation in Greek and Roman History. As she had already gained the required amount of credits in mathematics, she was satisfied to forego trigonometry. She was not fond of mathematics and had decided not to burden her senior year with the further study of them. Once in college she knew she would have her fill of trigonometry.

“I’ve something to report, Captain,” was her gay sally as, school over for the day, she tripped into the living room. “I’ve the dearest letter from Lucy Warner. I’m going to sit right down and read it to you. I found it waiting for me on my desk when I went back to school this afternoon. For just a minute it made me feel queerly. You can understand why. But it was very different from – well, you know.” Marjorie unpinned her pretty white hemp hat and hastily depositing it on the library table, plumped down on the floor at her mother’s knee. Dignified senior though she had now become, she had not outgrown her love for that lowly but most confidential resting place.

“That is pleasant news.” Mrs. Dean glanced affectionately down at her daughter, who was busily engaged in exploring the folds of her silk blouse for the letter.

“Why!” A frightened look overspread Marjorie’s lately radiant face. “Why, it’s *gone!* Oh, Captain, I’ve lost it!”

“Perhaps it has slipped to the back of your blouse, dear.” Mrs. Dean became the acme of maternal solicitude. “Unfasten your blouse and look carefully.”

Ready to cry, Marjorie sprang to her feet and obeyed the instruction, but the missing letter was not forthcoming. “How could I have lost it,” she mourned despairingly. “I always tuck my letters inside my blouse. But I’ve never lost one before to-day.”

“I don’t like to pile up misery, Lieutenant, but that seems to me a rather careless practice,” commented her mother. “I am truly sorry for you. Perhaps you left it in school instead of putting it inside your blouse.”

Marjorie shook a dejected head. “No; I didn’t. I wish now that I had. I know I put it inside my blouse. I was anxious to bring it home and show it to you. I would feel worried about losing any letter that had been written me, but this is a great deal worse. It was a very confidential letter. In it Lucy spoke of – of – last winter and of her plans for the future. Suppose someone were to find it who didn’t like her very well? The person who found it might gossip about it. That would be dreadful. Of course, anyone who finds it can see by the address that it is my letter. I think most of the girls would be honorable enough to give it back. A few of them perhaps wouldn’t. None of the four juniors who were on the sophomore basket-ball team last year like me very well. And there’s Mignon, too. I wouldn’t say so to anyone but you, Captain, but I’m not quite sure what she might do.”

“No, my dear, I am afraid you can never trust Mignon La Salle very far.” Mrs. Dean grew grave. “I made up my mind to that the day your girl friends were here at that little party you gave while you were sick. If ever a girl’s eyes spelled treachery, Mignon’s showed it that afternoon. Several times I have intended mentioning it to you. You know, however, that I do not like to interfere in your school affairs. Then, too, since her father so depends on your help and that of your girl chums, it seems hardly right in me to wish that you might be entirely free from her companionship. Yet, at heart, I am not particularly in favor of your association with her. Sooner or later you will find yourself in the thick of some disagreeable affair for which she is responsible.”

“I am always a little bit afraid of that, too,” was Marjorie’s dispirited answer. “I try not to think so, though. But it’s like trying to walk across a slippery log without falling off. Mignon is so – so – different from the rest of us. You know I told you of the things she said about that nice girl who works for Miss Archer and her sister. Well, the girl came to school to-day. Her name is Veronica Browning and she’s a senior.”

Marjorie went on to tell her captain of the locker-room incident, and the walk home from luncheon, ending with: “She is awfully dear and sweet. We are friends already. I may invite her to come and see us, mayn’t I, Captain?”

“By all means,” came the prompt response. “I am very glad, Lieutenant, that you have no false pride. It is contemptible. You may invite your new friend here as soon as you like. No doubt when I see Miss Archer she will tell me more of her protégé of her own accord. Judging from what you say of her, she seems to be a rather mysterious young person.”

“She acts a little as Connie used to act before I knew her well,” declared Marjorie. “She has the same fashion of starting to say something and then stopping short. I think it is only because she is quite poor. But she doesn’t seem to mind it as Connie did. She just smiles about it.”

“A young philosopher,” commented Mrs. Dean, her eyes twinkling. “I shall look forward to knowing her.”

“Oh, you will surely like Veronica,” Marjorie confidently predicted. The next instant her face fell. “Oh, dear,” she sighed, as fresh recollection of her loss smote her, “what shall I do about that letter? I’ll simply have to tell Lucy that I lost it. She’s so peculiar, too. I am afraid she won’t like it.”

“Don’t put off telling her,” counseled Mrs. Dean. “It is right that you should. Perhaps when you go to school to-morrow morning, you may find that some one of your friends has picked it up. I sincerely hope so, for your sake, Lieutenant.”

“Thank you, Captain.” Marjorie brightened a trifle. “I am going to hope as hard as ever I can that I’ll have it back by to-morrow.”

Marjorie’s earnest wish that the lost letter might be returned to her the next morning met with unfulfillment. Anxious inquiry among her close friends revealed no clue to the whereabouts of the missing letter. Nor, during the long day which anxiety made longer, did any of her schoolmates seek her with the joyful news, “Here is a letter I found, Marjorie, which is addressed to you.”

At the close of the afternoon session, which had lagged interminably, Marjorie turned slow steps toward Miss Archer’s big living-room office where Lucy Warner now claimed the secretary’s desk.

“Why, Marjorie, I was just thinking of you!” Lucy’s bluish-green eyes lighted with pleasure as Marjorie approached her desk. “I was hoping you’d run up soon to see me. I am so glad my hope came true.” Her hand went out to Marjorie in cordial greeting.

“I am ever so glad to have a chance to talk to you,” returned Marjorie earnestly as she took Lucy’s hand. “I received your letter. It was splendid. I loved every line of it. I – but I am afraid you won’t feel so glad that I came when I tell you what I’ve done.” A quick flush dyed Marjorie’s cheeks.

“I guess it is nothing very dreadful.” Lucy smiled her utmost faith in her pretty visitor.

“Lucy, I – well – I hate to tell you, but I’ve *lost* that letter you wrote me.” Marjorie looked the picture of anxiety as she made the disagreeable confession.

“You’ve *lost* it!” gasped Lucy, her heavy dark brows meeting in the old ominous frown.

“Yes. I tucked it inside my blouse,” went on Marjorie bravely, “and when I reached home it was gone.”

Lucy’s green eyes fastened themselves on Marjorie in an angry stare. For a moment her great liking for the gentle girl was swallowed up in wrath at her carelessness. Intensely methodical, Lucy found such carelessness hard to excuse. Remembering tardily how much she owed Marjorie, she made a valiant effort to suppress her anger. “It’s too bad,” she muttered. “I – you see – I gave you my confidence. I wouldn’t care to have anyone else know all that I wrote you.”

“Don’t I know that?” Marjorie asked almost piteously. “I can’t begin to tell you how dreadfully I feel about it. I know you think it careless in me to have tucked it inside my blouse. It *was* careless. I’ve waited all day, thinking someone who might have found it would return it. My name on the envelope ought to insure a prompt return if I dropped it in or near the school building. But if I lost it in the street and a stranger found it, then I’m afraid I wouldn’t stand much chance of getting it again.” Marjorie made a little gesture of hopelessness. “You must know how humiliated I feel over it. But that won’t bring the letter back,” she concluded with deep dejection.

During this long apology Lucy’s probing eyes had been riveted unblinkingly on Marjorie, as though in an effort to plumb the precise degree of the latter’s regret for the accident. “Don’t worry

about it any more,” she said rather brusquely. “It may not amount to anything after all. If you dropped it in the street, the wind may have blown it away; then no one would ever see it. If you dropped it in the school building, it may be returned to you, or perhaps to me. My full name was signed at the end of it. It has taught me a lesson, though.”

Within herself Lucy knew that this last speech bordered on the unkind. Yet she could not resist making it. Although she was earnestly endeavoring to live up to the new line of conduct which she had laid down for herself on the day when she had confessed her fault to Marjorie, much of her former antagonistic attitude toward life still remained. Having, for years, cultivated a spirit of envy and bitterness, she was still more ready to blame than condone. A kind of fierce, new-born gratitude and loyalty toward Marjorie transcended momentarily her personal displeasure. It was not quite powerful enough, however, to check that one caustic remark. She had not yet learned the true secret of gratitude.

“I can’t blame you for feeling that I am not a safe confidant,” Marjorie made honest reply. “Still it hurts me to hear it. I must go now, Lucy. The girls are waiting for me outside. We are all going down to Sargent’s for ice cream. I’d love to have you come, too, if you are through with your work and would care to join us.”

“Thank you, but I shall be busy here for the next half hour,” Lucy returned, a tinge of stiffness in the reply. She wondered how Marjorie could thus so easily dismiss the annoying matter of the lost letter. Perhaps, after all, she was not half so sorry as she pretended to be.

“Please don’t think that I am trying to make light of my misdeed,” Marjorie said eagerly. Lucy’s curt refusal of the invitation bore a hint of offended pride. “I shall have that letter on my mind all the time until we learn what has become of it, or are sure that it hasn’t fallen into unfriendly hands.”

At the words “unfriendly hands” Lucy’s heavy brows again met. She mentally saw herself held up as an object for ridicule by some unknown person whom the letter might apprise of her secret ambitions. “That’s just the trouble,” she flashed forth sharply. “Hardly any of the girls at Sanford High understand me in the least. I am sure some of them would be only too glad for an opportunity to make fun of me. It wouldn’t be very pleasant for me if some morning I should walk into school and find that about half the girls here knew all about my personal business. You know, as well as I, how fast news travels among a lot of girls.”

“I understand – all – that – perfectly.” There was a faint catch in Marjorie’s clear utterance. “I can only say again that I am very, very sorry for my carelessness.”

“That won’t bring back my letter,” was the testy retort. “But never mind. Let’s not say anything more about it.” With a little shrug her green eyes sought the pile of papers on her desk.

Marjorie immediately took it as a sign that Lucy did not wish to talk further to her. Not angry, but distinctly hurt, she did not try to prolong the conversation but merely said: “Good-bye, Lucy. If I hear anything about the letter I will let you know at once.” Then she quietly left the office, trying not to blame Lucy for being so austere regarding the lost letter. Yet Marjorie was too human not to feel that having once freely forgiven Lucy of a far greater fault, she had expected to receive a certain amount of clemency in return, which the peculiar, self-contained senior had not offered.

CHAPTER IV – LAYING A CORNERSTONE

“Well, how about it?” challenged the irrepressible Jerry Macy. Marjorie joined the stout girl and Constance, who stood waiting for her across the street from the high school. Both friends knew why Marjorie had lingered in the school building when the afternoon session was over. They were among the first to whom she confided the news of yesterday’s loss. She had announced to them her intention of apprising Lucy Warner of the unpleasant fact, and Jerry in particular was curious to know what effect the disclosure would have upon Lucy.

“I’m glad *that’s* over.” Marjorie gave a little sigh. “It was pretty hard for me to tell Lucy. It served me right for being so careless, though.”

“What did she say? Was she mad?” Curiosity looked forth from Jerry’s round face.

“No; that is, not exactly. Still, she wasn’t very well pleased,” admitted Marjorie. “I hope someone finds the letter yet and brings it to me. But where are the rest of the girls?” She decided that a change of subject was in order. Lucy’s too-evident umbrage had hurt her considerably. She therefore preferred to try to forget it for a time at least.

“They’ve gone on ahead,” informed Constance. “Muriel had an errand to do in town and so had Susan. Irma and Harriet went with them. They are to meet us at Sargent’s at four-thirty.”

“Then we had better be starting for there.” Marjorie consulted her wrist watch. “It’s ten after four now. Let’s hurry along. Did either of you have a chance to talk with Veronica after school?” she continued as they set off for Sargent’s three abreast.

“I saw her for a moment in the locker room,” replied Constance. “She seemed to be in quite a hurry. She smiled at me but didn’t say anything. Then she put on her hat and left the locker room without stopping to talk to any of us.”

“I suppose she has to go straight home from school and help Miss Archer’s sister,” surmised Jerry. “I’d hate to have to study all day and then go home and shell peas or scrub floors or answer the doorbell or do whatever had to be done. I guess we ought to be thankful that we don’t have to earn our board and keep.”

“I ought to be doubly thankful,” agreed Constance seriously. “Not so very far back in my life I had no time to play, either. Every once in a while when I feel specially self-satisfied, I take a walk past the little gray house where I used to live before my aunt played fairy god-mother to all of us. It makes me remember that my good fortune was just a lucky accident and takes all the conceit out of me.”

“Now that we are seniors I believe we ought to make it our business to do all we can for the girls in school who aren’t able to have the good times we do,” stated Marjorie soberly. “It seems to me that we might band ourselves together into some sort of welfare club. If we do well with it we can pass it on to the next senior class when we have been graduated from Sanford High.”

“Hurrah!” Jerry waved a plump hand on high. “That’s the talk. Every since last year I’ve had that club idea on my mind. Let’s hurry up and organize it at once. For that matter we can do it this afternoon; the minute we meet the girls at Sargent’s. There will be seven of us to start with. Then we can decide on how many more girls we’d like to have in it.”

“Oh, splendid!” exclaimed Marjorie, the sober expression vanishing from her pretty face. “Once we organize a club and get it well started, who knows what distinguished members we may become.”

As the three girls swung blithely along toward Sargent’s the incessant flow of conversation that went on among them betokened their signal interest and enthusiasm in the new project.

“Here we are,” proclaimed Jerry noisily to the quartette of girls seated at a rear table in the smart little shop. “Strictly on time, too, or rather five minutes ahead of it. How long have you been here?”

“Oh, we just came.” It was Muriel Harding who answered. “Maybe we didn’t hustle our errands through, though. Sit down and we’ll order our ice cream. Then we can talk.”

“The time has come, the walrus said,

To talk of many things,”
quoted Jerry mysteriously as she seated herself.

“Well, Walrus, what’s on your mind?” giggled Susan Atwell, promptly applying Jerry’s quotation to the stout girl herself.

“I’m no walrus. I don’t consider that I resemble one in the least,” retorted Jerry good-humoredly. “I’m sorry you don’t recognize a quotation when you hear one. But I forgive you, giggling Susan.”

The approach of a white-clad youth to take their order interrupted Jerry’s discourse. The instant the order had been given she continued: “Girls, as I just said, the time has come.”

“For what?” demanded Harriet, smiling.

“Marjorie will answer that. She’s the real promoter of the enterprise. I am merely the press agent. Go ahead, little Faithful.”

Marjorie’s cheeks grew rosy at the broadly-implied compliment. “You’re a goose, Jerry,” she affectionately chided. “You tell the girls about it.”

“I’d rather be a goose than a walrus,” grinned Jerry. “As for telling; let Marjorie do it. No; I mean, I’d rather you’d spring it on them. Oh, what’s the use? Slang and I are one.” Jerry sighed an exaggerated sorrow over her vain effort at eliminating inelegant English from her vocabulary.

“It must be something very important,” put in Susan, with a derisive chuckle, “or Jeremiah would *never* resort to slang.”

Jerry’s grin merely widened. “Go ahead and tell them, Marjorie. Hurry up.”

“It’s just this way, children.” Marjorie leaned forward a trifle, her brown eyes roving over the little group of eager-faced listeners. “For a long time Jerry and I have had the idea of forming a club. We talked of it last year, after Christmas, and again after we gave the operetta. But you know what a hard year we had over basketball, and then so many of us became sick that somehow the club idea was put away and forgotten. But now, as Jerry says, ‘the time has come.’ What we’d like to do is to form a club from a certain number of girls in the senior class. It mustn’t be just a social affair but one devoted to the purpose of looking out for anyone that needs our help. Of course when first we start we won’t be able to do much. Later we may find it in our power to do a good deal.”

“And if the club’s a success,” interposed Jerry, “Marjorie thinks it would be nice to pass it along, name and all, to the next senior class. Then they could will it to the next and so on. It would be a sorority, only I hope you won’t go and burden it with a Greek letter name. We ought to give it a name that would mean a lot to anyone who happens to hear of it.” Despite her insistence that Marjorie should put forward the project, Jerry could not resist having her say, too.

“That’s a fine idea,” glowed Harriet Delaney. “How many girls ought we to have in it?”

“I should think ten or twelve would be enough to start with,” returned Marjorie meditatively. “If we decide later that we need more we can have the pleasure of initiating them. Has anyone of you a pencil and paper?”

Muriel immediately brought forth a notebook from her leather school bag. Susan Atwell promptly produced the required pencil.

“Write on the back page of it, Marjorie,” directed Muriel. “If you put down our illustrious names anywhere else in the book, I am likely to mix them with my zoology notes.”

“Imagine Muriel standing up in class and innocently reading: ‘To the Crustacean family belong Jerry Macy, Marjorie Dean, Harriet Delaney, etc.,’” giggled Susan Atwell. Whereupon a ripple of giggles swept the zealous organizers.

“Let me see.” Turning obediently to the last leaf of the notebook Marjorie glanced about the circle and began to write. “We are seven,” she commented after a moment. “Now for the others. Esther Lind, Rita Talbot and Daisy Griggs, of course. That makes ten. I’d like to ask Lucy Warner. Have you any objections?” Marjorie had resolved to overlook Lucy’s recent cavalier treatment of herself.

No one objected and Lucy’s name went down on the list.

“We ought to ask Veronica,” reminded thoughtful Constance.

“Of course.” Marjorie jotted down their new friend’s name. Suddenly she raised her eyes, a faint frown touching her smooth forehead. “Girls,” she said slowly, “it’s our duty to ask Mignon La Salle to join the club.”

“I knew it!” exclaimed Jerry disgustedly. “I’ve been expecting to hear you say that. Must we always have *her* tied to our apron strings?”

“Oh, I wouldn’t ask her, Marjorie.” Muriel’s face registered plain disapproval. “If you do, we won’t have a peaceful minute. Besides, she would be the thirteenth member.”

“I’d hate to belong to a thirteen-member club,” declared Harriet superstitiously. “We’d never have a minute’s luck.”

“We’ll never have even that much luck if we drag Mignon into our club,” was Jerry’s gruff prediction.

Marjorie’s troubled gaze strayed from one to another of her schoolmates. Constance and Irma alone looked tranquil. She read strong opposition in the faces of the others.

“I am perfectly willing that Mignon shall become a member of the club.” Constance ranged herself boldly on Marjorie’s side.

“So am I,” reinforced Irma. “We all gave Marjorie our promise to help Mignon in any way that we could. I won’t go back on my part of it.”

“If you put it that way, neither ought the rest of us,” grumbled Muriel. “Still, we have the welfare of the club to consider. Mignon is, and always has been, a disturber. Just at present she is pretending to behave herself because her father has taken her in hand. The hateful way she has acted about Veronica shows very plainly that she hasn’t really reformed. If Rowena Farnham hadn’t left Sanford High, she and Mignon would be as chummy as ever by this time.”

“I said that same thing to Marjorie last year,” confessed Constance. “I am perfectly willing to admit it. Even so, that has nothing to do with our agreement to try to help Mignon. If Rowena were here, and she and Mignon began to go around together again, it would be our duty to look out for Mignon just the same, or else go frankly to Mr. La Salle and ask him to release us from our promise.”

“I’d rather do that than have Mignon in our club,” asserted Jerry stubbornly. “As long as you’ve mentioned Rowena I’ll tell you something that I’ve been keeping to myself. You know that the La Salles always go to Severn Beach for the summer, and so does our family. Last year the Farnhams were there, too. But this year they were at Tanglewood. It’s not more than ten miles from Severn Beach.

“Twice, while Hal and I were motoring through Tanglewood in his roadster, we saw Mignon and Rowena together. Once, in their bathing suits on the beach, and another time we saw them walking together in a little grove about a mile above Tanglewood. They didn’t see us either time. I know perfectly well that Mignon slipped away to visit Rowena without permission. It proves that they can’t be kept apart. I understand that Rowena went away to boarding school last week. That means the two will correspond. Rowena will do her best to bother Marjorie through Mignon. She will never forgive her for last year. All I have to say is that in order to protect Marjorie from her spite we ought to keep Mignon out of the club. We can try to help her in other ways.”

“That settles it!” exclaimed Muriel Harding. “I mean that I think Jerry’s reason for not asking Mignon to join the club is a good one. Every year of high school, so far, she has managed to make things hard for Marjorie. Now it’s time to put a stop to her mischief-making.”

“I agree with Muriel,” announced Harriet.

“So do I,” chimed in Susan.

Marjorie smiled a trifle wistfully. “The majority rules,” she said slowly. “It’s a case of four against three. I hardly know what to do. If I say that I won’t join the club, after being the one to propose it, it will appear that I am backing out just because I can’t have my own way. If I say, ‘very well, let us organize the club and leave Mignon out,’ then I shall be breaking my word to Mr. La Salle.

“I have never yet broken a promise I made. I should hate now to feel that I had failed to be true to myself. Please don’t think that I am asking you girls to accept my views. You must do whatever

you feel to be best. For me it means one of two evils: refuse to join the club or break my promise. To do either would make me feel dreadfully.”

As Marjorie finished blank silence reigned. It was Jerry Macy who broke it. “You’ve set us a pretty stiff example to live up to, Marjorie,” she said bluntly. “You haven’t left us a foot to stand on. We all gave you our word to help Mignon. As long as you think that this is one of the ways we can help her then it must be so. We want you in the club and we want you to keep your promise to Mr. La Salle. But I’ve just one thing to say. I’ve said it before and I say it again. If after she joins the club she starts to make mischief for you or any of us, I’ll resign. If I do, you needn’t try to coax me back for I shan’t come. Remember that.”

“Thank you, Jerry, for being so splendid.” Marjorie’s slender hand reached out to Jerry in token of her gratitude. “I know that all of you would like me to be in the club. That is why it was so hard for me to say what I just said.”

“Here’s my hand, too.” Muriel flushed as she proffered it. “Susan and Harriet, you are beaten. Salute the victor. I agree with Jerry, though, about resigning from the club.”

“I’ll risk both of you,” declared Marjorie happily, as she shook hands with the three girls. “Thank you ever so much. I didn’t say so before, because I was afraid you might think that I was trying to influence you, but don’t you see that Mignon needs us now more than ever? We must try to win her away from Rowena’s hurtful influence over her. For her to join the club may be the very best way to do it. If we can interest her in whatever we may decide to do for others, she will, perhaps, care more for us and less for Rowena.”

“I guess there’s something in that,” nodded Jerry. “But what are we going to do about Mignon being the thirteenth member?”

“We had better add one more name to the list,” suggested Irma. “Why not ask Florence Johnston? She is such a nice girl.”

Concerted assent greeted Irma’s suggestion, and Marjorie duly inscribed Florence’s name below Mignon’s.

“We might as well make it fifteen,” asserted Jerry. “Gertrude Aldine is a worthy senior. How about her?”

Jerry’s choice approved, Marjorie read down the list as she had compiled it. “That much is settled,” she declared. “The next thing is to choose a name. Suppose we think hard about it while we eat our ice cream. When we’ve finished, then each one must tell the name she has thought of. Out of seven names we ought to find one that will suit our club.”

In the interest of deciding upon the club members, for once Sargent’s toothsome concoctions had stood neglected on the table. The girls now proceeded to make up for lost time and an unusual stillness settled down upon them as they ate their ice cream.

Quick-witted Jerry was the first to make the announcement, “I’ve thought of one.”

Inspiration did not come so easily to the others, however.

“I can never think of anything like that on the spur of the moment,” lamented Harriet. “The only thing that sticks in my brain is ‘The Serious Sanford Seniors,’ which is awful.”

“Mine is even worse,” snickered Susan Atwell. “All I can think of is ‘The Happy Hustlers.’”

“Mine’s ‘The Ever Ready Club,’” smiled Irma. “But that’s not an interesting name.”

“It wouldn’t be a bad name for us,” praised Marjorie. “I thought of ‘*Bon Aventure*’ but it really ought to be a good plain English name, instead of a French one.”

“‘*Bon Aventure*’ sounds very pretty,” asserted Constance. “Mine is ‘The Searchlight Club.’”

“That’s good!” came from two or three of the circle.

“My naming faculty isn’t working,” was Muriel’s rueful cry. “I can’t think of a single thing. Go ahead and tell us yours, Jerry. I know you are anxious to.”

“When first it came to me, it seemed pretty good, but I like the other names just as well. What I thought of was the ‘Lookout Club.’ You see that is what we are going to pledge ourselves to do. We must look out for others who need our help.”

“I like that name,” was Marjorie’s opinion. “It’s short and plain, yet it means so much. Every time we heard it or said it or even thought about it, it would make us remember our object. Those in favor of the ‘Lookout Club’ raise your right hand.”

Seven right hands promptly went up. And although they could not then know it, they laid the cornerstone that afternoon for a famous high school sorority that was destined to flourish and endure long after their Sanford High School days had become but a dear memory.

CHAPTER V – THE HARD ROAD OF DUTY

“But why won’t you join our club, Veronica?” Marjorie’s voice held a pleading note. “We have been counting on you from the first. Of course I know you haven’t as much time to yourself as the rest of us have. Still, I am sure Miss Archer would let you come to some of our meetings, if not all of them. We are going to meet once a week at the homes of the different girls and in the evening after dinner.”

“I am sorry, Marjorie, but really I can’t. For your sake I’d love to, but I am sure it would be best for me not to join your club.” Veronica’s pretty, pale features took on a faint tinge of pink as she delivered her quiet ultimatum.

“Is it because of Mignon La Salle?” It was Marjorie’s turn to color as she asked this pertinent question. Since the first day of school when Veronica had chanced to overhear Mignon’s unkind criticism of herself, and Marjorie had rather lamely asked the former not to judge the French girl too harshly, Mignon’s name had never again been mentioned between them. From Jerry Macy, however, and various others, Marjorie had learned that Mignon never lost an opportunity to pass sneering remarks about “that servant girl.” Marjorie wondered now if at least a part of these remarks had come to Veronica’s ears. If such were the case she could hardly blame her new friend for refusing to belong to a club of which Mignon was to be a member.

For a moment Veronica did not answer. Her brief, mysterious smile flickered into evidence, then faded as she said frankly: “Yes, it is because of Miss La Salle. Understand, I am not afraid of her sneers. She is a very vain, foolish young person. It is because – ” She broke off abruptly to launch forth unexpectedly with: “You remember my first day at school, when you and I walked home together?”

“Yes,” came Marjorie’s ready answer. Her eyes sought the other girl’s face in mute question.

“You spoke to me then of Miss La Salle, and I said I understood. Since then I’ve wondered a good deal whether or not I did understand you. When you and she came to call on Miss Archer that afternoon, I may say frankly that I liked you on sight and disliked her intensely. I supposed, however, that there must be some good in her or you wouldn’t be her friend. Then, too, when she sneered about me in the locker room and afterward, you asked me to think as kindly of her as I could, I still supposed that you must like her very much. Now comes the curious part. I’ve been at Sanford High only a week, but in that time I’ve managed to see and hear a great deal; enough, at any rate, to convince me that Miss La Salle is not nor never has been your friend. What I can’t understand is why a delightful girl like you should trouble your head over the welfare of such an ingrate.”

Marjorie’s face registered patent surprise at gentle Veronica’s energetic denunciation of Mignon. She realized that the flash in the former’s gray eyes betokened an anger that had been wakened in Veronica’s heart solely on her account.

“Why do you and your friends pay any attention to her?” continued Veronica warmly. “My – Miss Archer has told me a number of things that make me wonder at it. Of course, this is in strict confidence, but she was very much surprised to see Miss La Salle with you on the day you called at our – her house.”

“I knew she would be,” was Marjorie’s rueful reply, “but on that day it was merely that she happened along in her runabout and – well – and just came with me. Miss Archer doesn’t know – ” Marjorie stopped. She had been on the verge of mentioning to Veronica her promise to Mr. La Salle. More than once, since that day in her general’s office when Mignon’s father had pleaded with her for his daughter’s sake, Marjorie had wished that she had never been asked to make that fateful promise.

“Doesn’t know what?” interrogated Veronica with the same energetic impatience that had characterized her blunt arraignment of the French girl.

“Veronica,” Marjorie began solemnly, “I think, as long as we are already such good friends, that I ought to tell you about Mignon. It’s not fair to you or myself or my friends to allow you to think that we approve of some of the things she does and says.” Briefly, Marjorie explained the position

that she and her chums had been forced into on the French girl's account. "You may tell Miss Archer, too, if you will. I'd like her to understand the situation."

"You girls have a hard task on your hands," was Veronica's grim comment. "I've seen that sort of reform tried so many times in – Well, I've seen it tried. It always fails. Perhaps I'm speaking too harshly for one in my humble position." She flashed Marjorie one of her strange smiles.

"It is right for you to say whatever you think," Marjorie made honest response. Inwardly, she decided that Veronica grew daily more baffling. For a girl who had been brought up in such humble circumstances she was astonishingly authoritative in her manner of speaking. Yet Marjorie could not help but admire her dauntless spirit of independence.

"You think me a queer girl, don't you?" challenged Veronica. "Never mind. Some day you'll learn to know and understand me better. About your club," she went on hastily as though anxious to lead Marjorie's attention away from herself, "I must refuse positively to belong to it. It would create trouble from the start. You have enough complications to manage as it is. I may have seemed unfeeling to you about Miss La Salle, but since I know more of the circumstances, I must say that I sincerely hope you may help her to find her better self. Look out, though, that she doesn't spread a web for your feet."

With this warning ringing in her ears, Marjorie left her new friend to continue on her way home to luncheon and entered at her own gate. Over a week had elapsed since the seven girls had congregated at Sargent's and made their first attempt toward forming the Lookout Club. During that time all the other prospective members had been interviewed and with the exception of Veronica had heartily fallen in with the plan. This was the second time that Marjorie had invited the former to join the club. She was distinctly disappointed at Veronica's firm refusal, yet she knew that the girl had spoken wisely when she had remarked that her advent into the club would be sure to create a disturbance on Mignon's part.

Privately, Marjorie would not have been specially grieved if Mignon, instead of Veronica, had been the one to refuse to join. On the contrary, the French girl readily accepted the invitation.

Although Marjorie could not know it, Mr. La Salle had recently stumbled upon a letter from Rowena to Mignon among those in his morning mail. Unluckily for Mignon, it had drifted there quite by mistake. The postmark plainly revealing its source, he had sent for Mignon, forced her to identify the writing on the envelope and destroyed it unopened before her very eyes. Then he had taken her severely to task for it. Mignon had craftily pretended innocence, boldly assuring her father that she was astonished to think that Rowena Farnham would dare write to her. Partially convinced by her eager protestations, Mr. La Salle had made Mignon sit down and write Rowena a curt note, which he dictated, informing her that she, Mignon, refused absolutely to hold any further communication whatever with her. It may be stated that although he also attended to the mailing of that particular letter, he had nothing whatever to do with a second much longer epistle written by Mignon to Rowena in school the next day and surreptitiously mailed to her by special delivery.

Following on the heels of this dire calamity to Mignon's peace of mind had come Marjorie's invitation to join the Lookout Club. Mignon had hailed it as a timely aid toward restoring her father's doubtful confidence in herself, and accepted the invitation with alacrity. That she had done wisely was soon made manifest. Mr. La Salle was delighted when she casually informed him of the fact, and immediately promised to buy her an expensive gold vanity case, for which she had previously teased him without avail. Secretly, Mignon was highly pleased with herself. Rowena had always impressed it upon her that she must not scruple to use others to gain her own ends. She felt that in thus using Marjorie's invitation to appease her father's wrath, she had indeed managed very diplomatically. As for the letter, her father had forced her to write Rowena, Mignon knew it would be of no more consequence to her friend than so much blank paper. Rowena was too shrewd not to guess that Mr. La Salle was the motive power behind it.

Marjorie's views on the subject of Mignon, however, were not optimistic. At luncheon that day she was very quiet. Veronica's warning still lurked in her brain. It was a queer situation she reflected. She had fought valiantly to make Mignon a member of the club, while all the time she was dreading the thought of it. On the contrary, she wished earnestly for Veronica to become a member, yet she had hardly protested against her refusal to join. Why was it, she pondered, that one's duty was hardly ever pleasant? Why did it so often require one to put aside the nice things and keep the disagreeable ones?

"What makes you so quiet, Lieutenant?" was her mother's solicitous question as Marjorie began a listless eating of a favorite dessert which she usually hailed with acclamation.

"Oh, I was thinking about the club. Veronica won't join it on account of Mignon. She thinks if she did that Mignon would make it disagreeable for all of us. Of course, she is right, yet it seems dreadfully unfair to her for me to accept that view of it. Just because I made that promise to Mr. La Salle, I am obliged to consider Mignon's welfare above Veronica's. It's too provoking!"

"If I felt that way about it, I would go to Mr. La Salle and ask him to release me from that promise," was her mother's tranquil advice. "If you lack the spirit of helpfulness, then you can hardly expect to be truly helpful. I don't mean that as censure, Lieutenant. You know my personal views on the subject of Mignon. I am merely suggesting it as an open road out of your difficulty."

"That is almost what Connie said to Jerry when we first talked of having the club, and Jerry objected to my asking Mignon to become a member. I stood up for Mignon then. Now I almost wish I hadn't. Still I know it was right to do it, so I must stand by my colors. Veronica and I understand each other. She knows that she is welcome to join the club, no matter what Mignon may think. Still, I know that if I coaxed her every day for a week she wouldn't change her mind about it. It's just another of those miserable vicissitudes, and I shall have to accept it as such and try to meet it like a good soldier. I couldn't go to Mr. La Salle and ask him to release me from my promise. I'd be a deserter from the army. That reminds me, Captain, may the club hold its first meeting here to-morrow evening after dinner? I'd like it ever so much if you have no objections. You know that means eats. Such a worthy organization can't conduct a business session without a reward afterward." Marjorie's brown eyes danced mischievously.

"I shall feel highly honored," laughed her mother, "and will take it upon myself to see that the worthy organization is lavishly rewarded. How many girls will be here?"

"Fourteen, counting your grateful lieutenant," informed Marjorie. Finishing her dessert in a hurry, she sprang from her chair and fervently embraced her mother. "You are positively splendiferous, Captain," she cried. "If I came and told you that I wanted to invite the whole four classes of Sanford High to this house to a party, you'd say 'yes.'"

"I doubt it," returned her mother with twinkling eyes. "Deliver me from any such invasion!"

"Oh, I am not going to try it," Marjorie laughingly assured. "That was merely an extravagance of speech. Miss Flint continually warns us against using extravagant language. But there are times when it's extravagantly necessary. Are you sure you won't mind letting us have the living room for our meeting? I'd have it upstairs in my house, only we'd be rather crowded."

"No; Lieutenant, I am willing to resign all claim to it for the evening. Mrs. Macy and I have a call to make on that poor man who was hurt so badly in that boiler explosion last week. I understand that he and his family are greatly in need of help. You will have to play hostess alone, as I am going to motor over for Mrs. Macy directly after dinner. I'll arrange with Delia this afternoon for refreshments for the club."

"Thank you a million times, Captain." With a final vigorous hug and a resounding kiss, Marjorie made a hop, skip and jump exit from the dining room. A twinkle of amusement lurked in her mother's eyes as through the wide doorway she watched her active daughter cross the hall and enter the living room to put in the fifteen minutes' piano practice after luncheon, which formed a part of the busy lieutenant's daily program. The last mail of the morning had been productive of a letter for Marjorie

from Mary Raymond. Mrs. Dean had placed it on the rack above the keyboard directly in front of Marjorie's open exercise book, with a view toward giving her a pleasant surprise.

That she had succeeded was immediately evidenced by the jubilant little cry which proceeded from the living room. As she had confidently expected, no sounds of practice arose from the neglected piano during the next fifteen minutes. Duty had succumbed to the fascinating wiles of Mary Raymond. As usual, Mary's letter covered many closely-written pages of note paper. She had much to tell of the glories of her far western home. She hoped that next summer Marjorie could surely make her the long visit which she had been unable to pay her that year. She was trying her best to be a good soldier. The Magic Shield of Valor had protected her more than once during her school life of the previous year. There were a number of very snobbish girls in the senior class at school, of which she was now a member. One of them reminded her a little of Mignon La Salle. She was a new girl in school whose father owned one of the largest ranches in the state. So far this new girl had been very nice to her, but she had made up her mind to be very cautious about rushing into too-ready friendship with her.

"You see," Mary wrote, "I've had one severe lesson of that sort. I don't need another. By the way, how is Mignon behaving toward you since school began? I can't make myself believe that she has really changed. If I were you, Lieutenant, I would keep a safe distance from her. She is likely to turn and snap at you when you least expect it. It must be a relief to you girls to know that Rowena Farnham won't be a pupil of Sanford High this year. It wouldn't surprise me, though, if she and Mignon were friends still on the sly. They are a well-matched pair, and, therefore, hard to separate."

Marjorie smiled ruefully as she read Mary's uncomplimentary opinion of the French girl and her wise conclusion regarding Mignon and Rowena. Mary Raymond had never forgiven Mignon her transgressions; moreover, she never would forgive her. She wondered what Mary would think when she wrote her chum the information that Mignon had been invited to join the Lookout Club. Mary's forceful warning against the latter did not tend to lighten the perplexed lieutenant's own lively apprehension. Suppose her own insistence that they keep their promise to Mr. La Salle were to later enmesh both herself and her friends in some difficult web of Mignon's spinning? Given that this could easily happen, it might take the greater part of their senior year to extricate themselves from it. On the other hand, membership in the club might have a highly beneficial effect on Mignon. Marjorie fervently hoped that it would. At any rate she had pleaded that Mignon should be asked to become a member of the club, and come what might, she must abide by the consequence of her own act.

CHAPTER VI – STRICTLY LOCAL POLITICS

Marjorie was just putting on her hat preparatory to setting out for school, when Jerry Macy walked in at the open front door. “Thought I’d stroll over for you,” she announced. “I might better say fly than stroll. I ran nearly all the way here so as to be sure to catch you at home.” Jerry’s very manner betokened the fact that she had something on her mind.

“I’m glad you came, Jerry. Captain says we can have the meeting here to-morrow evening. I wish you’d help me invite the girls. I’ll tell Lucy, Rita, Florence, Gertrude and – Mignon. I think I’d better invite them myself as long as the meeting is to be at my house. You can tell the others. But we mustn’t stand here to talk. It’s after one o’clock now.” Seizing her hat, Marjorie hastily slipped it over her curls and the two left the house.

“I’ll cheerfully invite anyone except Mignon,” stipulated the stout girl. “Is Veronica coming?” They had now started down the street toward the high school.

“No.” Marjorie’s face clouded. “She refuses to join our club.”

“Isn’t that too bad?” deplored Jerry in deep disgust. “I suppose it’s on account of Mignon that she won’t belong to the club. I can’t say I blame her much. Daisy Griggs told me this morning that Mignon said she wouldn’t be seen associating with a menial like that Browning girl. Isn’t that the limit? No apology for using slang, either. I mean what I say. There’s just one thing about it, Marjorie, we’ll have to do something to stop Mignon from making such malicious remarks about Veronica. All morning I kept thinking about what Daisy had said. While I was eating luncheon an idea popped into my head. We might as well make a special rule along with the regular club rules that the members must pledge themselves not to gossip or say hateful things about anyone. All the girls except Mignon will live up to it, I know. I’ve thought of another way, too, to keep her from gossiping. You’ll think I’ve surely gone crazy when I tell you. Yet there’s some method in my madness.”

“What is it?” asked Marjorie curiously. She could think of no effectual method of sealing Mignon’s wayward lips.

“Well, the best thing to do with Mignon is to elect her to an office in the club. Then she won’t dare to do anything but behave herself. The eyes of the club will be on her all the time. She’ll just have to walk a chalk line. She’ll do it, too. You know how well she behaved when Laurie gave her back her part in the operetta last Spring. She loves power and position. Make her an officer in the club and she’ll walk softly for fear of putting out her own bright light. What do you think about it, anyway?”

“It’s a good plan,” was Marjorie’s unhesitating answer. “I don’t believe it would be wise to have her for president, though, or even vice-president.”

“No, she’ll have to be secretary or treasurer,” declared Jerry quickly. “In a club of fourteen, four officers will be about as many as we shall need.”

“But suppose the girls don’t care to vote for her?” Tardy remembrance of this obstacle now confronted Marjorie.

“Oh, it will have to be a cut-and-dried election as far as Mignon is concerned.” Jerry grinned cheerfully as she made this bald statement. “You and I will have to do some electioneering. I’ll interview one half of the girls and leave the other half to you. We’d better decide now on the office she’s to have,” she added with the judicial air of a seasoned politician.

“We might propose her for treasurer,” said Marjorie after a moment’s reflection. “Very likely we won’t have much money at first, but it would make her feel more important to take care of it than to be secretary and just set down the minutes of the different meetings.”

“All right, we’ll see to it that she is elected treasurer. I expect it will be *some* surprise to her. I hope to goodness she appreciates it enough to behave like a Christian. If she doesn’t, you can blame me for the whole thing.”

“It will be just as much my fault as yours if the plan doesn’t work out well. It’s rather queer, Jerry, but just before you came I was wondering whether I had done right after all in proposing Mignon as a member of the Lookouts. I had just decided that I had, when you came and proved it to me by proposing that we elect her to an office in the club. It looks as though there were some hidden influence at work, far greater than we are, which is urging us on to help her find herself. Who knows how wonderfully our little plot may turn out after all?”

“You might better say, ‘Who knows *how* our little plot may turn out?’” grumbled Jerry. “It reminds me of a problem in algebra. Let X equal the unknown quantity, or rather let Mignon equal the unknown quantity. But let us once more be reformers or die in the attempt. We’ve started the ball rolling, so we’ll have to run along behind it and see that it keeps on rolling in the right direction.”

Their entrance into the school building cut the earnest conversation short. Marjorie left Jerry in the corridor and went on alone to Miss Archer’s office to apprise Lucy Warner of the new project and that the first meeting of the club was to take place at her home on the following evening. There was a distinct tinge of reserve in the green-eyed girl’s greeting, which informed Marjorie that Lucy was still slightly peeved over the incident of the lost letter. Diligent inquiry had failed to bring forth any news of it. It was now over a week since Marjorie had lost it, and there seemed small chance that it would materialize at this late date.

“I have an invitation to deliver to you, Lucy,” was Marjorie’s frank address. “Can you come to my house to-morrow evening after dinner? A number of other girls will be there, too. We are going to organize a club, and we should like to have you belong to it.”

For a moment Lucy regarded the winsome face before her with scowling indecision. She was very fond of Marjorie, yet she still cherished a slight resentment toward her. The friendly light in the other girl’s brown eyes, however, filled her with an overwhelming sense of shame for her own stubbornness. Her wrinkled forehead suddenly cleared and she said contritely: “I hope you’ll forgive me, Marjorie, for being so hateful to you about that old letter. I am sorry. Please forget that it ever happened. It is sweet of you to ask me to belong to your club. I’d love to come to your house to-morrow night, and I surely will. Thank you for asking me.”

Marjorie’s lovely face broke into smiles. “Thank you for saying you’ll come,” she nodded brightly. “The meeting is to begin at eight o’clock. Come over earlier if you can. I must hurry along now. It’s almost half-past one.”

“I’ll be there before eight,” assured Lucy. Her uncompromising manner had vanished, and her stolid features shone with renewed good will.

As Marjorie hurried toward the senior locker room to dispose of her hat before entering the study hall, she felt as though a sudden weight had been lifted from her shoulders. It was not only her own remorse at losing the letter which had troubled her. Lucy’s frosty attitude had belonged strictly to the embittered Observer. Having successfully dragged her out of that rut, Marjorie had deplored that she should be the one to shove poor Lucy back into it again. It was vastly comforting to her to find that the Observer had not risen again to dominate Lucy Warner.

CHAPTER VII – A STEP TOWARD POPULARITY

The next evening found the Deans' living room in the possession of an ardent band of organizers, all bent on organization. A double row of chairs had been placed at one end of the pretty room, giving it a most business-like appearance. The long library table had been moved to the extreme opposite end, thus allowing sufficient free standing space before the rows of chairs for whomever should be chosen to conduct the meeting.

"It's eight o'clock, girls," announced Jerry Macy from the midst of a group comprising Muriel, Harriet, Susan and Esther Lind. As though in direct corroboration of her speech, the tall clock in the hall began a majestic intoning of the hour. "Much obliged for agreeing with me," commented Jerry with a waggish nod toward the kindly-disposed timepiece. "It's evident that I'm some little important person. Even the furniture in this house likes me."

"Of course it does," smiled Constance Stevens, who had approached the group just in time to hear Jerry's droll remark. "How could it help itself?"

"Them's my sentiments, too," retorted Jerry modestly, "only I hated to praise myself too much. But forget it. I mean, give Jeremiah's manifold virtues a rest. Let's get busy. Ladies and no gentlemen, take your seats and the show will begin." Jerry raised her voice in a stentorian call: "Our esteemed hostess, Marjorie Dean, will address this noisy throng as soon as she can make herself heard."

"I wish you would do the talking, Jerry," pleaded Marjorie. Her glance suddenly straying to the rows of chairs on which the girls were disposing themselves, she exclaimed: "We can't begin the meeting yet. Mignon isn't here. I knew someone was missing, but I couldn't say who."

"Oh, bother!" the ejaculation slipped out before Jerry could check it. "Well, sit down, all of you, just the same. Mignon will be here. She told Marjorie that she would." Under her breath she muttered: "I hope it doesn't take her all evening to get here."

Hardly had Marjorie recognized the fact of Mignon La Salle's absence, when the loud whir of the electric doorbell proclaimed her arrival.

"Good evening," she greeted, as Marjorie ushered her into the hall. "I am sorry to be so late. An unexpected circumstance arose to delay me." Mignon did not add, however, that the true cause of her delay was a letter from Rowena Farnham, in which the writer of it rated her scathingly for allowing the letter she had written to fall into Mr. La Salle's hands. It had quite upset Mignon and put her distinctly out of humor with the idea of the meeting at Marjorie's home. In consequence she had sulked in her room in solitary grandeur, and finally decided to go to the meeting merely for the sake of tantalizing Rowena by writing her a defiant account of it afterward.

"Oh, you aren't really late," excused Marjorie courteously. "We knew you'd soon be with us, so we waited for you. I see by your hatless condition that you drove here in your runabout. Come into the living room, Mignon, and take your place in joiner's row."

With a patronizing smile, which she blindly believed to be the acme of graciousness, Mignon followed Marjorie into the living room and seated herself on one of the two vacant chairs in the front row. As she greeted her companions her elfish black eyes kept up the usual incessant roving from face to face.

"Go ahead, Marjorie," Jerry ordered as she slipped into the remaining vacant chair. "It's up to you. I'm no orator."

"Girls," rang out Marjorie's clear tones, "some of you know quite a little bit more about this club idea than others. So I'd better tell you everything from the very beginning." Briefly, she related what had transpired among the seven seniors on the afternoon they had visited Sargent's. This accomplished she continued: "So you see we haven't done much as yet except choose a name and decide what our object is to be. First let me ask you: Have any of you another name that you think would be better than the 'Lookout Club?'"

Emphatic approval forthcoming for the name already selected, she went on: "You must understand that the object of this club is purely to help anyone or any good cause we can. We must always be on the lookout with that purpose in view. At first we can't do much. Later we may do a good deal. But whatever our hands find to do, we must do it with our might. If the club proves a success, then we can pass it on to the next senior class of Sanford High. I believe it would make us all very glad some day to be able to say that we founded the first sorority in our high school. It seems strange to me that there has never been one in Sanford High. At Franklin High, the school I had just entered before I came to Sanford to live, there were several sororities. It would be splendid if we could call ourselves the founders of one at Sanford High.

"That is about all I can say regarding the object of our club. What we ought to do first this evening is to elect our officers. As there are only fourteen of us in the club, we don't need many officers. A president, vice-president, secretary and treasurer will be enough. For president, I wish to nominate Jerry Macy. Are there any other nominations for that office? As there are so few of us we might as well make the election a strictly informal affair. Afterward we can conform to the usual method of club procedure."

"I nominate Marjorie Dean for president," put in Jerry quickly.

"I refuse the nomination." Marjorie smilingly shook her head. "I shall not accept an office. I prefer to be just a member."

"I think Jerry would make a fine president," said Harriet Delaney with emphasis.

"But I – " began Jerry.

"Are there any further nominations?" interrupted Marjorie mischievously.

"I don't want to be president." Jerry's protesting voice alone broke the silence.

"I second the nomination," declared Rita Talbot.

Paying no attention to the protest, Marjorie continued: "It has been regularly moved and seconded that Jerry Macy become president of the Lookout Club. Those in favor of the motion please respond by rising."

Twelve girls immediately stood up. Jerry alone remained seated, scowling ferociously.

"I declare Jerry Macy to be president of the Lookout Club," stated Marjorie. "Don't look so cross about it, Jerry. You can't help yourself. Come up here now and show us how nicely you can conduct the rest of the election."

"Not for mine. I mean not to-night," amended Jerry hastily. "I won't decline to be president, because I am no quitter. If you girls are determined to have me for that high and mighty office, I'll do my best to fill it. Still, I must say I don't admire your taste."

A general laugh went up at this naïve speech of acceptance. Only one girl did not smile. In her secret heart Mignon was not in favor of the stout girl for president. She had voted for her merely because she did not wish to be the only one on the contrary side.

"Since Jerry refuses to begin her duties to-night, I'll let her off for just once," asserted Marjorie playfully. "We will now consider the office of vice-president. Nominations are in order."

"I move that we nominate Muriel Harding for vice-president," volunteered Daisy Griggs.

Susan Atwell instantly seconded the nomination. The matter was then put to vote and Muriel was unanimously elected to the honor of the vice-presidency.

"Nominations for treasurer are now in order," announced Marjorie. Her color deepened a trifle as she spoke. This particular part of the election did not appeal to her. Both she and Jerry had encountered sturdy opposition when they had privately interviewed their friends regarding their proposal to make Mignon treasurer of the club. In the end they had won a concerted though reluctant consent to the project. Marjorie now felt a trifle anxious for fear ample time for reflection might have caused one or more of them to alter their decision.

"I nominate Mignon La Salle for the office of treasurer." Constance Stevens' low, sweet voice cut the silence.

“I second the motion,” came reassuringly from Irma Linton.

Marjorie flashed her a quick, grateful glance. Irma Linton, too, could always be depended on to do the right thing at the right moment. Her gaze resting next on Mignon, she was inwardly amused at the expression of blank amazement that overspread the French girl’s sharp features. Mignon had, indeed, been treated to a pleasant surprise. A gleam of intense triumph shone in her large, black eyes when a moment later twelve girls loyally rose to their feet in response to Marjorie’s mechanically-stated request.

Was it really true that she, Mignon La Salle, had actually been nominated by Constance Stevens and chosen by the girls whom she privately scorned to fill an important office in the club? It looked as though at last they were beginning to come to their senses. Possessed of an overweening vanity, Mignon smilingly accepted her election to the post of treasurer as a distinct compliment to herself. Far from being grateful for it, she regarded it purely as a step toward the popularity which she had ever craved. It also gave her a thrill of malicious joy to discover in her hands an efficient means of arousing Rowena’s jealousy. How greatly she would enjoy writing Rowena the news, and how furious Rowena would be! A mocking smile touched her red lips as she gleefully anticipated Rowena’s rage.

Engaged in rapt meditation of this desirable consummation, Mignon did not realize that a pair of shrewd eyes had marked that smile and translated it with surprising accuracy. “I’ll bet you my hat she’s wondering how Rowena will take it,” was Jerry Macy’s astute conclusion. A surmise which seemed indeed to point to the truth of Jerry’s frequent assertion that she “knew everything about everybody.”

CHAPTER VIII – THE RULE OF RULES

The fourth and last officer to be elected was the secretary, and this honor fell to gentle Irma Linton. Ever modest and self-effacing, Irma was even more greatly surprised at her own election than Mignon had been when Constance Stevens had suddenly declared herself.

“Will the four distinguished officers please come forward and stand in a row and receive the congratulations of the humble members?” requested Marjorie gaily. “After that I will conduct them to their official stations and let them run the meeting.”

Several minutes of merry talk and handshaking went on before Jerry assumed the scepter of office and called the meeting to order again. Mignon and Irma had now been given seats at the big library table at one end of the room. Muriel had moved her chair to the front, placing it a little to one side of where Jerry stood.

“Ahem!” ejaculated Jerry, then giggled. “As president of this club, it now becomes my duty to discuss with you a number of rules and regulations to which this distinguished organization must pledge themselves to live up. In the first place, you will all be taxed with dues. You are lucky to be charter members and thus avoid the payment of initiation fees. Now the question is how much are you willing to pay per week or per year or any other old per for your glorious privilege of membership. Now don’t all speak at once, and don’t be stingy. Remember, we are as yet a very poor and struggling concern. We have only one consolation. We needn’t hire a hall. We can meet at one another’s houses and thus practice thrift. Now let’s have a little informal discussion about it.”

“I think the per week idea would be nice.” Harriet Delaney rose promptly to the financial situation. “We could give so much each week when we came to the meeting. Mignon could have our names on a book just as the grammar school teachers keep a register. Then when we first came into the room where the meeting is held we could give her our money and she could credit us with it on her book. It’s easier to give a little each week than to have to save it up and pay it all at one time. We wouldn’t even miss it, for we are always spending small sums for candy and ice cream and moving pictures and such things. We ought to look at our club as an amusement and be willing to pay for it accordingly. Then, too, the money will be used to do good with.”

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