

Chase Josephine

Marjorie Dean, High School

Junior



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Содержание

CHAPTER I – MARJORIE DECLARES HERSELF	5
CHAPTER II – ALL IN HONOR OF MARY	9
CHAPTER III – THE SHIELD OF VALOR	14
CHAPTER IV – THE NEW SECRETARY	19
CHAPTER V – A STORMY INTERVIEW	23
CHAPTER VI – A QUESTION OF SCHOOL-GIRL HONOR	27
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	28

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CHAPTER I – MARJORIE DECLARES HERSELF

“Only to think, next week, at this time, I’ll be saying good-bye to you, Mary Raymond.” Marjorie Dean’s brown eyes rested very wistfully on the sunny-haired girl beside her in the big porch swing.

“You know now, just how dreadfully I felt two years ago when I had to keep thinking about saying good-bye to you,” returned Mary in the same wistful intonation. “It was terrible. And after you had gone! Well – it was a good deal worse. Oh, Marjorie, I wish I could live this last year over again. If only – ”

Marjorie laid light fingers on Mary’s lips. “You mustn’t speak of some things, Lieutenant,” she said quickly. “If you do I won’t listen. Forget everything except the wonderful summer we’ve had together.”

Mary caught the soft little hand in both hers. “It *has* been wonderful,” she agreed rather unsteadily. “I’ll have the memory of it to treasure when I’m away off in Colorado. I can’t believe that I am really going so far away from you. I hope I’ll like the West. Next summer you must come out there and visit me, Marjorie. By that time I’ll be a little bit at home in such a strange, new country.”

“I’d love to do that,” responded Marjorie with an eagerness that merged almost immediately again into regretful reflection.

A sad little silence fell upon the two in the porch swing. Each young heart was heavy with dread of the coming separation. This was the second time in two years that the call to say farewell had sounded for Marjorie Dean and Mary Raymond.

Those who have followed Marjorie Dean through her freshman and sophomore years at high school are already familiar with the details of Mary’s and Marjorie’s first separation. In “Marjorie Dean, High School Freshman,” was recorded the story of the way in which Marjorie had come to leave her chum at the beginning of their first year in Franklin High School, in the city of B – , to take up her residence in the far-off town of Sanford, there to become a freshman at Sanford High. In her new home she had made many friends, chief among them Constance Stevens, to whom she had been greatly drawn by reason of a strong resemblance between Constance and Mary. In an earnest endeavor to bring sunshine to the former’s poverty-stricken lot she had thereby involved herself in a series of school-girl difficulties, which followed her throughout the year. True to herself, Marjorie met them bravely and conquered them, one by one, proving herself a staunch follower of the high code of honor she had adopted for her own.

With the advent of Mary Raymond into her home for a year’s stay, Marjorie was confronted by a new and painful problem. “Marjorie Dean, High School Sophomore,” found Marjorie enmeshed in the tangled web which Mary’s jealousy of Constance Stevens wove about the three girls. Led into bitter doubt of Marjorie by Mignon La Salle, a mischief-making French girl who had made Marjorie’s freshman days miserable, Mary Raymond had been guilty of a disloyalty, which had come near to estranging the two girls forever. It was not until their sophomore year was almost over that an awakening had come to Mary, and with it an earnest repentance, which led to equity and peace.

It was to this which Mary had been about to refer mournfully when Marjorie’s gentle hand had sealed her repentant utterance. All that summer the two girls had been earnestly engaged in trying to make up for those lost days. Constance and Mary were now on the most friendly terms. The three had spent an ideal month together at the seashore, with no hateful shadow to darken the pleasure of that delightful outing. Later Constance had left them to spend the remainder of her vacation with

her family in the mountains. The Deans had lingered in their seaside cottage until the last of August. Now September had arrived, her hazy hints of coming Autumn reminding the world at large that their summer playtime was over.

To Mary Raymond it was a pertinent reminder that her days under the Deans' hospitable canopy were numbered. In fact, only seven of them remained. On the next Friday morning she would say her last farewells to speed away to Denver, Colorado, where, on her invalid mother's account, the Raymonds were to make their home. So it is scarcely to be wondered at that Marjorie and Mary were decidedly melancholy, as they sat hand in hand, bravely trying to meet the trial which lay before them.

"I wonder if Jerry will come home to-day." Marjorie rose from the swing with an abruptness that set it to swaying gently. The weight of parting had grown heavier during that brief silence and she was very near to tears.

"I don't know. Her letter said Thursday or Friday, didn't it?" Mary's voice shook slightly. She, too, was on the verge of a breakdown.

"Yes." Marjorie's back was toward Mary as she answered. She walked to the end of the spacious veranda and gazed down the pebbled drive. Just then she felt as though the sight of Geraldine Macy's round, good-humored face would be most welcome. Slowly returning to where Mary still sat, she said: "As this is Friday, Jerry will surely –"

"Marjorie!" called a clear voice from within the house. "The telephone is ringing."

"Coming, Captain!" Marjorie quickened to sudden action. "I hope it's Jerry," she flung over her shoulder as she ran to the open door. "Come on, Mary."

Mary needed no second invitation. By the time Marjorie had reached the telephone, she was only a step behind her chum.

"Hello! Yes, this is Marjorie. Oh, Jerry!" Marjorie gave a little squeal of delight. "We were just talking of you. We wondered if you'd be home to-day. Won't you come over now? You will? Well, then, hurry as fast as ever you can. We're crazy to see you. Mary wants to talk to you. Just say 'hello' to her and hang up the receiver." Marjorie cast a playful glance at the girl beside her. "You can talk to her when you get here."

Marjorie held the receiver toward Mary, who greeted Jerry in brief but affectionate fashion and obediently hung up. "Always do as your superior officer tells you," she commented with a smile.

"That's pure sarcasm," retorted Marjorie gaily. "The question is, am I your superior officer or are you mine? This business of both being lieutenants has its drawbacks. We can never know just who's who."

"I ought to be second lieutenant and you first," demurred Mary soberly. "I didn't deserve to become a first with you last June after –"

"Mary!" Marjorie cried out in distressed concern. Her brown eyes were filled with tender reproach. "Aren't you ever going to forget?"

"I can't." Mary turned her face half away, then the flood of sadness she had been fighting back all afternoon overtook her. Stumbling to the stairs she sat down on the lowest step, her face hidden in her hands, her shoulders shaking.

"Poor, dear Lieutenant." Her own eyes overflowing, Marjorie dropped down beside Mary and wound her arms about the dejected figure.

"This is a nice reception! I see I shall have to welcome myself. Why, how are you, Geraldine? Boo, hoo! It's a wonder you wouldn't ring. You never did have any manners. I don't see why you called, anyway. Boo, hoo!"

The first sound of a loud, cheerful voice brought the weepers to their feet. A loud, anguished "Boo, hoo!" sent them into half-tearful giggles.

"That's more like it," approved the stout girl in the doorway, her round face alive with kindly solicitude. "If I had sensitive feelings I might think you were crying because you'd invited me to call."

But I haven't. Hal says I am the most unfeeling person he knows. He only says that when his little sister can't see things the way he does."

Jerry rattled off these pleasantries while in the midst of a rapturous embrace, bestowed upon her plump person by two now broadly-smiling mourners.

"It's splendid to see you again, Jerry," caroled Marjorie, hugging her friend with bearish enthusiasm. Mary echoed Marjorie's fervent greeting.

"The mere sight of me is always inspiring," grinned Jerry, winding an arm about each friend. "I hope you have both noticed by this time that I am a great deal thinner than I was last June. I've lost two pounds. Isn't that some loss?"

"Perfectly remarkable," agreed Marjorie mischievously. "Come on out on the veranda, Jerry. We have such a lot to talk about."

Four determined, affectionate arms propelled Jerry to the wide, vine-decked porch, established her in the big porch swing, and climbed in beside her.

"Now, tell me, children, why these weeps?" Jerry demanded practically, still retaining her loving hold of her two friends.

"They've been on the way all day," confessed Marjorie. "We've both tried not to cry, but – somehow – " Her voice faltered. "You see, Jerry, this is Mary's and my last week together. Mary's going away off to Colorado next week."

"You don't mean it?" Jerry sat up very straight, looking wide-eyed concern. "You never said a thing about it in your letter. I mean letters. I believe you did write me two." Jerry registered comical accusation.

"Don't remind me of my sins of omission," Marjorie laughed, flushing a trifle. "I always mean to write, but somehow I never do. We didn't know until the week before we came from the seashore that Mary would have to go so soon. We thought it wouldn't be until November." Again her tones quavered suspiciously.

"I see." Jerry frowned to hide her own inclination to mourn. During the brief time they were thrown together, after the reunion of Marjorie and Mary, she had learned to know and love the real Mary Raymond. "I'm more sorry than I can say. I thought we'd all be together for our junior year at Sanford High."

"Of course, I am anxious to be with mother and father," put in Mary loyally, "but I hate to leave Sanford. There are lots of things I meant to do this year that I didn't do last year."

"But you can't be in two places at once," was Jerry's blunt consolation. "Never mind, Mary, you can come back to visit us and we'll write you lots of letters. Marjorie is such a splendid correspondent." Her accompanying jolly chuckle robbed this last pertinent fling of offence. "We'll write you all the news. That reminds me, I've some for you girls. You'll never guess who stayed at the same hotel with us this summer. I didn't write about it, because I wanted to have it to tell when I came home."

Mary cast a sidelong glance at the stout girl. There had been a faint touch of disgust in Jerry's intonation. "Was it – Mignon?" she asked, half hesitant.

"Right you are. How did you guess it?"

"Oh, I just wondered," was Mary's brief response. A tide of red had risen to her white skin, called there by distressing memories.

"Yes, it was our dear Mignon," continued Jerry briskly. "And she has a friend, Rowena Farnham, who likewise stayed at our hotel. Believe me, they were a well-matched pair. You see the La Salles usually go to Severn Beach every summer, but they always stay at Cliff House. We always go to the Sea Gull. That's the whole length of the beach from their hotel. Imagine how pleased I was to see Mignon come parading down to dinner one evening, after we'd been there about two weeks. I was so disgusted that I wanted my father to pack up and move us over to Cliff House. But he wouldn't, the hard-hearted person."

“That is only part of my tale. The worst now comes trailing along. It’s about this Rowena Farnham. It seems that the Farnhams moved to Sanford last June just after school closed and – ”

“Is this Rowena Farnham a very tall, pretty girl with perfectly gorgeous auburn hair and big black eyes?” broke in Mary abruptly.

“Yes. Where did you ever see her?” demanded Jerry. “Where was I that I didn’t?”

“Oh, I saw her one day in the post-office with Mignon. It was after you had gone away. I thought she must be a guest at the La Salles’.”

“You thought wrong. She lives in that big house with the immense grounds just the other side of the La Salles’ home. It’s the one with that terribly high, ornamental iron fence. I always used to call it the Jail. It made me think of one. But that’s not my news, either. This new girl is going to be a sophomore at Sanford High. I’m sorry for poor old Sanford High.”

“Why?” A curious note of alarm sprang into Marjorie’s question. After two stormy years at high school, she longed for uneventful peace. Jerry’s emphatic grumble came like a far-off roll of thunder, prophesying storm.

“Why?” Jerry warmed to her subject. “Because she is a terror. I can see it in her eye. Just now she and Mignon are as chummy as can be. If they stay chummy, look out for trouble. If they don’t, look out for more trouble.”

“Perhaps you may find this new girl quite different,” suggested Mary hopefully. “It’s not fair to judge her by Mignon. Very likely she hasn’t any idea that – that – ” She was thinking of how completely she had once fallen under Mignon’s spell.

“That Mignon is Mignon, you mean,” interrupted Jerry. “She ought to know her after being with her all summer. I’ll bet she does. That’s just why I think she’s a trouble-maker. They always hang together, you know.”

Marjorie slipped from the swing and faced her friends with the air of one who has suddenly arrived at a definite conclusion. For a moment she stood regarding Jerry in silence, hands clasped behind her back.

“There’s just one thing about it, Jerry,” she began firmly, “and that is: I *will not* have my junior year spoiled by Mignon La Salle or her friends. Last year we tried to help Mignon and our plan didn’t work. I thought once that she had a better self, but now it would take a good deal to make me believe it. She caused me a great deal of unnecessary unhappiness and she almost made Constance lose her part in the operetta. And little Charlie! I can’t forgive her for the way she treated that baby. This year I am going to go on with my school just as though I had never known her. I hope I won’t have to play on the same basket ball team with her or against any team that she plays on. I’ve had enough of Mignon La Salle. I’m going to steer clear of her.”

CHAPTER II – ALL IN HONOR OF MARY

“Be sure not to pack your white lace dress, Lieutenant.” Marjorie delivered this reminder from the open doorway of the pretty blue room which Mary had so long regarded as her own special nook.

From a kneeling position before her trunk Mary Raymond turned her head, her eyes two mournful blue stars. “It’s over there,” she returned, nodding somberly toward the bed. “Everything else that had to be packed is packed. I can put my dress in the last thing to-night. I’m so glad Connie is home in time to see me off on my journey. I hope she and Charlie will come over early this afternoon.”

“They will.” The blithe assurance held a significance which Mary did not catch. The shadow of the coming separation now hung more heavily upon her. Marjorie’s cheery reply caused her to wonder vaguely if her chum would really miss her so very much. The next instant she put the thought away from her as unworthy. Of course Marjorie would miss her. Still she could scarcely be blamed if she did not. In spite of the long, happy summer they had spent together, occasionally the past rose to torture Mary.

Packing her effects had been a severe trial. Everything she touched called forth memories. There was the blue linen frock she had worn on the morning of her first entrance into Sanford High School. The very sight of it filled her with remorse. And the dress she had worn on Christmas Day, when the merciful Flag of Truce had bade a halt to the hostilities which her own unreasonable jealousy had created. More than one tear had fallen on the various dainty articles of wearing apparel as she consigned them to her trunk. She wished above all to be brave and cheerful, even to the very moment of farewell, but she found it hard to fight back the terrible feeling of oppression that clutched at her heart.

From her position in the doorway, Marjorie had watched Mary for a moment or two before speaking. She had guessed that the work of packing would be something of a dolorous labor, which Mary might prefer to perform alone. At heart she, too, was sad, but in her mind lurked a pleasant knowledge which for the present Mary did not share. It was this particular bit of knowledge that made it difficult for her to keep a sober face as she met Mary’s doleful gaze.

“I’m going to wear white, too,” she said brightly. “Captain finished my new lingerie frock yesterday. As long as you’re through packing, why not get dressed for dinner now? I’m going to, even if it is only three o’clock. Then when Connie and Charlie come we can take a stroll down to Sargent’s. That is, if we care to.” Again her lovely face threatened to break forth into the smiles.

“All right.” Mary’s acquiescence came rather listlessly. Rising from the floor she began somewhat spiritless preparations toward making ready to receive the expected guests.

“I’m going to my house now to put on my costliest raiment.” Flashing a mischievous glance toward Mary, Marjorie disappeared from the doorway and tripped down the hall. Once inside her “house,” as she had whimsically named her pink and white room, she executed a gleeful little dance for her own benefit. “She doesn’t suspect a thing,” was her jubilant comment.

But while the two girls were engaged in arraying themselves to do honor to Constance, a most peculiar state of affairs was in progress downstairs. Through the wide flung hall door, one after another flitted a mysterious procession of girls, moving with the noiseless tread of a flock of ghosts. Their bright-eyed, smiling faces and gala attire, however, marked them as being particularly human. One of the seven specters bore a strong resemblance to Mary herself, and the diminutive black-eyed sprite she led by the hand seemed on the verge of breaking forth into an ecstatic flow of joyful sounds.

Apparently, Mrs. Dean had also been suddenly bereft of speech. Only her twinkling eyes and smiling lips gave sign of just how greatly welcome were her silent guests. Ushering them into the living room she nodded brightly, laid a warning finger to her lips and softly withdrew, pulling together the silken portieres. A half-smothered giggle, to which no self-respecting ghost would have stooped to give utterance, followed her. Then profound stillness reigned within.

“Are you ready, Mary?” A bewitching, brown-eyed vision in white pranced in upon Mary as she was slowly adjusting the soft loops of her wide, white ribbon sash. “Let me tie your sash.” Marjorie’s nimble fingers set themselves to work. “There you are. You do look so perfectly sweet in white. Now smile and say prettily, ‘Thank you for them kind words, Miss Marjorie.’ That’s what Delia always says when she dresses up and I tell her how fine she looks.”

Marjorie’s buoyant spirits were so irresistible as to bring the coveted light into Mary’s mournful eyes. “Forward, march! Here we go.” Seizing Mary gently by the shoulders she marched her down the hall to the stairway. “Break ranks,” she ordered. “The gallant regiment can’t afford to tumble downstairs.”

“Halt!” came the order, as Mary reached the lower hall a step ahead of her commander. “We will now make an invasion on the living room. Two’s right, march!”

Mary obediently marched. Of her own accord she came to an abrupt halt. “Oh!” she gasped. Her amazed exclamation was drowned in a chorus of gleeful shouts as seven very lively apparitions closed in around her.

“Charlie never said a word!” shrieked a high, triumphant voice. “We comed to see you. Hooray!” A small, joyful figure hurled itself straight into Mary’s arms. She stooped and hugged him close, her golden head bent to the youngster’s. Straightening, she glimpsed the affectionate circle of girls through a mist of unbidden tears. “I’m so glad and so surprised to see all of you,” she faltered. “And you knew it all the time!” She caught Marjorie’s hand.

“Of course I knew it. Now we are even. You gave me a surprise party once, so I thought I’d return the compliment,” laughed Marjorie. “I could hardly keep it to myself, though. Every time I looked at you I wanted to say, ‘Cheer up, the best is yet to come.’”

“It’s a good thing it wasn’t long coming,” retorted Jerry Macy. “I never knew how much I liked to talk until I had to keep still.”

“You must have slipped into the house like shadows,” declared Mary happily. Her sad expression had quite vanished with the unexpected honor that had been done her. She felt that, after all, she held some small place in the affections of Marjorie’s intimate friends, and the cloud of doubt that had obsessed her rolled away.

“We did do that arriving stunt rather well,” was Harriet Delaney’s complacent comment. “Of course, Susie giggled. We expected she would, though. The rest of us were above reproach.”

“No wonder I giggled,” defended Susan Atwell. “If you had been the last one in line you’d have laughed, too. You girls looked as if you were trying to walk on eggshells, and when Jerry crossed the room in about three steps, it was too much for me.” Susan’s cheerful chuckle broke forth anew and went the rounds.

“Well, children, what is your pleasure?” inquired Marjorie. “Shall we stay here, or sit on the veranda, or establish ourselves in the pagoda, or what?”

“The pagoda for mine,” decided Jerry, “provided the rest of you are of the same mind. We can sit in a circle and tell sad stories of the deaths of kings, etc. All those in favor of this lively pastime please say ‘Aye;’ contrary, keep quiet.”

“Aye,” came the willing response.

“What for is ‘Aye?’” calmly demanded Charlie Stevens of Mary, to whom he had immediately attached himself.

“Oh, it means that Charlie can go out with us to the summer house and have a nice time, if he would like to,” explained Mary.

“Charlie don’t want to,” was the frank response. “Where’s Delia?” Fond recollections of frequent visits to the Dean kitchen, invariably productive of toothsome gifts, lurked in the foreground. “Delia likes to see me.”

“You mean you like to see Delia,” laughed Constance. “But you know you came to see Mrs. Dean and Marjorie and Mary,” she reminded.

“I’ve seen them. Now I have to see Delia.”

“Delia wins the day,” smiled Mrs. Dean. “You are all jilted. Very well, Charlie, you and I will pay our respects to Delia. Come on.” She stretched forth an inviting hand to the little boy, who accepted it joyfully, and trotted off with her to invade good-natured Delia’s domain.

“As long as our one cavalier has been lured away from us by Delia we might as well try to console one another,” laughed Marjorie.

“He’s growing terribly spoiled,” apologized Constance. “My aunt adores him and thinks he must have everything he asks for. He’s a good little boy, though, in spite of all the petting he gets.”

“He’s a perfect darling,” dimpled Susan Atwell. “He says such quaint, funny things. Has he ever tried to run away since the night of the operetta?”

“No.” Constance made brief reply. Her gaze wandered to Mary Raymond, who was talking busily with Harriet Delaney and Esther Lind. The vision of a fair-haired, blue-eyed girl, leading a small runaway up to the stage door of the theatre rose before her. Next to Marjorie Dean, Mary ranked second in her heart. Constance felt suddenly very humble in the possession of two such wonderful friends. Life had been kinder to her than she deserved was her grateful thought.

Susan eyed her curiously. Although she was very fond of Constance, she did not in the least understand her. Now she said rather timidly, “I hope you didn’t mind because I spoke of the operetta and Charlie’s running away, Connie?”

Constance promptly came out of her day-dream. “You brought it all back to me,” she smiled. “I was just wondering what I’d ever done to deserve such friends as I’ve made here in Sanford. I can’t bear to think that Mary won’t be with us this year.”

Before Susan could reply, Jerry interrupted them with, “Come along, girls. The sooner we get settled the longer we’ll have to talk.”

It was a merry, light-hearted band that strolled out of the house and across the lawn to the honeysuckle-draped pagoda, situated at the far end of the velvety stretch of green. Mary and Marjorie brought up the rear, their arms piled high with bright-hued cushions, and the guests soon disposed themselves on the bench built circular fashion around the pagoda, or sought the comfort of the several wicker chairs.

Brought together again after more than two months’ separation, a busy wagging of tongues was in order, mingled with the ready laughter that high-spirited youth alone knows. Everyone had something interesting to tell of her vacation and rejoiced accordingly in the telling. Father Time flew in his fleetest fashion, but no one of the group paid the slightest attention to the fact. From vacation, the conversation gradually drifted into school channels and a lively discussion of junior plans ensued.

“By the way, girls,” remarked Jerry Macy with the careless assumption of casualty which was her favorite method of procedure when about to retail some amazing bit of news. “Did you know that Miss Archer almost decided to resign her position at Sanford High for one in Chicago?”

“Of course *we* didn’t know it, and *you* know we didn’t,” laughed Susan Atwell. “Whenever Jerry begins with ‘By the way,’ and tries to look innocent you may know she has something startling to offer.”

“Where on earth do you pick up all your news, Jerry?” asked Constance Stevens. “You always seem to know everything about everybody.”

“Oh, it just happens to come my way,” grinned Jerry. “I heard about Miss Archer from my father. He’s just been elected to the Board of Education.”

“She isn’t really going to leave Sanford High, is she, Jerry?” An anxious frown puckered Marjorie’s smooth forehead. She hated to think of high school without Miss Archer.

“No. At first she thought she would, but afterward she decided that she’d rather stay here. She told father that she had grown so fond of the dear old school she couldn’t bear to leave it. I’m certainly glad she’s not going to resign. If she did we might have kind, delightful Miss Merton for a principal. Then —*good night!*” Jerry relapsed into slang to emphasize her disgust of such a possibility.

“I shouldn’t like that,” Marjorie remarked bluntly. “Still, I can’t help feeling a little bit sorry for Miss Merton. She shuts out all the bright, pleasant things in life and just sticks to the disagreeable ones. Sometimes I wonder if she was ever young or had ever been happy.”

“She’s been a regular Siberian crab-apple ever since I can remember,” grumbled Jerry. “Why, when I was a kidlet in knee skirts she was the terror of Sanford High. I guess she must have been crossed in love about a hundred years ago.” Jerry giggled a trifle wickedly.

“She was,” affirmed quiet Irma with a smile, “but not a hundred years ago. I never knew it until this summer.”

“Here is something I don’t seem to know about,” satirized Jerry. “How did that happen, I wonder?”

“Don’t keep us in suspense, Irma,” implored Muriel Harding. “If Miss Merton ever had a love affair it’s your duty to tell us about it. I can’t imagine such an impossibility. Did it happen here in Sanford? How did you come to hear of it?”

A circle of eager faces were turned expectantly toward Irma. “My aunt, whom I visited this summer, told me about it,” she began. “She lived in Sanford when she was a girl and knew Miss Merton then. They went to school together. There were no high schools then; just an academy for young men and women. Miss Merton was really a pretty girl. She had pink cheeks and bright eyes and beautiful, heavy, dark hair. She had a sister, too, who wasn’t a bit pretty.

“They were very quiet girls who hardly ever went to parties and never paid much attention to the boys they knew in Sanford. When Miss Merton was about eighteen and her sister twenty-one, a handsome young naval officer came to visit some friends in Sanford on a furlough. He was introduced to both sisters, and called on them two or three times. They lived with their father in that little house on Sycamore Street where Miss Merton still lives. The young ensign’s furlough was nearly over when he met them, so he didn’t have much time to get well acquainted with them. The night before he went away he asked Miss Merton if he might write to her and she said ‘Yes.’”

“Some story,” cut in Jerry. “And did he write?”

“Don’t interrupt me, Jeremiah,” reproved Irma. “Yes, he wrote, but – ”

“Miss Merton never got the letter,” supplemented the irrepressible Jerry. “That’s the way it always happens in books.”

“All right. You may tell the rest of it,” teased Irma, her eyes twinkling.

“Someone please smother Jerry’s head in a sofa cushion, so she can’t interrupt,” pleaded Harriet.

“Try it,” challenged Jerry. “Excuse me, Irma. I solemnly promise to behave like a clam. On with the miraculous, marvelous memoirs of meritorious Miss Merton.”

“Where was I? Oh, yes. The young ensign wrote, as he thought, to Miss Merton, but in some way he had confused the two sisters’ first names. So he wrote to Alice Merton, her sister, instead, thinking it was our Miss Merton.”

“How awful! The very idea! What a dreadful mistake!” came from the highly interested listeners.

“The sister was delighted because she liked the ensign a lot and thought he didn’t care much about her. You can imagine how Miss Merton felt. She never said a word to anyone then about his asking her if he might write. She thought he had just been flirting with her when really he had fallen in love with her. Then his ship went on a trip around the world, but he kept on writing to the sister, and at last he asked her to marry him. So they were engaged and he sent her a beautiful diamond ring. They planned to be married when he received his next furlough. But when he came to Sanford to claim his bride, he found that he had made a terrible mistake.”

“What did he do then?” chorused half a dozen awed voices.

“Oh, he made the best of it and married the sister,” Irma replied with a shrug. “I suppose he felt that he couldn’t very well do anything else. Perhaps he didn’t have the courage to. But one day before his wedding he went to the house and found Miss Merton alone. She had been crying and he

felt so sorry that he tried to find out what was the matter. Somehow they came to an understanding, but it was too late. Three or four years after that he was drowned during a storm at sea. Miss Merton never quite got over it all, and it changed her disposition, I guess.”

“What a sad story.” Constance Stevens’ blue eyes were soft with sympathy.

“That makes Miss Merton seem like a different person, doesn’t it?” Marjorie thoughtfully knitted her brows.

“I suppose that is why she acts as though she hated young people,” offered Mary. “We probably remind her of her cheated youth.”

“She should have been particular enough to let that stupid ensign know that she was she,” criticized practical Jerry. “I’m glad I haven’t a sister. There’s no danger of any future aspirant for my hand and heart getting me mixed with Hal.”

The sentimental shadow cast upon the group by Irma’s romantic tale disappeared in a gale of laughter.

“Honestly, Jerry Macy, you haven’t the least idea of romance,” giggled Susan. “Here Irma tells us a real love story and you spoil it all about a minute afterward.”

“Can’t help it,” asserted Jerry stoutly. “I have to say what I think.”

“Oh, here come Captain and Charlie,” cried Marjorie, sighting a gracious figure in white descending the steps with Charlie in tow. “That means dinner is about to be served, children. Our farewell feast to Lieutenant Mary Raymond.”

CHAPTER III – THE SHIELD OF VALOR

A chorus of ohs and ahs ascended as the guests filed into a dining room, the decoration of which spelled Patriotism in large capitals. In honor of the pretty soldier play to which she and Mary had so long clung, Marjorie had decreed that the dinner should be a patriotic affair so far as decorations went. The walls of the large, attractive room were plentifully festooned with red, white and blue bunting. Flags were in evidence everywhere. From the center of the large oak table a large doll dressed as Uncle Sam held gallantly aloft the tri-colored ribbons that extended to each place. On one side of him stood a smaller doll dressed in the khaki uniform of the United States soldier. On the other, a valiant Jackie stood guard. At each cover was a small soldier doll and the place cards were tiny, folded, silk flags, each guest's name written in one of the stripes of white uppermost.

Mary occupied the seat of honor at the head of the table, with Marjorie at her right and Constance at her left. But at the departing Lieutenant's place rose an amazing pile of tissue-paper wrapped, beribboned bundles that smacked of Christmas.

"Company, attention," called Mrs. Dean from the foot of the table, the instant the party had seated themselves. "Lieutenant Raymond, you are ordered to inspect your wealth before mess."

"I – oh – " stammered the abashed Lieutenant, regarding said "wealth" in stupefaction. "All those things are not really for *me!*"

"Open them and see," directed Marjorie, her face radiant with unselfish happiness. "Every one of them holds an original poetic message. None of us knows what the other wrote. You are to read them in a loud voice and satisfy our curiosity. Now hurry up and begin."

Under a battery of smiling faces, Mary slowly undid a good-sized square bundle. With slightly shaking fingers she drew forth a white box. When opened it displayed several sizes of note paper and envelopes bearing her monogram in silver. Picking up a card she steadied her voice and read:

"You say, of course, 'I'll surely write,'
But when you've traveled out of sight,
This nice white box may then remind you
Of Jerry Macy, far behind you."

"I truly will write you, Jerry. Thank you." Mary beamed affectionately on the stout girl. "It's a lovely present, and my own monogram, too."

"See that you do," nodded Jerry gruffly. She loved to give, but she did not relish being thanked.

"Next," smilingly ordered Marjorie. "If you don't hurry and open them, we shall all starve."

The next package disclosed a dainty little leather combination purse and vanity case from Muriel Harding with the succinct advice:

"Don't lose your ticket or your money,
To be stone broke is far from funny.
When wicked cinders seek your eye,
Consult your mirror on the sly."

After Muriel had been thanked and her practical, poetic advice lauded, Mary went on with her delightful investigation. An oblong bundle turned out to be a box of nut chocolates from Susan, who offered:

"In time of homesick tribulation,
Turn to this toothsome consolation."

To eat it up will be amusin' —
Here's sweet farewell from giggling Susan."

"Giggling Susan's" effort brought forth a ripple of giggles from all sides.

"That's my present," squealed Charlie, as Mary fingered a tiny package ornamented with a huge red bow. "It's a —"

"Shh!" warned Constance, placing prompt fingers on the too-willing lips.

Mary cast the child a tender glance as she glimpsed a tiny leather violin case, partially obscured by a card. In this instance it was Uncle John Roland who had played poet, after receiving Charlie's somewhat garbled instructions regarding the sentiment.

"Say it s'loud as you can," commanded the excited youngster.

Mary complied, reading in a purposely loud tone that must have been intensely gratifying to the diminutive giver:

"Once when away from home I ranned
To play my fiddle in the band,
You comed and finded me, 'n then
I never ranned away again.
So now I'm always nice and good
An' do as Connie says I should,
And 'cause you're going to run away
You'd better write to me some day!
Inside the little fiddle box
There is a fountain pen that talks
On paper — it's for you from me,
The great musishun; your friend, C."

As Mary read the last line she slipped from her place to Charlie and kissed the gleeful, upturned face. "You darling boy," she quavered. "Mary won't forget to write."

"Mine's the best of all," observed Charlie with modest frankness, as he enthusiastically returned the kiss.

Back in her place again, Mary finished the affectionate inspection of the tokens her friends had taken so much pleasure in giving. There was a book from Harriet, a folded metal drinking cup in a leather case from Esther Lind, a hand-embroidered pin and needle case from Irma, a pair of soft, dark-blue leather slippers from Constance, and a wonderful Japanese silk kimono from Mrs. Dean. The remembrances had all been selected as first aids to Mary during her long journey across the country. With each one went a humorous verse, composed with more or less effort on the part of the givers.

But one package now remained to be opened. Its diminutive size and shape hinted that it might have come from the jeweler's. Mary knew it to be Marjorie's farewell token to her. She would have liked to examine it in private. She was almost sure that she was going to cry. She thrust back the inclination, however, flashing a tender, wavering smile at her chum as she untied the silver cord that bound the box. It bore the name of a Sanford jeweler and when the lid was off revealed a round, gold monogrammed locket, gleaming dully against its pale blue silk bed. In a tiny circular groove of the box was a fine-grained gold chain.

Mary's changeful face registered many emotions as she took the locket in her hands and stared at it in silence. Acting on a swift, overwhelming impulse she sprang mutely from her chair and rushed out of the room. Marjorie half rose from her place, then sat down again. "Lieutenant will come back soon," she said fondly. "She hasn't really deserted from the army, she's only taken a tiny leave of

absence. I remember just how I felt when some of the boys and girls of Franklin High gave me a surprise party. That was the night this came to me.” She patted the butterfly pin that had figured so prominently in her freshman year at Sanford. “I almost cried like a baby. I remember that the whole table blurred while Mary was making a speech to me about my beautiful pin.” Marjorie talked on with the kindly object of centering the guests’ attention on herself until Mary should return.

Meanwhile, in the living room Mary Raymond was engaged in the double task of trying to suppress her tears and open the locket at the same time. Her eyes brimming, she worked at the refractory gold catch with insistent fingers. Opened at last, she beheld Marjorie’s lovely face smiling out at her. On the inside of the upper half of the locket was engraved, “Mary from Marjorie.” Below was the beautiful Spanish phrase, “*Para siempre*,” literally translated, “for always,” but meaning “forever.”

Within a brief space of time, following her flight, the runaway reappeared, her eyelids slightly pink. “I hope you will all pardon me,” she apologized prettily. “I – I – couldn’t help it. You’ve been so sweet to me. I can’t ever thank you as you deserve to be thanked for giving me so many lovely things; the very ones I shall need most when I’m traveling. I am sure you must know how dear you all are to me; dearer even than my Franklin High friends. I hope each one of you will write to me. I’ll truly try hard not only to be a good correspondent, but always to be worthy of your friendship.”

Mary’s earnest words met ready responses of good fellowship from those whom she had once scorned. Everything was so different now. The new Mary Raymond was an entire opposite to the sullen-faced young person who had once flouted all overtures of friendship on the part of Marjorie’s particular cronies. Beyond an eloquent hand clasp and, “My picture locket is wonderful, Lieutenant. Thank you over and over,” Mary had reserved further expression of her appreciation until the two chums should be entirely by themselves.

The delightful dinner ended with a general distribution of fancy cracker bon-bons, which the guests snapped open with a will, to find cunning caps representing the flags of various nations. They donned these with alacrity and trooped into the living room for an evening of stunts in which music played an important part. Constance lifted up her exquisite voice untiringly, weaving her magic spell about her eager listeners. Jerry sang a comic song, mostly off the key, merely to prove the impossibility of her vocal powers. Charlie Stevens, who had trustfully tugged his faithful fiddle along, insisted on rendering a solo of anguishing shrieks and squawks, assuming the majestic mien of a virtuoso. He took himself so seriously that no one dared laugh, although the desire to do so was throttled with difficulty. Susan was prevailed upon to perform a scarf dance, her one accomplishment, using a strip of red, white and blue bunting with graceful effect. Harriet Delaney also sang a ballad, and Esther Lind offered a beautiful Swedish folk song she had learned from her father, who had sung it as a boy in far-off Scandinavia. When the small repertoire of soloists had been exhausted, everyone turned to with Constance at the piano, and made the living room ring with school songs.

Just before the farewell party broke up the door bell rang. Its loud, insistent peal brought a significant exchange of glances, in which Mary alone did not share. Mrs. Dean hurried into the hall. A moment and she returned to the living room, escorting Delia, whose broad, homely face was wreathed in smiles. She advanced toward Mary, holding out a goodly sheaf of letters. “Special delivery, Miss Mary,” she announced. “May yez have many of the same.” She made a little bobbing bow as Mary took them, bestowed a friendly grin on the company and waddled out.

“I don’t understand.” Mary seemed overcome by this fresh surprise. “Are they all for me?”

“They’re your railway comforts, Lieutenant,” laughed Marjorie. “There’s a letter from each of us. You can read one a day. There are enough to reach to Denver and a few thrown in to cure the blues after you get there. So you see we won’t let you forget us.”

“It’s the nicest reminder I could possibly have. I don’t need a single thing to make me remember you, though. You’re all here in my heart to stay as long as I live.” Mary had never appeared more sweetly appealing than she now looked, as her clear tones voiced her inner sentiments.

“You’re a nice girl,” approved Charlie Stevens. “If I ever grow to be’s tall’s you, Mary Raymond, I’ll be married to you and you can play in the band, too. Uncle John’ll buy you a fiddle.”

This calm disposal of Mary’s future drove sentiment to the winds. Unconsciously, little Charlie had sounded a merry note just in time to lift the pall which is always bound to hang over a company devoted to the saying of farewells.

At eleven o’clock Mary and Marjorie accompanied their guests to the gate, the latter avowing their intention to be at the station the following morning to see Mary off on her journey. The two girls strolled back to the house, under the stars, their arms entwined about each other’s waists.

“We had a beautiful evening, Lieutenant. How I wish General could have been here. I hate to go away without saying good-bye to him,” sighed Mary.

“I’m sorry, too. I wish he could always be at home. He has to be away from Sanford and home so much.” Marjorie echoed Mary’s sigh. Brightening, she said: “I’ve another dear surprise for you, though. Come up to my house and I’ll give it to you. It’s his farewell message. He wanted you to have it the very last thing to-night.”

“We are going upstairs, Captain,” called Mary, as they passed through the living room. “Want to come?”

“Later,” returned Mrs. Dean. She was too good a commander to intrude upon the last precious moments of confidence her little army still had left to them.

Marjorie marched Mary to the pink and white window seat and playfully ordered, “Sit down and fold your hands like a nice, obedient lieutenant. Shut your eyes and don’t open them until I say so.”

Tripping gleefully to the chiffonier she opened the top drawer, bringing forth a small package and a square white envelope. Tucking them into Mary’s folded hands she said, “First you may open your eyes; then you must open your presents. I haven’t the least idea what’s in the package or what the letter says. General mailed them to me from Boston.”

Two pairs of eyes, bright with affectionate curiosity, bent themselves eagerly on the little quaintly enameled box, which Mary hastily unwrapped. “Oh!” was the concerted exclamation. On a white satin pad lay an exquisitely dainty gold pin. It was in the form of a shield. Across the top winked three small jewels set in a row, a ruby, a diamond and a sapphire.

“Three cheers for the red, white and blue,” sang Marjorie, dropping down beside Mary and hugging her enthusiastically. “Do read the letter, Lieutenant. We’ll rave about this cunning pin afterward. Oh, I forgot. Perhaps General didn’t mean me to know what he wrote.”

“Of course he did,” flung back Mary loyally. “We’ll read it together.” Tearing open the envelope, she unfolded the letter and read aloud:

“Beloved Lieutenant:

“You are going away to a far country on a long hike, and, as it is the duty of every good general to look to the welfare of his soldiers, I am sending you the magic Shield of Valor to protect you in time of need. It is a token of honor for a brave lieutenant who fought a memorable battle and won the victory against heavy odds. It is a magic shield, in that it offers protection only to the soldier who has met and worsted the giant, Self. It was wrought from the priceless metal of Golden Deeds and set with the eyes of Endurance, Truth and Constancy. No enemy, however deadly, can prevail against it. It is a talisman, the wearing of which must bring Honor and Peace.

“Dear little comrade, may happiness visit you in your new barracks. Let the bugle call ‘On duty’ find you marching head up, colors flying, until ‘Taps’ sounds at the close of each busy day. Though you have answered the call to a new post, your general hopes with all his heart that you will some day hurry back to your regiment

in Sanford to receive the sword of captaincy and the enthusiastic welcome of your brother officers. May all good go with you.

*“Loyally,
“General Dean.”*

Mary’s voice trailed away into a silence that outrivaled mere speech. The two girls sat staring at the jeweled token before them as though fearing to break the spell their general’s message had evoked.

“Isn’t it queer?” came from Mary, “I don’t feel a bit like crying. When all the nice things happened to me downstairs I wanted to cry. But this letter and my wonderful Shield of Valor make me feel different; as though I’d like to march out and conquer the world!”

Marjorie’s red lips curved into a tender smile as she took the pin from the box and fastened it in the folds of lace where Mary’s gown fell away at the throat. “That’s because it is a true talisman,” she reminded softly. “We never knew when long ago we played being soldiers just for fun that we were only getting ready to be soldiers in earnest.”

CHAPTER IV – THE NEW SECRETARY

“I’m ready to go to school, Captain!” Marjorie Dean popped her curly head into the living room. “Is the note ready, too? It’s simply dear in you to give me a chance to call on Miss Archer.”

“Just a moment.” Mrs. Dean hastily addressed an envelope and slipped into it the note she had just finished writing. “I could mail it, I suppose, but I thought you might like to play special messenger,” she observed, handing Marjorie the note.

“It was a glorious thought,” laughed Marjorie. “I wanted to see Miss Archer yesterday, but I didn’t like to go to her office on the very first day without a good excuse. Do I look nice, Captain?” she inquired archly.

“You know you do, vain child.” Mrs. Dean surveyed the dainty figure of her daughter with pardonable pride. “That quaint flowered organdie frock exactly suits you. Now salute your captain and hurry along. I don’t care to have you tardy on my account.”

Marjorie embraced her mother in her usual tempestuous fashion and went skipping out of the house and down the stone walk with the joyous abandon of a little girl. Once the gate had swung behind her she dropped into a more decorous gait as she hurried along the wide, shady street toward school. “Oh, goodness!” she murmured. When within two blocks of the high school building she glimpsed the City Hall clock. Its huge, black hands pointed to five minutes to nine. “I’ll have to run for it,” was her dismayed reflection. “If I hurry, I can make it. I won’t have time to put my hat in my new junior locker, though.”

Decorum now discarded, Marjorie set off on a brisk run that brought her into the locker room at precisely one minute to nine. Hastily depositing her dainty rose-trimmed leghorn on a convenient window ledge, she ran up the basement stairs to the study hall, gaining the seat assigned to her the previous day just as the nine o’clock bell clanged forth its warning. She smiled rather contemptuously as she noted the disapproving glance Miss Merton flung in her direction. She had escaped a scolding by virtue of a few brief seconds.

“*She* hasn’t changed a bit,” was Marjorie’s inward judgment, as she turned her gaze upon the rows of students; called together again to continue their earnest march along the road of education. Her heart thrilled with pride as she noted how few vacant seats the great study hall held. The freshman class was unusually large. She noticed there were a number of girls she had never before seen. It looked, too, as though none of last year’s freshmen had dropped out of school. As for the juniors, they were all present, even to Mignon La Salle. But how decidedly grown-up the French girl looked! Her black curls were arranged in an ultra-fashionable knot at the back of her head that made her appear several years older than she really was. Her gown, too, an elaborate affair of sage green pongee, with wide bands of heavy insertion, added to her years. She looked very little like a school girl Marjorie thought.

Lost in contemplation of the new Mignon, she was rudely reminded of the fact that she was staring by Mignon herself. Their eyes meeting, Mignon made a face at Marjorie by way of expressing her candid opinion of the girl she disliked. Marjorie colored and hastily looked away, amused rather than angry at this display of childishness. It hardly accorded with her grown-up air. She had not realized that she had been guilty of staring. Her mind was intent on trying to recall something she had heard in connection with the French girl that now eluded her memory. Shrugging her shoulders she dismissed it as a matter of small consequence.

As the members of the four classes were still vacillating between which subjects to take up and which to exclude from their programs of study, classes that morning were to mean a mere business of assembling in the various recitation rooms, there to receive the first instructions from the special teachers before settling down to the usual routine of lessons.

For her junior program, Marjorie had decided upon third year French, English Literature, Cæsar's Commentaries and civil government. As she had recently begun piano lessons, she had wisely concluded that, with piano practice, four subjects would keep her sufficiently busy. Her interest in music had developed as a result of her association with Constance Stevens. She yearned to be able some day to accompany Constance's beautiful voice on the piano. Mrs. Dean had long deplored the fact that Marjorie was not interested in becoming at least a fair pianist. Herself a musician of considerable skill, she believed it a necessary accomplishment for girls and was delighted when Marjorie had announced that she wished to begin lessons on the piano.

By reciting English literature during the first period of the morning and French the second, the last period before noon was hers for study. Civil government and Cæsar recitations the first two periods of the afternoon left her the last hour of that session free. She had always tried to arrange her subjects to gain that coveted afternoon period, and now she felt especially pleased at being able to also reserve the last period of the morning for study.

It was while she sat in her old place in French class, listening to the obsequiously polite adjurations of Professor Fontaine, that she remembered the still undelivered note from her mother to Miss Archer. "I'm a faithless messenger," was her rueful thought. "I'll hurry to Miss Archer's office with Captain's note the minute class is over." Contritely patting a fold of her lace-trimmed blouse where she had tucked the letter for safe-keeping, Marjorie gave strict attention to the earnestly-exhorting instructor.

"Eet ees een thees class that we shall read the great works of the incomparable French awthors," he announced with an impressive roll of r's. "Eet ees of a truth necessary that you should become familiar weeth them. You moost, therefore, stody your lessons and be thus always preepaired. Eet ees sad when my pupeels come to me with so many fleemys excuses. Thees year I shall nevaire accept them. I most eenseest that you preepaire each day the lesson for the next."

Marjorie smiled to herself. The long-suffering professor was forever preaching a preparedness, which it never fell to his lot to see diligently practised by the majority of his pupils. Personally, she could not be classed among the guilty. Her love of the musical language kept her interest in it unflagging, thereby making her one of the professor's most dependable props.

The recitation over, she paused to greet the odd little man, who received her with delight, warmly shaking her hand. "Eet ees a grand plaisir thus to see you again, Mees Marjorie," he declared. "Ah, I am assured that you at least weel nevaire say 'oonpreepaired.'"

"I'll try not to. I'm ever so glad to see you, too, Professor Fontaine." After a brief exchange of pleasantries she left the class room a trifle hurriedly and set off to call on Miss Archer.

Entering the spacious living room office, she was forcibly reminded that Marcia Arnold's high school days had ended on the previous June. The pretty room was quite deserted. Marjorie sighed as she glanced toward the vacant chair, drawn under the closed desk that had been Marcia's. How much she would miss her old friend. Since that day long past on which they had come to an understanding, she and Marcia had found much in common. Marjorie sighed regretfully, wondering who Miss Archer's next secretary would be.

As there was no one about to announce her, she walked slowly toward the half-closed door of the inner office. Pausing just outside, she peeped in. Her eyes widened with surprise as she caught sight of an unfamiliar figure. A tall, very attractive young woman stood before the principal's desk, busily engaged in the perusal of a printed sheet of paper which she held in her hand. It looked as though Miss Archer had already secured someone in Marcia's place.

"May I come in, please?" Marjorie asked sweetly, halting in the doorway.

The girl at the desk uttered a faint exclamation. The paper she held fluttered to the desk. A wave of color dyed her exquisitely tinted skin as she turned a pair of large, startled, black eyes upon the intruder. For a second the two girls eyed each other steadily. Marjorie conceived a curious impression

that she had seen this stranger before, yet it was too vague to convey to her the slightest knowledge of the other's identity.

"You are Miss Archer's new secretary, are you not?" she asked frankly. "You can tell me, perhaps, where to find her. I have a note to deliver to her personally."

A quick shade of relief crossed the other girl's suddenly flushing face. Smiling in self-possessed fashion, she said, "Miss Archer will not be back directly. I cannot tell you when she will return."

"I think I'll wait here for her," decided Marjorie. "I have no recitation this period."

The stranger's arched brows arched themselves a trifle higher. "As you please," she returned indifferently. She again turned her attention to the papers on the desk.

Seating herself on the wide oak bench, Marjorie took speculative stock of the new secretary. "What a stunning girl," was her mental opinion. "She's dressed rather too well for a secretary, though," flashed across her as she noted the smart gown of white china silk, the very cut of which pointed to the work of a high-priced modiste. "I suppose she's getting examination papers ready for the new pupils. I wonder why she doesn't sit down."

As she thus continued to cogitate regarding the stranger, the girl frowned deeply at another paper she had picked up and swung suddenly about. "Are you just entering high school?" she asked with direct abruptness.

"Oh, no." Marjorie smilingly shook her head. "I am a junior."

"Are you?" The stranger again lost herself in puzzled contemplation of the paper. Hearing an approaching footfall she made a quick move toward the center of the office, raising her eyes sharply to greet a girl who had come in quest of Miss Archer. Promptly disposing of the seeker, she returned to her task. Several times after that she was interrupted by the entrance of various students, whom she received coolly and dismissed with, "Not here. I don't know when Miss Archer will return." Marjorie noted idly that with every fresh arrival, the young woman continued to move well away from the desk.

Marjorie watched her in fascination. She was undoubtedly beautiful in a strangely bold fashion, but apparently very cold and self-centered. She had received the students who had entered the office with a brusqueness that bordered on discourtesy. Two or three of them, whom Marjorie knew, had greeted her in friendly fashion, at the same time mutely questioning with uplifted brows as to whom this stranger might be.

"This problem in quadratic equations is a terror," the girl at the desk suddenly remarked, her finger pointing to a row of algebraic symbols on the paper she was still clutching. "Algebra's awfully hard, isn't it?"

"I always liked it," returned Marjorie, glad of a chance to break the silence. "What is the problem?"

"Come here," ordered the other girl. "I don't call *that* an easy problem. Do you?"

Marjorie rose and approached the desk. The stranger handed her the paper, indexing the vexatious problem.

"Oh, that's not so very hard," was Marjorie's light response.

"Can you work it out?" came the short inquiry, a note of suppressed eagerness in the questioner's voice.

"Why, I suppose so. Can't you?"

"I was trying it before you came in just for fun. I've forgotten my algebra, I guess. I don't believe I got the right result. It's rather good practice to review, isn't it?"

"She must be a senior," sprang to Marjorie's mind. Aloud, she agreed that it was. "I ought not to have forgotten my algebra," she added. "It's only a year since I finished it."

"See if you think I did this right, will you? I'm curious to know." The stranger thrust into her hand a second paper, covered with figures.

Marjorie inspected it, feeling only mildly interested. "No; you made a mistake here. It goes this way. Have you a pencil?"

The pencil promptly forthcoming, the obliging junior seated herself at a nearby table and diligently went to work. So busy was she that she failed to note the covert glances which her companion sent now and then toward the door. But, during the brief space of time in which Marjorie was engaged with the difficult equation, no one came. Altogether she had not been in the office longer than fifteen minutes. To her it seemed at least half an hour.

“Here you are.” She tendered the finished work to the other girl, who seized it eagerly with a brief, “Thank you. I can see where I made my mistake when I have time to compare the two.” With a smile, which Marjorie thought a trifle patronizing, she carelessly nodded her gratitude. Laying the printed examination sheet on a pile of similar papers, she placed a weight upon them and walked gracefully from the office, taking with her the two sheets of paper, bearing the results of her own and Marjorie’s labor.

Another fifteen minutes went by. Still no one came, except a student or two in quest of Miss Archer. Marjorie decided that she would wait no longer. She would come back again that afternoon, before the second session opened. It was almost noon. Were she to return to the study hall just then, it meant to court the caustic rebuke of Miss Merton. The locker room offered her a temporary refuge. Accordingly, she wended her steps toward it.

“Where were you that last period?” demanded Jerry Macy, coming up behind her as she stood at the mirror adjusting her rose-weighted hat.

“Oh, Jerry! How you startled me.” Marjorie swung about. “I was up in Miss Archer’s office.”

“So soon?” teased Jerry, putting on a shocked expression. “I *am* surprised.”

“Don’t be so suspicious,” responded Marjorie, adopting Jerry’s bantering tone. “I had a note, if you please, from Captain, to deliver to Miss Archer. I saw the new secretary, too.”

“Humph!” ejaculated Jerry. “You must have only thought you saw her. So far as I know Miss Archer hasn’t secured a secretary yet.”

“But she must have,” Marjorie insisted. “There was a tall girl in her office when I went there. She must surely be the girl to take Marcia’s place, for she was standing at Miss Archer’s desk, going over some papers.”

“That’s funny. What did she look like? You said she was tall?”

“Yes; tall and very pretty. She had big, black eyes and perfectly gorgeous auburn hair – ” Marjorie broke off with a puzzled frown. Her own words had a curious reminiscent ring. Someone else had said the very same thing about – Who had said it, and about whom had it been said?

“Now I know you didn’t see Miss Archer’s new secretary,” cried Jerry in triumph. “There’s only one person that can answer to your description. She’s that Rowena Farnham I told you about, Mignon’s side partner. I told you she was going to enter the sophomore class. She was probably waiting for Miss Archer herself. She has to try her exams, I suppose.”

“But what was she doing at Miss Archer’s desk?” asked Marjorie sharply. “Why did she answer me and make me think she was the secretary? She told several other girls that Miss Archer was out!”

“Search me,” replied Jerry inelegantly. “If she’s much like Mignon it’s hard to tell what she was up to. Believe me, they’re a precious pair of trouble-makers and don’t you forget it.”

“I ought to have recognized her,” faltered Marjorie. A curious sense of dread had stolen over her. “Don’t you remember Mary described her almost as I did just now, that day you came to see us, when first you got back to Sanford?”

“Well, nobody’s going to kill you because you didn’t, are they?” inquired Jerry with a grin. “What’s the matter? What makes you look so solemn?”

“Oh, I was just wondering,” evaded Marjorie. Outwardly only slightly ruffled, tumult raged within. She had begun to see clearly what had hitherto been obscure and the revelation was a severe shock. All she could hope was that what she now strongly suspected might not, after all, be true.

CHAPTER V – A STORMY INTERVIEW

Marjorie returned to school that afternoon in a most perturbed state of mind, occasioned by Jerry Macy's identification of Rowena Farnham as the girl whom she had assisted in the working out of the problem in quadratic equations. She was now almost certain that she had unwittingly assisted in a most dishonest enterprise. If the papers on Miss Archer's desk comprised the trial examination to sophomore estate, then Rowena had no doubt been guilty of tampering with what should concern her only at the moment when the test began. If they were the sophomore examination papers, why had Miss Archer left them thus exposed on her desk? And now what was she, Marjorie, to do about it? She felt that when she delivered her mother's note to Miss Archer, she ought to inform the principal of what had occurred during her absence. Yet she hated to do this. It was tale bearing. Besides, her suspicions might prove unfounded.

She was still juggling the trying situation when she entered Miss Archer's office to deliver her captain's note. Should she speak of it or not? The fact that Miss Archer was now accessible but extremely busy, with several girls occupying the office benches, caused her to put off her decision for a time. She stopped only long enough to receive a kindly welcome from the principal and to perform her mission as messenger. Then she went dejectedly to her recitation in civil government, wondering resentfully if the event of the morning was the beginning of an unpleasant year.

By a determined effort of will, Marjorie put the whole thing aside to attend strictly to her recitations. But during the study hour that preceded dismissal for the day, a way of settling the difficulty presented itself to her. It was not an agreeable way, but her straightforward soul welcomed it as a means toward settlement. She was resolved to seek Rowena Farnham and learn the truth. The question of where to find her was next to be considered. She had not yet made an appearance into the study hall. Doubtless she was in the little recitation room on the second floor that was seldom used except in the case of pupils with special examinations to try. Marjorie mused darkly as to whether the problem she had obligingly solved would figure in Rowena's algebra paper.

Half-past three saw Marjorie on her way to the locker room, keeping a sharp lookout for a tall figure crowned with luxuriant auburn hair. Her vigilance met with no reward, however, and she left the school building in company with Irma, Jerry, Constance and Susan, deliberating as to what she had best do next. Outside the high school she caught no glimpse of her quarry among the throng of girls that came trooping down the wide stone steps. Although she took part in her friends' animated conversation, she was steadily thinking of the self-imposed task that lay before her.

"Let's go down to Sargent's," proposed Susan, gleefully jingling a handful of silver that clinked of sundaes and divers delicious cheer.

"You girls go. I can't. I've an errand to do." Marjorie's color rose as she spoke.

"Do your errand some other time," coaxed Susan. "I may not have any money to spend to-morrow."

"I'll treat to-morrow," Marjorie assured her. "I can't possibly put off my errand. You can imagine I'm with you. Always cultivate your imagination."

Four voices rose to protest her decision, but she remained firm. "To-morrow," she compromised. "Please don't tease me. I can't really go with you to-day."

"We'll try to get along without you, just this once," agreed tactful Constance. Something in Marjorie's manner told her that her friend wished to go on her way alone.

"Go ahead then, Marjorie. Do your errand, faithful child," consented Jerry, who had also scented the unusual and shrewdly speculated as to whether it had anything to do with their conversation of the morning.

Anxious, yet regretful, to be free of her chums, Marjorie said good-bye and hurried off in an opposite direction. Jerry had said that the Farnhams lived in the beautiful residence that adjoined

Mignon La Salle's home. It was not a long walk, yet how Marjorie dreaded it. Given that Rowena were at home, Mignon would, perhaps, be with her. That would make matters doubly hard. Yet she could do no less than carry out the interview she felt must take place at the earliest possible moment.

It was a very grave little girl who opened the ornamental iron gate and proceeded reluctantly up the long driveway to the huge brown stone house, set in the midst of a wide expanse of tree-dotted lawn. For all the residence was a magnificent affair, Marjorie shivered as she mounted the massive stone steps. There was little of the atmosphere of home about it.

"Is Miss Rowena Farnham here?" was her low-voiced question of the white-capped maid who answered the door.

"She hasn't come home from school yet, miss," informed the maid. "Will you step into the house and wait for her?"

"Yes, thank you." Marjorie followed the woman into a high-ceilinged, beautifully appointed, square hall and across it to a mammoth drawing-room, very handsomely furnished, but cheerless, nevertheless. She felt very small and insignificant as she settled herself lightly on an ornate gilt chair, to await the arrival of Rowena.

Her vigil was destined to be tedious, unbroken by the sight of anyone save the maid, who passed through the hall once or twice on her way to answer the bell. Even she did not trouble herself to glance through the half-parted brocade portieres at the lonely little figure in the room beyond. Consulting her wrist watch, Marjorie read five o'clock. She had been waiting for over an hour. She guessed that the girl on whom she had come to call must be with Mignon La Salle. There was at least a grain of comfort for her in this conjecture. If Mignon were at home now, there was small chance that she would be present at the interview.

An impatient hand on the bell sent a shrill, reverberating peal through the great house. An instant and she heard the maid's voice, carefully lowered. There came the sound of quick, questioning tones, which she recognized. Rowena had at last put in an appearance. Immediately there followed a flinging back of the concealing portieres and the girl who had sprung into Marjorie's knowledge so unbecomingly that morning walked into the room.

"You wished to see – Oh, it's you!" The tall girl's black eyes swept her uninvited guest with an expression far from cordial.

"Yes, it is I," Marjorie's inflection was faintly satirical. "I made a mistake about you this morning. I thought you were Miss Archer's new secretary." She lost no time in going directly to the point.

For answer Rowena threw back her auburn head and laughed loudly. "I fooled you nicely, didn't I?" According to outward signs her conscience was apparently untroubled.

"Yes," returned Marjorie quietly. "Why did you do it?"

Rowena's laughing lips instantly took on a belligerent curve. The very evenness of the inquiry warned her that trouble was brewing for her. "See here," she began rudely, "what did you come to my house for? I'm not pleased to see you. Judging from several things I've heard, I don't care to know you."

Marjorie paled at the rebuff. She had half expected it, yet now that it had come she did not relish it. At first meeting she had been irritated by the other girl's almost rude indifference. Now she had dropped all semblance of courtesy.

"I hardly think it matters about your knowing or not knowing me," she retorted in the same carefully schooled tone. "You, of course, are the one to decide that. What does matter is this – I must ask you to tell me exactly why you wished me to work out that quadratic problem for you. It is quite necessary that I should know."

"Why is it so necessary?"

"Because I must believe one of two things," was Marjorie's grave response. "I must have the truth. I won't be kept in the dark about it. Either you only pretended to play secretary as a rather

peculiar joke, or else you did it purposely because – ” She hesitated, half ashamed to accuse the other of dishonesty.

“What will you do if I say I did it on purpose?” tantalized Rowena. “Go to your Miss Archer, I suppose, with a great tale about me. I understand that is one of your little pastimes. Now listen to me, and remember what I say. You think I was prying into those examination papers, don’t you?”

“I’d rather not think so.” Marjorie raised an honest, appealing glance to meet the mocking gleam of Rowena’s black eyes.

“Who cares what *you* think? You are a goody-goody, and I never saw one yet that I’d walk across the street with. Whatever I want, I always get. Remember that, too. If your dear Miss Archer hadn’t been called to another part of the building, I might never have had a chance to read over those examinations. She went away in a hurry and left me sitting in the office. Naturally, as her desk was open, I took a look to see what there was to see. I wasn’t afraid of any subject but algebra. I’m n. g. in that. So I was pretty lucky to get a chance to read over the examination. I knew right away by the questions that it was the one I’d have to try.

“My father promised me a pearl necklace if I’d pass all my tests for the sophomore class. Of course I wanted to win it. That quadratic problem counted thirty credits. It meant that without it I’d stand no chance to pass algebra. I couldn’t do it, and I was in despair when you came into the office. If you hadn’t been so stupid as to take me for Miss Archer’s secretary and hadn’t said you were a junior, I’d have let you alone. That secretary idea wasn’t bad, though. It sent those other girls about their business. I thought *you* could do that problem if *I* couldn’t. It’s a good thing you did. I copied it in examination this afternoon and I know it’s right,” she ended triumphantly.

Sheer amazement of the girl’s bold confession rendered Marjorie silent. Never in all her life had she met a girl like Rowena Farnham. Her calm admittance to what Marjorie had suspected was unbelievable. And she appeared to feel no shame for her dishonesty. She gloried in it. Finding her voice at last, the astounded and dismayed interviewer said with brave firmness: “I can’t look at this so lightly, Miss Farnham. It wasn’t fair in you to deceive me into doing a thing like that.”

“What’s done can’t be undone,” quoted Rowena, seemingly undisturbed by the reproof. “You are as deep in the mud as I am in the mire. You helped me, you know.”

“I will not be included in such dishonesty.” Marjorie sprang angrily to her feet and faced Rowena. “If Miss Archer knew this she would not accept your algebra paper. She might not wish to accept you as a pupil, either. I hoped when I came here this afternoon that everything would turn out all right, after all. I hoped that paper might not be the algebra test you were to have. I don’t wish to tell Miss Archer, yet it’s not fair to either of us that you should masquerade under false colors. You have put me in a very hard position.”

It was now Rowena who grew angry. During the interview she had remained standing, looking down on the girl in the chair with amused contempt. Marjorie’s flash of resentment unleashed a temper that had ever been the despair of Rowena’s father and mother. Her dark eyes glowed like live coals, her tall, slender body shook with fury. “If you dare go to Miss Archer with what I’ve told you, I’ll put you in a much harder position. I’ll make you lose every friend you have in school. I know all about you. You’ve bullied and snubbed poor Mignon La Salle and made her lose *her* friends. But you can’t bully or threaten or snub me. I didn’t want to come to Sanford to live. It’s nothing but a little, silly country town. I didn’t want to go to your old school. My father and mother make me go. My father doesn’t believe in select boarding schools, so I have to make the best of it. If I pass my examinations into the sophomore class I’ll make it my business to see that I get whatever I take a notion to have. You can’t stop me. I’ve always done as I pleased at home and I’ll do as I please in school. If you tell Miss Archer about this morning, I’ll see that you get more blame than I. Don’t forget that, either.”

Marjorie felt as though she had been caught in a pelting rain of hail-stones. Yet the furious flow of vituperation which beat down upon her did not in the least intimidate her. “I am not afraid of anything you may do or say,” she returned, a staunch little figure of dignified scorn. “I came to see

you in all good faith, willing to give you the benefit of the doubt. Now that I understand exactly how you feel about this affair, I won't trouble you further. Good afternoon."

"Stop! What are you going to do?" called Rowena. Marjorie had already passed into the hall. "You've got to tell me before you leave this house." She darted after her steadily retreating caller, cheeks flaming.

At the outer door, Marjorie paused briefly, her hand on the dead latch. "I said 'good afternoon,'" was her sole response. Then she let herself out and walked proudly away from the house of inhospitality, oblivious to the torrent of hot words which the irate Rowena shrieked after her from the veranda.

CHAPTER VI – A QUESTION OF SCHOOL-GIRL HONOR

“I’ve something to report, Captain.” Marjorie entered her mother’s room and dropped dispiritedly at her feet. Unpinning her flower-decked hat, she removed it with a jerk and let it slide to the floor.

“Well, dear, what is it?” Mrs. Dean cast a half anxious look at her daughter. The long strip of pink crochet work, destined to become part of an afghan for Marjorie’s “house” dropped from her hands. Reaching down she gave the dejected curly head at her knee a reassuring pat. “What has happened to spoil my little girl’s second day at school?”

Marjorie flashed an upward glance at her mother that spoke volumes. “I’ve had a horrid time to-day,” she answered. “Last year, when things didn’t go right, I kept some of them to myself. This year I’m going to tell you everything.” Her voice quivering with indignation at the calamity that had overtaken her unawares, she related the disturbing events that had so recently transpired. “I don’t know what to do,” she ended. “Do you think I ought to go to Miss Archer and tell her everything?”

“That is a leading question, Lieutenant.” Mrs. Dean continued a sympathetic smoothing of Marjorie’s curls. “It is one thing to confess one’s own faults; it is quite another to make public the faults of someone else. It is hardly fair to Miss Archer to allow this girl to profit by her own dishonesty. It is not fair to the girl herself. If she is allowed to pursue, unchecked, a course which will eventually lead to a great dishonesty, then you would be in a measure responsible. On the other hand, I abhor a talebearer. I can’t decide at once what you ought to do. I shall have to think it over and give you my answer later. Your rights must be considered also. You were an innocent party to a despicable act, therefore I do not believe that you owe the author of it any special loyalty. I am not sure but that I ought to go to Miss Archer myself about it. You have suffered a good deal, since you began going to Sanford High School, through Mignon La Salle. I do not propose that this new girl shall spoil your junior year for you. Come to me to-morrow at this time and I will have made up my mind what is best for you. I am glad you told me this.”

“So am I,” sighed Marjorie. “I know that whatever you decide will be best for me, Captain. I am not afraid for myself. It’s only that I hate to make trouble for this girl, even though she deserves it. You see it may mean a good deal to her father and mother to have her get along well in school. She said her father wouldn’t let her go away to boarding school. That sounds as though he wanted her to be at home where he could look after her.”

“That must also be considered,” agreed Mrs. Dean. “Now don’t worry about this affair any more. I am sure we shall find the wisest way out of it for everyone concerned. You had better run along now and get ready for dinner. It’s almost half-past six.”

Marjorie reached for her discarded hat. Scrambling to her feet she embraced her mother and went to her room, infinitely cheered. As she left the room, Mrs. Dean sent after her a glance freighted with motherly protection. She had no sympathy for a girl such as Marjorie had described Rowena Farnham to be, and she uttered a mental prayer of thankfulness that her own daughter was above reproach.

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