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SIDNEY AT COLLEGE

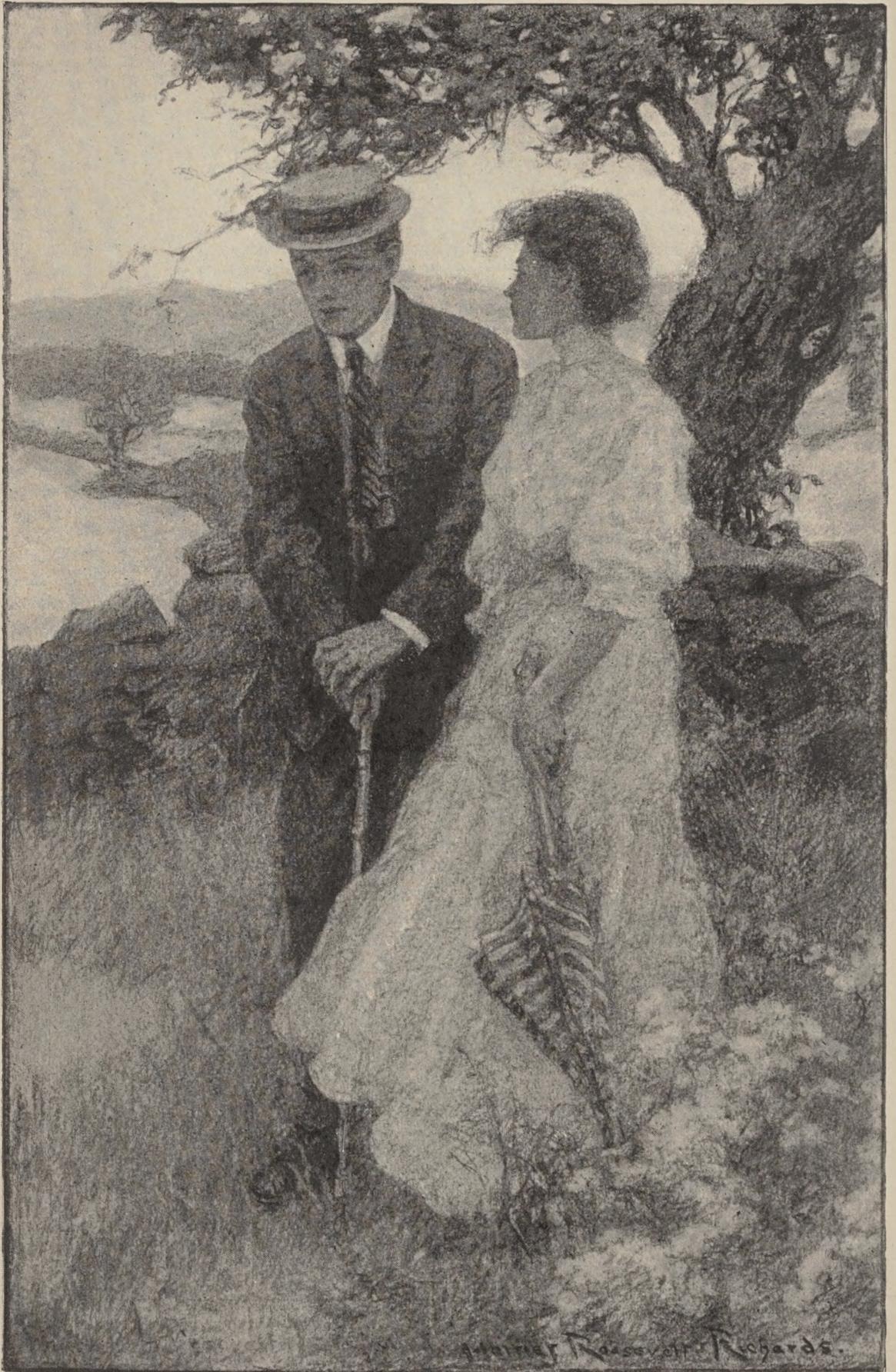
Anna Chapin Ray's Stories

THE SIDNEY BOOKS

- I. Sidney; Her Summer on the St. Lawrence
 - II. Janet; Her Winter in Quebec
 - III. Dav; Her Year in New York
 - IV. Sidney; at College
- (Others in Preparation)
-

THE TEDDY BOOKS

- I. Teddy; Her Book
- II. Phebe; Her Profession
- III. Teddy; Her Daughter
- IV. Nathalie's Chum
- V. Ursula's Freshman
- VI. Nathalie's Sister



“‘DAY,’ HE SAID SLOWLY, ‘IT’S NOT TOO LATE YET.’”
[Frontispiece. See p. 23.]

SIDNEY AT COLLEGE

BY

ANNA CHAPIN RAY

AUTHOR OF "SIDNEY: HER SUMMER ON THE ST. LAWRENCE," "JANET:
HER WINTER IN QUEBEC," "DAY: HER YEAR
IN NEW YORK," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS FROM DRAWINGS BY
HARRIET ROOSEVELT RICHARDS



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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

| | PAGE |
|---|---------------------|
| “‘DAY,’ HE SAID SLOWLY, ‘IT’S NOT TOO LATE YET’” | <i>Frontispiece</i> |
| “LATER, HIS CONTENTMENT DEEPENED, AS HE SAT IN HIS CORNER” | 76 |
| “IRENE HAD THE TACT TO RISE, WITHOUT ANOTHER WORD” | 148 |
| “DOWN THE PATH THEY CAME CHARGING ALONG” | 275 |

SIDNEY AT COLLEGE

CHAPTER ONE

“One lovely summer morning,
Without a word of warning,
There 'peared a bear
Without a hair,
One lovely summer morning.”

ITS pitch rising and falling according to the general outlines of an ancient Gregorian tone, the voice came up the stairs and halted outside of Sidney's open door. Then, —

“Did you hear that, Sidney?” it demanded, with an accent which had suddenly shifted into harmony with the energetic, strenuous modern century.

“Yes, Bungay.”

Sidney, her lap full of rolled-up stockings destined to fill in the irregularities in the substratum of her trunk, was pondering whether her bathrobe should go in next, or wait to be put on top. Accordingly, her voice was distracted, preoccupied.

“What did you think about it?” Bungay asked vaingloriously.

“Beautiful!” Sidney's voice was still absent, while she shifted her best pumps to another corner.

Bungay strolled into the room and seated himself

in the open trunk-tray amid a pile of fresh shirt-waists.

"You don't pay any 'tention," he rebuked his sister. "I think it's very beautiful; but you only just say so, without thinking anything at all."

"What is it, Bungay? Oh, you dear boy, do get out of that tray!" And Sidney supplemented her words by a firm grasp on Bungay's shoulders.

Bungay freed himself from the grasp and smiled up at Sidney, quite unabashed.

"My poem. I made it for you."

Sidney, restoring order in the tray, forced herself to an appearance of excited pleasure amounting wellnigh to delirium.

"You made it, Bungay? Really and truly? How proud of you I am!" And yet, asked, she still would have been totally at a loss to say whether Bungay's manufacture were a kite or a toy locomotive.

Fortunately, however, Bungay did not ask.

"Yes, I made it for you. I thought maybe it would keep you from getting homesick, when you went to college."

The heart of Sidney, preparing for her first great exit from the home circle, was unwontedly tender. She looked up from her packing.

"You dear little boy!" she said. "Thank you, Bungay. I'll love it."

"Then you say it over," Bungay ordered her imperiously.

Sidney shook her head.

“ I like better to hear you say it,” she suggested craftily. “ You know just how to make it sound best.”

Young as he was, Bungay had all the characteristics of the true poet. Upon one salient one Sidney had hit with unerring aim.

“ All right. Listen.” And once more he intoned his masterpiece.

This time, Sidney clapped her hands.

“ Bravo, Bungay! And you really made it up?”

“ No; I made it down,” Bungay replied literally, as once more he seated himself, this time on the pile of tissue papers which concealed Sidney’s best hat.

“ I began at the top line and worked down the page, and I couldn’t work up again, because it was too short to reach over the leaf. And I think it’s very good indeed, and ought to keep you from getting homesick a bit.”

“ Why shouldn’t I get homesick, Bungay boy?” Sidney was once more deep in her trunk and spoke without lifting her eyes.

“ Because it ought to make you think about me.” Bungay’s tone was sentimental, as he lifted his stout little legs and let his fat little body settle more deeply into its easy nest.

The soft crumpling of the papers aroused Sidney to attention, and she laid firm hands on Bungay’s nether extremities. Then, of a sudden, she turned strategic.

“ I believe it would make me think about you

lots more, if you would only write it down for me, Bungay," she suggested. "Then I could pin it on my wall where I could see it, every single day, and not forget it ever."

Bungay scrambled to his feet, albeit with a rotary motion which bade fair to complete the ruin he had wrought.

"All right. Where's a pencil?"

"Mine are packed. I think one of the twins left hers on the table down-stairs."

Bungay dashed away, descended the stairs by his customary route of the banisters, and landed on the rug with a bump. Then he lifted up his voice, —

"On the wall of your room at Smith College, Sidney?" he queried, and the volume of his tone implied that he believed his sister to be already ensconced within those distant halls of learning.

For four years, Sidney Stayre, at present eighteen and as downright as a girl could be, had been working steadily towards the packing of the great new trunk which stood open before her now. The trunk meant a good deal in her life. Heretofore, she had lived upon her mother's trunk. Now she possessed one of her own, a large and shiny one with a great red *S* in a black diamond upon either end. To Sidney, this journey was not like any other one she had made. Those were visits, her return was bound to occur within a more or less short time. This was no visit, but something of far deeper import; her real return would not be until four years had passed away,

perhaps not even then. And whereas, heretofore, the trunk had been full of frocks and hats, now it held something more, something quite as real, albeit quite intangible. For into that open trunk and among her gowns, Sidney Stayre was placing many a girlish dream and plan and purpose, many an aspiration which the coming years alone could ever make good. In a certain sense, the closing of her emptied bureau drawers had marked the shutting away of her young girlhood. It would be a budding woman who would open them again to take possession of them, when those four years were ended. And would the budding woman be swift to recognize the girlhood buried there, to love it, and to claim kinship with it? There lay the question.

As a matter of course, Sidney, folding her old brown pongee frock, did not express her thoughts in any such form as this. They were vague thoughts, yet they held within them all the questions sure to rise up in the mind of a girl whose new life is bound to break sharply away from the old, old groove. It mattered not in the least that all the past four years had tended to that very hour. The hour was no less momentous, for all that. Sidney, as she laid the pongee frock above the bathrobe and then attacked the problem of her best white gown, wondered if Day were sharing in her mood, Day and Janet.

For Sidney was not to take the momentous step alone. Less than half a mile away, in a home far more elaborate than the Stayre's cosy house, Sidney's

chiefest friend, Day Argyle, was just then confronted with a yawning trio of trunks and a bed heaped with a wardrobe which, two days before, had taken away Sidney's breath completely. She had long been accustomed to Day's pretty clothes. Still, it was one thing to get used to them, a frock at a time, and quite another matter to be confronted by a round dozen of new frocks, with hats and shoes to match, and coats of every persuasion from golf jackets to fluffy, floppy things to wear to parties. Judged by the Argyle fortune, Day's clothes were quite conservative; judged by Sidney's simple outfit, they were an astounding vision. The Stayres would have all they could do to send Sidney to a college such as Smith. At best, her gowns must be of the simplest. Moreover, Mrs. Stayre had been shrewd enough to recognize the fact that, for Sidney, going there a stranger, all her gowns would be like new, so far as familiarity with them was concerned. Better wait, then, until the second year, and then equip her more elaborately. And Sidney had listened, and agreed, and fallen to work, under her mother's practical advice, to mend and freshen and remodel the gowns she had already worn. Nevertheless, Sidney was a human girl; she liked pretty clothes, would have liked a dozen trunkfuls of her own. Denied that, however, she was broad enough to revel in her private view of Day's new finery, revel in it without a twinge of girlish envy. Day's clothes, after all, were a mere detail. It was much to be Day Argyle's chosen friend.

As for Janet, she was Janet Leslie, and a dear. Likewise, she was a Canadian, a Canadian who had had the independence to cut free from her own local ties and to choose an American college because she could get there some things denied to her at home. For the rest, there had been a time, the time when Sidney had known her best, when Janet could have had nearly as many clothes as Day herself. Now, for the past two years, Janet had owned just two cloth frocks, her best one and her "other." Moreover, the "other" had had a darn in its front breadth. But Day, fussy and finical as a girl could be, had made the acquaintance of Janet under these new conditions, and had loudly proclaimed to Sidney her belief that, with a girl like Janet, it didn't make the least bit of difference, a judgment which had received the vigorous support of Day's older brother.

And now Janet, with her two frocks and, perhaps, an extra one, was already on the spot, awaiting with what patience she was able the coming of her two good friends. It was three weeks, now, since Janet had packed her little trunk and Janet's mother her large one, and had journeyed southward to the lovely old New England town where Mrs. Leslie's new work was awaiting her, untried, full of responsibility, yet full of brilliant promise.

For Mrs. Leslie, left a widow on an income less than, heretofore, she had been accustomed to pay her cook, had lost no time in opening her fine old house to boarders. Those boarders had chanced

to be the Argyles, four of them. It was through Day Argyle and her brother Rob that Janet's young ambition had been turned to college; it was through a random remark of Mrs. Argyle that Janet had been fired with the idea of using her dainty, convent-taught handiwork as source of the fast-growing fund which was to make that college life a possibility. Later on, as the time drew near, as Janet's plans grew and gathered focus, it was through Mr. Argyle's financial backing that Mrs. Leslie had been enabled to hire the huge old house upon a central street, to throw out a huger wing and to equip it for the use of the girls who were destined to fill it. Last of all, the Argyles, husband and wife, had appeared upon the scene, had held long conference with the President, with the Registrar; then, rushing northward in the private car *Aurora*, they had lost no time in bringing Mrs. Leslie down to assume her share in the second conference.

It had been Mrs. Argyle who had suggested that final move, and Mrs. Argyle had been wise. One look at Mrs. Leslie, slight and dainty as a girl with her wide, sweet blue eyes and her waving dark brown hair, one half-hour spent in listening to her sweet-voiced phrasings of soundest common sense, of watching the grace and breeding of her every look and motion, all these details had won the day. The first of September found her refusing daily demands for more rooms, while she set in order her plans for housing the twenty girls or so whose recommenda-

tions had passed the critical sifting process arranged by Mrs. Argyle.

Of course, in all this there was a certain element of risk, a risk none knew so well as Mrs. Leslie. Her social guardianship of the girls would be all that the strictest parent could require. The fact remained, however, that she would be English, they American. There would be two races, two distinct points of view. Things might be right; they also might be very wrong.

“But there is no especial use in worrying about it, mummy,” Janet said philosophically, on the eve of the first arrivals. “We can’t do worse than fight; and, in that case, we can just pack up our trunks and start for home. I don’t believe they will be so very bad, even if they are Americans.”

“Not bad, dearie; only different,” Mrs. Leslie corrected her, with a smile.

But Janet shook her head.

“Not so different, either. Sidney wasn’t, nor Day; and you know Freda,” Janet only quoted her elder sister under extreme stress of circumstances; “Freda likes Americans as well as she does us.”

Mrs. Leslie smiled down at her daughter’s eager young face. Janet Leslie was not pretty — yet. She was thin and dark and intensely alive; but her oval, olive face and slim figure held promise of great beauty in the years to come. Mrs. Leslie was slim, too; but there the likeness ended. She was lighter than Janet; her slimness was less wiry, more swaying, and

the effect of this was increased by the long, clinging gowns she invariably wore inside the house, by the arrangement of her soft brown hair which was artistic and like nothing else that Janet had ever seen. And Janet, wiry and trig and tight-girt for whatever might arise, adored her mother's trailing skirts and her soft, curling ends of hair. To Janet, her mother was a thing of ceaseless charm. Nevertheless, she shook her head ever so little at her mother's next words, —

“ At least, we shall know all about it, by to-morrow night.”

“ That depends,” Janet made dubious reply. “ Let me see: four come, to-morrow. Is it the Denver tribe, or the Chicago ones? ”

“ Both.”

“ All eight? ” Janet's tone expressed her consternation. “ When did you hear? ”

“ This morning.”

“ Horrible! Still, it is as well to get it over,” Janet sighed. “ I hate new people; and I only wish Sidney and Day could be the first ones.”

“ They will be here, the day after. It won't be long to wait.” Then, as Mrs. Leslie studied her daughter's downcast face, she smiled a little to herself. “ Janet,” she said; “ shall I spoil a surprise by giving you something good to anticipate? ”

“ I wish you would.” Janet looked up; but her face did not lighten. “ What is it? ” she asked

after a moment, with a listlessness which showed her incredulity as regarded the goodness of the news.

Mrs. Leslie sat down on the arm of her daughter's chair, and drew the smooth, dark head against her shoulder.

"Courage, little daughter!" she said. "This isn't the time to have the dumps. It is too late for that; and, besides, Ronald wouldn't like his sister to lose her pluck. It all will come out right, dearie; it can't help it, with friends like the Argyles back of us. And, if it doesn't, what difference?"

Janet lifted her head with a jerk.

"This difference, you darling mummy. Don't you suppose I know that, just for me, you've given up home, and the people you like, and have come among strangers and into all sorts of hard work, just so that I can get to know things? And suppose I don't? Suppose I fail, or get lazy, or prove to be a dunce; then where will you be, I'd like to know? Answer me that, and then see if you wonder I'm in the dumps! I feel as if it all came back on me, as if I'd pulled you up by the roots, away from all the things and places and people you love best, and as if I never, never, never could make up to you for it, whatever I try to do." And, stretching out her thin arms as if to snatch at what lay beyond her sight she gave a little, nervous laugh, then shut her arms around the mother neck and buried her face against the mother shoulder.

“ But I don't worry, dear,” Mrs. Leslie answered softly.

“ No; but I do,” Janet made breathless reply. Then she cast her emotion from her as suddenly as it had come. “ What is your great news?” she demanded, once more sitting up to face her mother.

Mrs. Leslie's smile responded to her daughter's altered mood.

“ Merely this: that Rob is coming up with the girls to see them settled. He will be here till Harvard opens, next week.”

Janet drew in her breath abruptly, a breath of sheerest rapture.

“ Mummy!” she exclaimed. “ Mummy Leslie! Now I don't care about anything else.”

And when, an hour later, she fell asleep, her lips, still curving with her happiness, bore witness to her full content.

CHAPTER TWO

“EVERY girls’ college is like every other girls’ college, saving and excepting Smith. That is unique, and wholly adorable.”

Thus harangued Day, seated, meanwhile, upon a closed trunk. Opposite her, upon a second trunk, sat her brother Rob. Beyond them both and upon a third and mammoth trunk sat Rob’s chosen friend and chum, Jack Blanchard. The closed trunks, however, marked an interval, not a finish, of the packing.

“How do you know?” Rob queried flippantly. “You haven’t sampled it yet.”

“Wasn’t I there for a whole day, this summer?” Day demanded.

“You can’t tell the flavour of your oyster by looking at his empty shell,” Rob suggested.

Day’s retort came with refreshing promptness.

“No; fortunately for you,” she responded.

But Jack struck in, deliberately, as was his wont.

“But, Day, it’s going to be lonesome,” he objected. “Can’t you and Rob call the contract off and stop at home?”

Day laughed, slid off her trunk and went to perch herself on the corner of the one already occupied by Jack.

“ Too late. You should have found it out before. The car is ordered for to-morrow noon. How I wish you were going up, too, Jackie! ”

“ I'll come later, ” he assured her.

“ Of course. I count on it. You're not going to do all the missing. ”

Then there came a little silence, while the bright faces grew suddenly grave. As Day said, Jack would not do all the missing. Both she and Rob would be acutely conscious of the loss of this friend who had grown to fill a brother's place in the home where chance had brought him. A Pullman conductor, whose sturdy, helpful friendliness had won Rob's regard, one stormy winter night, Jack Blanchard had been transplanted from his old routine into the Argyle office, then into the Argyle home. In both places, he had more than made good the promise of his clean brown eyes. The transplanting had occurred but nine months before; already the Argyle home would have felt itself incomplete without Jack Blanchard.

To the outward eye, the two young fellows were totally unlike. Rob was an almost aggressively handsome blond of eighteen, sturdy and full of boyish fun, full, too, of a demonstrative affection for his friends which was as unboylike as it was free from any taint of girlishness. If one stopped to consider the items of his good looks, they summed themselves up in thick yellow hair and long yellow lashes, two dark blue eyes, usually merry, yet now

and then strangely gentle, straight yellow brows, a straight nose and the jolliest, most refined mouth boy ever had. Added to that were a pair of broad shoulders and a little limp — impediment in his walk, Rob called it — left over from a football strain of three or four years before.

Like Janet Leslie, to whom, however, he was a total stranger, Jack Blanchard was an Anglo-Canadian, and well-born. Like Janet, too, his life had known reverses; but, unlike Janet, he had come through his bad times and was fast returning to the edge of his old prosperity. For the rest, military service had given him the erectness, bodily and mental, of the true British soldier. His shoulders were wide, his mouth thin and firm, his brown eyes keen and clean and steady. Otherwise, there was little to distinguish him from his fellows, save an ugly scar across his temple, left there by a burn, now five months old. Strange to say, Jack's friends felt no wish to bewail the scar, partly because it was so much less than they all had feared, partly because it served to remind them that, face to face with a bad emergency, Jack Blanchard had proved himself swift to think, brave to act. To Rob and Day, that ugly scar was a veritable badge of honour. For the rest, Jack was not handsome in the least; but so likable and steady that no one ever questioned his lack of beauty. Older than Rob, a true Briton and hence far less exuberant, far less quick, he atoned for his mental deliberation by his good staying power,

by a reliability which won him first regard, then love.

And Day, sitting there beside him, was fully conscious that her one brother, Rob, was perfect and all-sufficient. Nevertheless, had Fate seen fit to endow her with a second brother, she would have been quick to choose Jack Blanchard for that place. Now, however, as she sat looking steadily up at him, her brave brown eyes were a little overcast.

“It is too bad to break up our trio and go our ways,” she said slowly. “We’ve had such good times together, and nobody knows when we’ll be here like this again.”

“Thanksgiving,” Rob suggested practically, moved by a desire to drive away her sudden gravity.

But Day shook her head.

“Not in the same way. Things will come in between; we’ll have to explain our stories, when we tell them.”

“Sometimes we do now,” Rob made unkindly comment.

This time, Day laughed. With the laugh, she cast aside her moment of depression.

“No matter,” she said. “It will be all right, for we all shall have our own things to talk about. Jack’s will be most interesting. You and I, Rob, will have to make up in learning what we lack in events.”

“What do you suppose Sidney is doing now?” Rob queried idly.

Day made an expressive gesture towards her trunks.

“The same thing that every other freshman is doing, to-night. Packing.”

“Janet, for instance? If so, she'd better hurry up and get it done.”

“Janet! She's there and in the midst of it all, by now. She wrote me that three or four girls would get there, to-night.”

“Jack,” Rob spoke thoughtfully; “I want you to know that little countrywoman of yours. She is made of the right sort of stuff.”

Jack laughed.

“We all are. I thought you'd learned that, long ago. What became of the brother? I remember him, the night he met you at the pier. Wonderfully handsome chap, the sort that, by good rights, ought to die young.”

“He hasn't, or hadn't at last accounts.” Rob turned sideways on the trunk and stretched out his legs at ease. “Didn't you know the fate that fell on Leslie?”

“No.”

“How funny!” Day put in. “I supposed you knew all about all our friends.”

“Mostly, yes. But you haven't said so much about the Leslies till this summer. Even then, it has been a case of Janet and her mother. By Jove, how your father has fairy-godmothered those two people!” And Jack fell silent for a moment. “I

suspect it is a way he has," he resumed. "He generally does think of things. But honestly, Day, it is only by the merest chance that I remembered there was a Leslie man. Where is he?"

"Jack," Rob queried gravely; "do you remember Sir George Porteous?"

"Rather!"

The next instant, both boys burst into a roar of laughter, for it was over the eccentricities of that same Sir George Porteous that their eyes had first met, steady brown and jolly blue, in one look of mutual mirth and understanding.

"You sha'n't laugh," Day protested. "He was a good little dunce, and I liked him. But, all at once, he proved to be heir to more things than he knew how to manage, and he took Ronald Leslie home with him to be his secretary."

"Poor Leslie! That was hard lines," Jack offered comment.

But Rob demurred.

"I'm not so sure of that. It meant much money and a good deal of fun. As for the work, it would be easier because Sir George hasn't brains enough to complicate things, and Ronald will have a comparatively free hand, once he learns his routine. And Sir George isn't bad, as Day says."

"No," Jack offered comment again; "he is merely totally preposterous."

Day rose.

"Oh, dearie me and you!" she said, and again

there came the falling cadence in her gay young voice. "I'd love to stay and gossip; but it is growing very late, and to-morrow —"

Jack rose and, standing beside her, took her hand into his two strong, brown ones.

"Is to-morrow," he said gravely. "We all of us dread it, Day; but there will be gladder ones afterwards. Good night to you, and good dreams!" But his face was sober, as he watched the girl vanish into the next room, and, though afterwards he sat long in the library down-stairs, talking with Rob, the soberness did not entirely wear away.

No trace of soberness was in his face, next noon, however, when, with one white box under his arm and another in his hand, he went striding out the long Grand Central Station and swung himself up to the rear end of the car *Aurora*. Day, who had supposed their farewells had all been said in the dining-room at home, fell upon him with effusion.

"Jack, you dear! Where did you come from?"

"The office. Your father just telephoned me about his being kept in town, and he asked me to go up with you, to see about having the car sent back." Jack delivered himself of the practical detail in all humility; but his eyes gave the lie to his prosaic words. "I had ordered a farewell posy for each of you girls," he added; "but, as long as I was coming, I thought I would make the presentation speeches, myself."

Day, surrounded by her own clan and freed from

the need of saying last farewells, pounced upon her box and drew out the American beauties with a delight which needed no words to make itself known. But Sidney, begirt as she was with other and hugging, chattering Stayres, yet in the midst of all the tumult, felt a quick throbbing of her girlish heart, a quick burning of her eyes, as she buried her face in the great mat of pansies that peeped up at her from her own opened box.

“Thoughts, you know,” Jack reminded her.

And she nodded across at him, although without speaking.

The whole flight of Stayres was at the train, waiting to see Sidney off in all the unwonted glory of a private car. There were six of them, and they ranged from lanky, fifteen-year-old Phyllis down to Bungay, the poet, age six. With them was Mr. Stayre, temporarily lured from his sub-editorial desk, and trying his best to conceal his pride in his tall daughter beneath a veil of admonition concerning her academic behaviour. Mrs. Stayre was there, too, as proud as her husband, but making far less effort to conceal her pride, and, proudest of all, yet almost the least cheerful, was Sidney's grown-up cousin, Wade Winthrop, who made no secret of his open lamentation over her departure. These were gathered on the platform below the steps; in the car, Mrs. Argyle sat and beamed out through the window, while Jack and Rob stood on the steps with the girls, adding their chaff to the merry nonsense and disconsolate, un-

breakable pauses which are the invariable alternations at such a time as this.

And then came a whistle, a final shout from the conductor, a sudden stepping backward on the part of the red-capped porters and of the group of Stayres. The train trembled, quivered in all its snaky length, and then, out from the group of faces, sorrowful, yet smiling bravely, the car *Aurora* went sliding up the track, carrying Sidney Stayre and Day Argyle towards the new life awaiting them.

There was a breathless, wordless instant. Then, out of the heart of the hush, Bungay lifted up his voice, lifted it until the arching girders overhead quaked with the sound, —

“There ’peared a bear
Without a hair.

Berember that, Sidney, and then you won’t get homesick.”

“But it isn’t exactly a case for homesickness,” Day said, the next day, as she and Rob turned from their final glimpse of the south-bound *Aurora* and started to walk back up town once more. “There is too much to do, too many things to get used to, all at once. It seemed as if I couldn’t have that car go away; and yet — I didn’t want to go back in it. Do you think I’m very horrid, Rob?”

“Very,” Rob assured her. “It is a shame they couldn’t stay a little longer.”

Day shook her head.

"No; not now," she said. "It was better that they went. As long as they were here, I couldn't settle down; and that's what I was sent here for, to settle down and get the very best of it."

"Hm!" Rob made thoughtful comment. "Does that same line of reasoning apply to my departure? If so, I'd best get out, to-night."

Regardless of a group of upper-class girls who swung past them, suitcase in hand, Day turned and clutched Rob's arm.

"Rob, I shall die, when you go!" she exclaimed vehemently.

Startled, Rob stared down at his sister, heedless of the covert glances of approval cast upon him by the passing group.

"Day! What's the matter? Don't you like it?"

Day's answering laugh was a bit hysterical.

"Yes, I adore it, — now. When you go — I'm not so sure."

"Let's come and take a walk, Day. Never mind Sidney; she'll have her chance later; and this is my turn," he said as, facing about, he led the way under the low bridge of tracks and along the wide street beyond, a street elm-arched and bordered with the houses of old colonial days. When they were entirely away from the little crowd that clustered near the station, "Day, is it going to be lonely for you here?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"Not in time. Not when I get used to it. I don't

mind any of it but you, Rob. I have been trying to get used to the idea of that, and I thought I had; but I haven't. Ever since we were in Quebec, we've been together, all the time, done things together, thought things together, and —" she laughed a little forlornly; "and half the pair of tongs finds it hard to get a grip on things, all by herself."

"I know, Day; I hate it, myself. But there will be Sundays and holidays, and it's not so far across to Boston," he suggested cheerily.

"Miles and miles and miles," she answered. "I am trying not to be a baby, Rob; but now and then it comes over me like a great wave, and it makes me sick in here." She laid her hand on her throat. "Then I try to forget, and I pretend that you are here to stay."

They had passed under all the elms by now, and were standing at the edge of the broad meadows, guarded at the south by the twin ranges of low mountain. With his back to the mountains, however, and his blue eyes fixed on the little town nestled among the eastern hills, Rob made his supreme offer of renunciation.

"Day," he said slowly; "it's not too late yet, and Dad would let me change, I know. If you'd really rather, I can give up Harvard and go over there."

Turning, Day stared up into his earnest face with eyes which slowly lost their melancholy and grew bright with fun. Then, for the bank above them sheltered them from prying eyes, Day snuggled her

face against her brother's shoulder and went off into a fit of laughter all the more intense because it came so close upon the tears.

"Oh, Rob, you darling!" she gasped. "How you must love me, to be willing even to suggest such an awful thing! I'd rather have you in Harvard, a thousand times over, than to have you over there, even if I could see you, every single day. Imagine you —!" Her laugh broke off her speech. Then, when the laugh had ended, "Come," she said; "we really and truly must go back to Sidney."

Sidney, meanwhile, left to herself, was philosophically amusing herself by trying to decide certain momentous questions regarding bureau drawers, and whether it would be more disastrous to hang her best frocks in the congested regions at the back of the closet, or to crowd past them in the daily search for things beyond. To her entered Janet, after the second knock made needful by Sidney's deep absorption in her problems.

"Where is Day?" Janet queried, as she cast herself down upon the window seat which as yet was guiltless of the upholsterer's art.

"Seeing her mother off."

"Still?" Janet raised her brows. "I thought they went at three-forty, and it's five now."

"Five?" Sidney cast a startled glance down at her gown, crushed by the strenuous labours of the day. "And look at me! What time is dinner?"

"Six. Mother sent me up to tell Day to have Rob

stay here. The dining-room isn't full yet, and she wants him while she can have him. Isn't he fine? So big and straight, and he seems so well, too."

"He has been well, ever since last Christmas. He had a fall then that laid him up for a few weeks. Do you know," as she spoke, Sidney was unfastening her blouse with nimble, dusty fingers; "I can't realize at all that you knew him before I did."

Janet laughed, bringing into view a dimple beside her cheek.

"But I did. Rob was our friend, before he was yours, and we claim him."

"Who is that you're claiming? Rob?" Day's voice demanded from the threshold. "Well, you just can't have him, Janet, for he's mine, all mine."

Janet laughed again.

"How many do you want, Day? I heard you laying the same wholesale claim to Mr. Blanchard, only last night."

Day crossed the floor, drew the hatpins from her hat and laid the hat down on the table. Then she faced about.

"Who has a better right?" she asked coolly. Then she flung down the gauntlet. "I don't know about Jack Blanchard," she remarked; "but I do know this: as far as Rob Argyle is concerned, if either one of you can get in ahead of me, you're welcome." Then, her say said and her defiance cast at Fate, she proceeded to array herself for dinner.

CHAPTER THREE

“ I HAVE seen the prettiest girl I ever saw in all my life!” With a bang, Sidney cast her books down on the window seat, and cast herself down beside them.

Janet, coiled up by the other window and wielding the dictionary for the joint translation being made by herself and Day, looked up with a patient boredom so obvious as to be slightly overdone.

“ How many does that make, Sidney?” she scoffed.

Sidney’s answer was crushing in its brevity.

“ I’m not Day,” she said.

“ Fortunately,” that young woman interposed.

“ The college couldn’t hold a pair of us. What were you saying, Sidney?”

“ That I have seen the prettiest girl in college.”

“ Doubted,” Day said serenely. “ However, go on. Who is she?”

“ How should I know?”

“ Where is she?”

“ Sitting on the gym floor, or at least, she was, watching us play basket ball.”

“ Oh,” Janet made dry comment. “ So that was it? And she applauded?”

“ More than that. She spoke to me,” Sidney announced.

“ Thrilling! What did the goddess say? ”

“ She is a goddess, anyway,” Sidney said loyally. Day interposed.

“ Oh, don't! That's local slang, and I have always said and vowed, and Rob has, too, that we wouldn't be the sort of freshmen that accumulated a vocabulary, inside of a week.”

“ It's ten days since we came, and *goddess* is Virgilian,” Sidney corrected literally.

But Janet offered cross correction, as became one whose Virgil cram was an affair of only the preceding summer.

“ Virgil's goddess appeared by her gait; this one was sitting on the floor. Fancy Venus watching basket ball, with her feet tucked under her! But what did the goddess say, Sidney? ”

Sidney laughed.

“ I feel rather coy about repeating it; it was so very personal,” she confessed.

Day looked up from her book.

“ Go on and tell us, Sidney,” she urged.

Sidney yielded to the urging.

“ As nearly as I can quote her words, she said, ‘ For goodness' sake, child, won't you ever learn to keep inside those lines! ’ Of course, the words weren't the main thing, though.”

“ If I had been a freshman in your place,” Day remarked sententiously; “ I should have rather felt

they were. However, I'm not a budding athlete, and I don't know the lingo. For all I can say, those might have been terms of the highest praise."

Sidney ruffled her hair, already loosened by two hours' hard play; then she clasped her hands at the back of her head.

"High enough for me," she said contentedly. "I was the only girl of the class she spoke to, and that was something. Then, when I was coming out across the back campus, I met her again, and she bowed to me as sweetly as could be."

"Some sophomore, most likely."

"No; a junior at the very least, and such a pretty one."

"What was she like?" Janet queried. "Day loves details, and it may keep her from mourning Rob's untimely departure."

Day allowed her book to slide to the floor, and glanced at her watch.

"Never!" she said firmly. "I shall mourn till the end of time. You haven't a brother —"

"Three!"

"I should like to know why not!"

The duet was full of protest, albeit brief. Quite unmoved, Day went on, —

"Like mine, I was about to say. I shall never smile without him. Still, the poor dear must be in Boston by now, and it is time I began to rally and take a little notice. What was she like, Sidney?"

“ Pretty, I said,” Sidney made vague reply; “ and she wore blue linen clothes and brown shoes.”

Day rose, with a little groan of ill-suppressed impatience.

“ Isn't that exactly Sidney?” she protested. “ Only last winter, I asked her about some notable or other her father had brought home to dinner, an English novelist; and all I could get out of her was ‘ She has a funny nose.’ Sidney, I'd advise you to forsake basket ball and take to descriptive writing. There's more chance for improvement there.”

“ Possibly,” Sidney made serene response. “ Still, I mustn't be selfish in my aims, and think only of my own improvement. All in its own good time. Meanwhile, I am thinking of the best good of the freshman team.”

Two days later, they were once more gathered in the great front room which already had been established as the favourite meeting-ground of the trio. In reality, the room belonged to Day and Sidney; but Janet, who nominally inhabited her mother's room in the exact centre of the house, actually spent the largest part of her time in the side-window seat where she could study or talk with the others as she chose and as the conversation waxed interesting or lapsed into dullness.

It was Day who had arranged this constant retreat for Janet. Her room was huge, the great “ front chamber ” of an old colonial house. It was

also quiet in comparison with the sanctum of Mrs. Leslie, which the girls were wont to invade ruthlessly and at all hours in search of the sympathy, advice, consolation, congratulation, or even admonition which the past week had taught them to expect. It was charming for the girls; it must be more or less satisfactory to Mrs. Leslie of whose forebodings Day, by way of her mother, had gained more than an inkling. Nevertheless, it could not fail to be more or less distracting, even to a girl with the concentration of Janet Leslie. Moreover, Day, who had certain perceptions beyond her years and who had been promptly lifted to an influential position by common consent of the other girls in the house, was swift to see that among those girls it would be fatal to the influence of Mrs. Leslie and to the popularity of Janet to have Janet, always and perforce, on hand at all these little visits to her mother's room. At best, it would be a disadvantage to Janet to be the daughter of the house. She would need to walk most circumspectly in all her ways. Moreover and according to her outspoken custom, Janet had placidly announced to all listeners that she had come to Smith to work, not to play; and Day, like a sensible young person, held to the belief that a modicum of play was good for any freshman, however earnest. Janet was a darling, earnest and honest as a girl could be; yet the end of the first week had found her set apart as an absolute misfit. Day, grasping the fact, yet powerless to prevent it, had done what she could to

mitigate the situation by accounting for it on the score of Janet's foreignness. She preached this doctrine up and down the house, preached it with a grave face which gave the lie to her own secret amusement over the girls' failure to realize that dainty, sympathetic Mrs. Leslie, fully as foreign as her daughter, was already the plaything and yet the dominating spirit of the entire household.

Facts were facts, however. All Day could do was to rescue Janet from the possible imputation of being under foot, and to give her a constant and prominent place in the room which was bidding fair to be the social and political centre of the house. Day herself set down its location and its size as the sole causes of that prominence. She was too busy just then in getting herself adjusted to the new place and people, to the strange routine and unfamiliar aims, to pay any especial attention to herself. The girls dropped into her room and out again, called for her to go to walk, asked her to play tennis at the Allen Field. Day laid it all to the fact that her door was at the head of the stairs and nearly always open. They took her as a matter of course, an incident in their path, just as they took the stairs and the great brass knocker on the outer door. She was there; it was easier for them to take her in than not. Her bi-weekly letters to Rob and her weekly ones to Jack held not the slightest word of her growing popularity. Jack, all unaccustomed to American college ways, read the letters in the spirit in which they had been

written. Rob, however, sprawling on his window seat among just such scenes as Day described, chuckled to himself as he read of the frequent caucuses which took place in his sister's room, chuckled to himself, too, at Day's frank comments in regard to Janet Leslie.

"Stiff-backed little sinner!" he said to himself. "She's Ronald all over again. Neither one of them has a bit of their mother's adaptability. Still, Ronald mellowed up a bit under our American influence; and Janet may follow his example and get demoralized in time. Anyhow, I'll bet on Day's grit to carry her through." Then, without stirring otherwise, he reached out for ink and paper, and fell to discussing the whole situation with Jack Blanchard.

It had been entirely the doing of Day herself, her occupation of the great front room at Mrs. Leslie's. The Argyle plans had been made so far in advance that Day's application for a campus room had followed hard upon the heels of her christening. Accordingly, she had been set down for a good-sized room in the Wallace House when, three months before college opened, she announced her change of plan.

"Daddy," she said abruptly, as she appeared in the doorway of his office, one day in early July; "are you too busy to talk to me?"

Mr. Argyle was busy, very busy. Nevertheless, —

"What now, Day?" he asked, as he pushed his work aside.

Day drew up a chair, seated herself and plumped both elbows on the corner of the desk at which were hatched the plans that ruled a railway traffic stretching from sea to sea.

"I have many things to say," she observed calmly.

Mr. Argyle's blue eyes twinkled, as he leaned back in his revolving chair and poked his fists into the side pockets of his coat. Viewed in that mood, he was curiously like his son, curiously little more mature.

"You generally have, Day," he assured her.

"How unkind, Daddy! But I am in earnest now, for it is all about college. Daddy, I think I won't go into the Wallace, after all."

The fists came out of the pockets, and Mr. Argyle sat up.

"Day! Why not?"

"Because I think I'd rather, just for the first year, go to Mrs. Leslie's."

"But why? You've always wanted to be on the campus."

"I know. But things are different now. Listen, Daddy. I really am not fitty about it; I have been thinking it all over for weeks and weeks, trying to decide. I did decide, more than a week ago, and I have been waiting ever since, to make sure I didn't change my mind. Now that I am sure, I think it is time I told you. There will be three more years for me to be on the campus. For this one year, I'd like to try living off it. Then I shall see all sides. And, besides that, in a campus house, there wouldn't be

so many freshmen; Mrs. Leslie will have nothing else, and the Registrar herself told you she would see to it that Mrs. Leslie had only the best sort. I'd rather be with the pick of my own class than with a mixture of the others."

"You young snob!" her father commented, in some amusement at her reasoning, although, even now, he realized that Day's true reasons had not yet appeared.

"No, Daddy; that's not a bit fair!" she protested.

"No," he admitted honestly; "it isn't."

Bending over, she patted his cuff. Then, —

"But it makes it harder for me to say what was coming next," she said slowly.

"Out with it, Day."

Her cheeks grew scarlet.

"It's Mrs. Leslie. Everybody is bound to find out I knew her before, knew her and Janet well. If I don't go into her house, it will look as if I thought it wasn't good enough for me."

"Or she thought you weren't good enough for it," her father offered unkind amendment.

Day laughed.

"I hadn't thought of that," she said. "There's something in it, too. Still, on the other hand, there is also something in my ground. I knew Mrs. Leslie in her old home; I can go into her house and try to make things run smoothly. I can do it, for I know both sides, the Canadian and the American girl. What is more," she laughed again; "I don't usually

eat with my knife and I have pretty clothes. With a crowd of girls, both things are bound to count."

"Possibly," her father assented, in some amusement. "What next?"

"Sidney," Day made unexpected answer.

"What! What has she got to do with it?"

"Everything. Her application hasn't been in long enough to give her a campus room, this year. You know how dear the good off-campus houses are. Sidney never could afford the sort of place where she belongs. A girl like Sidney Stayre mustn't be buried in some little hole."

"Cream always rises," her father reminded her.

However, Day was ready for him.

"Yes; but it rises better in a pan than in a bottle. Sidney needs space. And you ought to remember that four years is all the time she has in all, and that four years isn't so very long a time. We can't afford to throw one of them away."

"We?"

"Yes. You."

"What am I doing about it?"

Day gripped the desk afresh with both her elbows and dropped her chin upon her clasped hands. She spoke low, and with her eyes upon a corner of the desk.

"Rob and I have talked it over, Daddy; and we agree. I'm willing to go without some things, this summer, to make up for it. I want you to take a good, big room at Mrs. Leslie's, and then have Sidney

share it with me. Not for nothing; she never would accept that, never in this world. But for what she would have to pay for a littler room in a side street. You can get around it with the Stayres. Tell them you're afraid the Leslie house won't be full. Tell them you don't want me to room alone, nor with a girl you've never seen. Tell them that Sidney is older, and you want her to look out for me for fear I get into mischief. Tell them anything you like, as long as you get your way. You'll get your money's worth out of it, Daddy." Again she faced him, and her laugh was merry, mocking. "You have always said, all this last year, that Sidney was the most helpful friend I've ever had. Think of our being room-mates, and of the good it's bound to do me in all sorts of ways!"

"Day, you're a — schemer!" her father said; but his eyes made substitution of another word.

Nevertheless, Day had her way.

And now, with the term already twelve days old, Janet and Sidney and Day were settled in the great front room where it would have been hard for an outsider to point out the rightful owner. The dressing bell had rung for dinner, and its clamour had produced a scattering among the group clustered, three-deep, on all the chairs. Day answered the last departing word thrown back from the hall outside; then she rose and switched on the lights. Then she faced back to Sidney.

"Now I will tell you," she said.

“ Tell me what? ”

“ The news I have gleaned for you.”

“ M-m-m.” Then Sidney took the pins from her mouth and slipped off her all-day gown. “ What was that? ”

“ Hear her, Janet! Is this a proper curiosity to show me? Listen, Sidney, and let your hair alone till I tell you. I have found out the name of your goddess.”

Sidney turned back to the mirror and once more raised her brush.

“ Have you? ” she said indifferently. “ How do you know? ”

“ Helen Pope was there and saw her. She heard what she said to you, and told me about it. Helen didn't think she was especially goddess-y; but she promised to find out who she was.”

“ And did? ” Sidney's tone was still indifferent.

“ Yes, to-day. I couldn't wait to tell you; but I was bound I wouldn't say a single word until the crowd had gone. Now guess! ”

“ How can I? Who is she, Day? ” The brush rose and fell in long, even strokes across the thick brown hair.

Day waited until, by very force of the prolonged pause, she had established the fact of Sidney's attention and her own consequent importance. Then she said, with slow distinctness, —

“ Merely the captain of the junior basket ball team.”

The brush flew across the room, and Sidney, catching the astonished Janet by the shoulders, whirled her away in a mad waltz. When they both were breathless, Sidney relaxed her hold and sank down on the edge of the nearest bed, which also chanced to hold Day's hat.

"The Fates be praised!" she said, with a solemnity and vagueness which the Delphic oracle might have envied. "I'll make it now, if it kills me. To paraphrase the Forty-Niner: basket ball, or bust!"

CHAPTER FOUR

“AFTER all,” Sidney said thoughtfully; “I believe I like the straight-along living better than I do the events. The events are fun, of course; but everybody makes such a fuss about having a good time that the good time loses half its point. I prefer things that do themselves.”

“This, for instance?” Janet queried.

Lifting herself upon her elbow, Sidney stared across at the corner whence the doleful voice had come. The corner was filled by a bed whose prosaic outlines were concealed by a frilly chintz cover all yellow roses and green leaves, and a great heap of yellow and green chintz pillows. In the midst of the pillows, curled up into a small black bundle was Janet. The bed was Day’s; but Janet felt herself in full possession, since Day, in partnership with five other freshmen, was giving a dinner at the Copper Kettle to the heroine of the present hour. Janet had watched her go, a vision of fluffy white beneath a long white coat, and Janet, watching, had given tongue to her disapproval.

“You look as if you were starting for a citadel ball,” she said a little tartly.

Day, already in the hall with the door closed be-

hind her, was too late to resent the words. To Sidney, the words meant little; the tone had stood for much.

"I should like to know why?" she questioned, also tartly.

"All that finery."

"What is the matter with it?"

"Unsuitable, just for a school-girl dinner."

"The other girls will wear the same sort of things."

"What of it, as long as it's entirely out of place?"

"But it is in place," Sidney argued, not without a certain logic on her side. "It is one of the ways here; the girls all do it."

Janet's mouth shut to a hard little line.

"Let them. There is no sense in it, though."

"You must admit that it is pretty."

"Overdress is never pretty."

Sidney had spent but one short summer upon Canadian soil. Nevertheless, she had been swift to learn how far the American girl is wont to outclass her northern sisters in the mere matter of dress; she also knew that the Smith College girls were second to none in that unessential, but artistic, detail. More than all, however, she realized in the depths of her girlish mind how much Day was doing, not only for herself, but for Janet, to lead them with her into the very heart and centre of the now rapidly organizing freshman class. It would have shocked all Sidney's sense of decorum to put this fact into words for Janet's edification. None the less, she resented Janet's criticism of Day at any point.

Unlike Day Argyle, moreover, Sidney had no notion of a certain streak of perverse antagonism which cut across the finer grain of Janet's character. Accordingly, she committed the fatal error of addressing Janet from the pedestal of her two extra years of age.

"No matter," she said carelessly. "Let's not fight about it any more."

"I'm not fighting," Janet answered shortly.

Then silence fell upon the room, bright with gay chintz and old white panellings and picture-spotted walls. Across the room and above the desk which held Day's writing things, hung her father's parting gift, a portrait of Rob, small, but the work of an artist of established fame. Now, in the silence, both girls turned their eyes towards the pictured face they knew so well, both with the selfsame girlish wish that Rob were there to talk to them, instead of this uncomprehending comrade. The pictured blue eyes were so true and honest, the lips smiling out above the fur collar of his winter coat were so jolly, yet so steady. It was so that they had always known him; they both were conscious of a little homesick twinge of longing for the boy comrade they had liked so well. Janet's twinge, however, had its throb of bitterness. It was in that same fur-lined coat and otter cap that she had found Rob, one winter day, in the old Historical Library at home. It was with just that merry, mocking smile upon his lips that he had blundered along the first steps

leading to a contest which had brought to him immediate disaster, and had nearly proved the shipwreck of all their pleasant winter. And her mood, that day, had been akin to the one resting upon her now. Confronted by the memory of that stormy day and all its ugly consequences, Janet shut her teeth and resolved to hold herself aloof from all discussion.

To be sure, Sidney deserved to be the object of much discussion. Because she was a little older, and happened to be in her own room; because she happened to be the roommate of Day Argyle, and not the daughter of the woman who took them both to board — for, in moods like this, Janet spared neither self, nor kith, nor kin — because of these things, Sidney had no right to speak to her in that toplofty fashion. Janet, once her temper warmed, crackled like a little coal. She took no heed of the fact that Sidney's tone was the unconscious echo of the one used to her own array of lesser Stayres. She merely lay quite still and glowered at the portrait which smiled back at her in Rob's accustomed friendly fashion.

At length, Sidney rose with a little shiver, crossed the room and closed the window, for it was late October now, the season of the falling leaf, and the night was crispy cool. Moreover, apart from the coolness, Sidney was possessed of a wholly human wish that the sudden motion on her part might arouse her glum guest to take her departure. With that wish in mind, Sidney dawdled about the room for a minute

or two. Then, as Janet continued to lie still and glower, she picked up her geometry and sat down to prepare the next day's lesson.

An hour later, the silence was still unbroken, save for an occasional impatient wriggle on the part of Janet, the occasional fluttering of one of Sidney's leaves. Then, moved by a sudden consciousness that, after all, Janet was a guest, a sudden realization of the duties imposed by hospitality, Sidney broke the silence.

"Just think!" she observed, recurring to her former theme, as being safely impersonal. "When I came here, Freshman Frolic and Mountain Day seemed to me the main events of the year; now they both are over, and I don't seem to have thought so very much about them."

Janet answered, answered again, and yet again. However, it was plain that her mood touched that of Sidney at no point. None the less, it was only after Sidney's dozenth ineffectual attempt at conversation that her patience gave way, and she turned on Janet a little shortly.

"What in the world is the matter, Janet Leslie? Don't you like it here; or what?"

"Well enough. I don't consider it so very remarkable, though."

"Why not?"

Janet's laugh was irritating.

"Because I happen to be made that way, I suppose."

After her downright fashion, and because, during

the one short summer of their acquaintance, she had had no experience of Janet's contradictory moods, Sidney cast aside her book and set herself in earnest at the task of finding out the cause of Janet's disaffection.

"What don't you like: the place or the people?" she demanded.

"Oh, the place is well enough," Janet admitted grudgingly.

"It's the people, then. What is the trouble with them?" Sidney's second demand held a note of exasperation.

"How do you know the trouble isn't with me?" Janet asked, in a tone meant to imply disdainful rebuke.

"I don't," Sidney responded, with a bluntness which completely took the wind from Janet's sails.

Janet lapsed into an aggrieved silence, and, after a moment, Sidney went on, —

"What is the trouble, anyway, Janet?"

Janet gave a little kick at the fat green and yellow cushion on the other end of the couch.

"Nothing; only I'm sick of being let alone."

"Whose fault is it?" Sidney asked shortly, for her healthy girlish optimism was of the species that looks upon the doughnut, and she had scanty patience with Janet's persistent contemplation of the hole.

"Everybody's." Again Janet's pump smote the green and yellow pillow.

During all her life, Sidney had held to the doctrine

that frankness, perfect and entire, was the sole line of argument for her to take. She took it now.

“ Now look here, Janet Leslie,” she burst out with a suddenness which fairly took away Janet’s breath; “ it is a good deal of it your own fault. You came here, as we all did, a stranger. You didn’t meet the girls half way; you waited for them to come three quarters, and, of course, they wouldn’t. You treat the faculty the same way. You seem to think the whole of Smith College is going to stop and hold out its hands and say, ‘ Why, here is that dear little Janet Leslie. How glad we are to see you!’ But colleges don’t say that, nor people, either. They bow and smile, and then they wait to see whether you are going to smile back.”

“ We Canadians don’t do that sort of thing,” Janet said a little resentfully, as Sidney paused for breath.

“ Some of you Canadians do, then. Look at your mother, here five weeks, and the darling of the whole house. Every freshman that isn’t in this house envies the lot of us that are; and it is your mother that has done it. She was *Mother Leslie* to everybody, inside of twenty-four hours; and we’d rather be lectured by her than hugged by the President himself. She is one Canadian. Jack Blanchard is another. Jack is a perfect mountain of dignity and self-respect; but it never gets under his feet and trips him up, when he has a chance to be nice to people.”

“ I am nice to people,” Janet objected.

“ Nice; but not very much so,” Sidney told her flatly. “ You merely accept the girls with resignation; that’s about all. You mourn because you aren’t popular; but it’s chiefly your own fault.”

Janet lifted her chin.

“ I don’t run about, hunting popularity,” she said, and there was an aggressive accent on the pronoun.

“ Does that mean me? For I don’t.”

“ What about the basket ball team? ”

Then Janet’s eyes blazed, for Sidney burst out laughing.

“ Good gracious, child, is that the bee in your bonnet? ” she asked. “ Of course, I want to make the team. It’s the only thing I can do well; I love the game, and I’ve worked for the team with all my might, and I hope I’ll make it, too. What’s the harm, so long as I make it by straight, hard work, and not by pulling any wires? ”

Janet shifted her ground.

“ Then look at Day, running for office! ”

However, Sidney, though willing to rise in her own defence, scorned to do as much for Day, for Day who, to Sidney’s loyal eyes, stood head and shoulders above the need of any defence.

“ I think we will leave Day out of the discussion,” she said, with an air of finality which, albeit quiet, yet held its flavour of rebuke.

Janet, resenting the rebuke, delivered counter rebuke.

“ How arrogant you are, Sidney! Paul used to

say so, down at Grande Rivière, and I can't see that you have changed at all."

Sidney laughed carelessly.

"Paul said *bossy*, not *arrogant*," she corrected.

"Yes; but I shouldn't use such words. But why should we leave Day out of the discussion?" Janet persisted.

Sidney kept her temper with an effort. Janet was manifestly trying to render herself unpleasant. Moreover, to Sidney's mind, she was succeeding in a fashion beyond her wildest hopes.

"Janet, what is the matter with you, nowadays?" she asked abruptly. "You never used to be like this, when we were down at Grande Rivière."

"Like what?"

"Critical and — cranky."

Janet digested the pill as best she could. Then, —

"I never had things to irritate me there."

"What's the matter here?"

"Things are different."

"How?"

"In Quebec, I was as good as anybody."

"Well, aren't you here?"

To anybody but a girl, Janet's reply would have appeared discursive.

"Look at Day's clothes!" she said.

Sidney understood; yet it suited her, just then, to appear uncomprehending.

"Yes, they're lovely. What about them?"

"I can't have clothes like that."

“ Neither can I. That doesn't prevent my appreciating Day's, though.”

Janet sat up and hurled her next question at Sidney with all the force of a deadly projectile.

“ What would Day be without her clothes? ”

“ Undressed,” Sidney answered, with unexpected flippancy. Then, crossing the room, she sat down on the edge of the heap of pillows. “ See here, Janet,” she said; “ I said we'd leave Day out of the discussion. It didn't seem to me quite decent, after all she has done for us, for the two of us to be talking her over, behind her back.”

“ I'm as good as Day,” Janet protested irritably.

“ No,” Sidney made flat response; “ you aren't. There aren't so many like her. Look at the way she is coming into recognition among the class. Wait till next Saturday's class meeting, and see what happens then. Day Argyle is booked for office, and she hasn't lifted a finger to bring it on herself, either.”

“ It's just because she has such crowds of clothes,” Janet sniffed.

“ It is not. As it happens, she has four gowns to our one, and they are four times as good; but, if we had the gowns and she had a gingham pinafore, she'd be Day Argyle, just the same. Besides, that sort of thing doesn't count here. Look at Alice Broderick. She is one of the most popular seniors this year; she hasn't a cent to her name, never saw a tailor and has washed dishes in the laboratory to pay for her college course. She is in everything that

stirs, the best invitation house, and all the rest of it. As long as she is Alice Broderick, nobody cares whether she wears satin or sacking. It's so with Day. Sooner or later, you'll find it out. Keep still, though, for here she comes, and I don't care to have her know how we've been talking her over. Good night." And, with surpassing deftness, Sidney steered Janet from the room, just as Day halted on the stairs to call a last good night to the group below.

Day came in, beaming, alert and elate. The dinner had been of her own planning; it had also been a thorough-going success, and the heroine had been loud in her expressions of appreciation. Day alternately sang to herself and imparted bits of information to Sidney, while she took out pins and untied ribbons and unclasped beads. Then, as she backed up to Sidney to be unhooked, she made an abrupt change of theme.

"What was the matter with Janet?" she asked.

"Nothing. Why?"

Day screwed her head about and peered over her shoulder into the place where Sidney's eyes should have been. Sidney's head was bent, however, her eyes intent upon a refractory hook which seemed loath to let go.

"I thought she looked as if she had been crying."

"Janet! Does she ever cry?" Sidney demanded mendaciously.

"I've seen her. So has Rob. And she stalked past me like *Banquo's* ghost."

“Perhaps she had something on her mind.” Again Sidney spoke carelessly, evasively, less from a desire to shield Janet from a charge of emotionalism than from a sturdy resolve to keep from Day the material of their late talk.

However, Day had her theories, for she knew Janet of old. It was one thing to spend a country summer in the next house; it was quite another matter to winter with her under the same roof, especially in a climate where the winter was nine months long. Sidney thought she knew Janet; Day really did know her, know her at her best and at her worst. And it was an honest, girlish desire to keep that knowledge away from her classmates which led Day, bending down to pull out her bed-box, to observe, —

“Oh, dearie me! I do hope and pray she isn’t going into one of her cranky fits.”

CHAPTER FIVE

“ MOTHER LESLIE, may I come in? ”

“ Who is it? Sidney? Yes, dear; of course.” Mrs. Leslie smiled a welcome, and drew forward the little white rocking chair which the girls were wont to name the stool of repentance.

Sidney, a rain-soaked tam o’shanter in one hand, a pile of books in the other, cast herself down into the white chair and stared reproachfully at her feet.

“ Really, I’m too muddy to come in here,” she said apologetically, as result of her reproachful staring.

“ To-morrow is sweeping day, and the rug will dry.” Mrs. Leslie picked up her sewing. “ What a pretty tam, Sidney! ”

Sidney laughed.

“ It’s Day’s; the Argyle tartan, you know. I couldn’t find mine, and it was too wet to go bare-headed, so I helped myself to this,” she explained.

Mrs. Leslie’s frown was all for the end of silk which balked at the eye of her needle. When it had finally entered, she smiled at Sidney.

“ I wonder if it is an American trick for girls to put their clothes into one common fund,” she said.

“ No; it’s merely a local custom. At home, I’d

flay Phyllis — that's my sister — if she touched my gowns. Up here, we none of us care. Last Sunday, Day and Amy Pope changed everything, frocks and hats and coats and all, and went off to church together. We nearly went into a fit, when we saw them come in; but they had the worst of it, for the minister preached on extravagance in dress, and they didn't know where to look. I could wear Day's clothes, half the time. She keeps offering them; but I hate to, hers are so much better than mine. I can't seem to make her understand why I won't; and she thinks it is all great fun, the way the girls change about. She has on the blouse of my pongee gown now. Where's Janet? ”

“ She said she was going over to the library to study.”

“ In this pour? Why didn't she go to our room? ”

Mrs. Leslie's smile was free from any sting.

“ For the same reason you gave about Day's clothes, perhaps.”

“ What do you mean? ” Sidney looked up sharply.

“ That the changing about is all on one side.”

“ That's nonsense. Besides, I'm here.”

“ Yes. But — ”

Sidney interrupted.

“ Did Janet say that? ”

It would have taken a keener ear than that of Sidney to make out the little sigh which prefaced Mrs. Leslie's next words.

“ Sidney dear, when you have lived with Janet

as long as I have, you will know she doesn't say things."

"No." Sidney rocked violently for a minute or two. "But she thinks them, just the same."

There was another silence which lasted until Mrs. Leslie had threaded a second needle, then a third. At length Sidney spoke again.

"It's an awful responsibility to be a freshman," she sighed.

Instantly Mrs. Leslie laid aside her sewing, with the little air of respectful attention which had gone so far in winning for her the loyalty of the girls.

"What now, dear child?"

"All sorts of things; but nothing especial. I think I am cross and worried; that is all."

Mrs. Leslie waited. She had known Sidney of old, and the renewed observations taken during the past six weeks had only gone to confirm her earlier judgment. Without something that she desired to say, something that she deemed of real importance, Sidney, in her present water-soaked condition, would not have sat and rocked the little white chair until its aged joints creaked with the motion. Nevertheless, not only had Mrs. Leslie brought up two daughters; she had been a girl herself, and girlhood is girlhood, after all, whether it be spent north or south of the frontier. Accordingly, she waited.

"It would be quite enough for the first year, I suspect, if we didn't do a thing but get used to the place," Sidney observed at length.

Again she fell to rocking with a vigour which betokened the fact that she neither wished nor expected an answer. Then she interrupted her rocking to speak once more.

“ There’s an immense amount of nonsense talked at us, before we come to college,” she went on thoughtfully. “ It is fashionable to assure us we must be on our guard against the new temptations that lurk on every hand. That’s all twaddle. There’s no more temptation here than at home. In some ways, there isn’t as much; and the girls take it out of one more than one’s own family can, or dare, do. What they’d better do is to let the temptations take care of themselves, and give us a little idea how to get our bearings among so many new girls and in a life that is practically all routine. Freshman year is a hard year, Mrs. Leslie.”

“ Harder than the others? ”

Sidney nodded, with the absolute conviction of her who sees but one side of the question.

“ Yes, for there are more things to worry one, more things to take our minds. The classes alone ought to do it. They are supposed to be the main thing — that is, the faculty seem to suppose so; we girls don’t. But we have to get through them, some way or other, and we aren’t all natural grinds, like Janet. Then we have to learn the ropes, and there are so many of them. I know I shall catch my toes in some new one, the very day I walk up to get my degree. All that is bad enough, enough to cockle

one's brain into all sorts of convolutions. But the thing I mind most is finding out just where to draw my own chalk-line."

"Chalk-line?" After all said and done, Mrs. Leslie was British. Being British, she could never quite keep pace with American metaphors.

"Yes, the chalk-line I draw to walk by," Sidney explained, with something as near impatience as she could ever show to gentle Mrs. Leslie. "It's almost impossible to do it here, to find the exact middle between running after popularity and sticking out your chin at the people you meet. It isn't necessary to be rampant, just because you're independent."

This time, Mrs. Leslie felt she could cope with the question.

"Who is rampant, Sidney?"

"Nobody; that's just the trouble. They want her to be. And that's another trouble. It's her way, the way she always has had. And none of the girls know it. They seem to think we all come here with a brand-new set of ways put on for the occasion. Because a girl is nice to people, they appear to regard it as a trap to catch votes, not a habit she was accustomed to use at home. For the average freshman intellect, a girl doesn't have any habits, or any past. She comes here, pop! brand-new and ready-made, just in time to catch the train, guaranteed to be adaptable to every college need." And Sidney's exasperation ended in a giggle at her own phraseology.

Mrs. Leslie's laugh echoed that of Sidney.

“ I’m afraid it is true, Sidney; only it hadn’t occurred to me to put it in just that way before. But who is She? ”

“ She? ” Sidney echoed blankly.

“ The case in point. There always is a case in point, you know. ”

Sidney flushed hotly. To do her justice, she had fully meant to argue out the case on its impersonal merits. She hesitated. Then, —

“ I hate to gossip, Mrs. Leslie. You know that. I hope you knew it at Grande Rivière. However, now you ask, it’s — it’s Day. ”

“ Day? ” Mrs. Leslie looked up in surprise. “ What has Day done? ”

“ Nothing at all. Day wouldn’t, ” Sidney said indignantly. “ Besides, do you suppose I would tell of it, if she had? ” The chair came to a halt so sudden that the books slid out of Sidney’s lap to the floor.

She let them lie.

“ Day hasn’t done a thing, ” she iterated. “ It is what people are doing to her. ”

“ What’s that? ”

“ Saying things. It’s all politics, and it makes me so cross. ” Sidney rose and walked to the window, where she stood drumming on the pane. Suddenly she faced about and spoke with the boylike directness natural to her at times. “ It is this, Mother Leslie. I stopped in at the Hatfield, on my way home, went up to Nan Withrow’s room. It was full of freshmen,

girls I never saw before, and they all were discussing class elections. You know, after being put off and put off and put off, they are to come, next Saturday. Well, after a while, Nan was called down to the telephone, and she was gone ever so long. She was hardly out of the room, when they began talking about Day, about her being up for president. It was all so sudden, I couldn't stop it, couldn't head them off. They said she would never have had the nomination, if she hadn't had so much money and such wonderful clothes and a father in *Who's Who*. Then, worse than that, they went on saying that she had worked for it ever since she came, that all her jolly little ways and her looking out that people have a good time, and her having all sorts, rich girls and self-help girls and shabby girls, all drinking tea and making chafing-dish things in her room, all that was so much scheme to make herself prominent and get votes. Just as if Day Argyle hadn't been doing that sort of thing ever since she was born, and her father before her, and Rob, too! There isn't a living soul that knows that better than I." Sidney strode across to the chair again and sat herself down with wrathful emphasis.

"Or than I," Mrs. Leslie added gently.

"Or Jack Blanchard," Sidney capped her addition. "Look at what Day has done for him. I sometimes wonder if she knows he isn't a real brother. Of course, he is a darling and deserves it; but not many girls would have taken him in, as Day did."

“ What did you do? ” Mrs. Leslie asked.

“ I? I adored him at first sight. He really is very splendid, you know.”

“ To the girls, I mean.”

“ Oh.” Sidney laughed a little grimly. “ I waited till they were through, all through. Then I told them what I thought.”

And Mrs. Leslie, hearing, smiled. She had no doubt but that the telling was terse and specific. Then there came another pause. Sidney's mood had talked itself out, in the talking had found relief. Now she was gathering courage to begin upon another.

“ Mother Leslie,” she asked at length and with a suddenness so spasmodic as to show how close the question lay to her heart; “ is a week from Sunday night, my night? ”

Mrs. Leslie counted swiftly.

“ It really doesn't make any difference, Sidney. A good many of the girls will be away, and there will be room enough. There always is, for the matter of that. The house is so large that I can always squeeze in another one or two. Who is it? ”

“ Irene Jessup.” The name came with a little catch in Sidney's breath.

“ Who is she? Freshman? ” For as yet, Mrs. Leslie was weak in the matter of college lions.

“ Dear me, no! If she were, I shouldn't be half so scared,” Sidney returned frankly. “ She is captain of the junior basket ball team; moreover, she is

adorable. She has been ever so nice to me, and I want to do something to show I appreciate it, and your Sunday night suppers are so lovely."

Mrs. Leslie laughed at the wheedling tone Sidney had taken on. Nevertheless, Sidney's words were not without foundation. Mrs. Leslie's Sunday night suppers, a custom dating from her own most prosperous days in the great stone house in Louis Street at home, had always had a flavour all their own.

"I'd love to meet her, Sidney. Be sure you get her to come, and be sure I know which she is. Among all these new faces, I may make a mistake, you know," Mrs. Leslie said cordially. "My only worry is as to who can take your place. I had counted on you to serve, you see."

Sidney's face fell.

"I'm sorry to miss that, Mother Leslie. I love to be doing things. What about Day?"

"Day has served, for four weeks running. I hate to ask her again."

"What an idea! She adores it. I'll go and tell her now." Sidney started to her feet.

At the door, however, she turned and looked back.

"Mother Leslie, you are a comfort," she said.

And Mrs. Leslie smiled and nodded a farewell. Then she fluffed up the white chair cushion for its next incumbent.

The next incumbent, as it chanced, was Day, who came in, wet and blown and wholly buoyant, to show

Mrs. Leslie the products of a down-town shopping tour. At her heels came Amy Pope who was Day's chosen friend, whenever Sidney was too busy to fill that, her permanent and rightful place. After Amy came Madeleine Rogers, the best talker in the house, and Elsie Brown, voted by the girls the best listener, and exceedingly popular on that account. And then another dropped in, and another yet, until the bed was fringed with girls and the white chair groaned beneath a double burden. And the gossip and chatter ran on, punctuated by constant appeals to Mrs. Leslie for opinion and advice, until the dressing bell aroused them all to a consciousness of their ruffled hair and walking-skirts. Day, as she departed in the very centre of the chattering group, called back over her shoulder, —

“ Mother Leslie, after all, isn't college just the finest thing that ever happened to any girl? ”

The last girl vanished and the last door shut, there came a little tap at Mrs. Leslie's door. Then the door opened.

“ Is everybody gone? ”

“ Janet! Where have you been, child? ”

“ Down-stairs. ”

“ Why didn't you come up here? ”

“ I thought the room was full enough without me, ”
Janet answered.

“ Janet! ”

“ Mummy? ”

“ Come over here and cuddle, dearie. ”

Janet shook her head with a dreariness which caught her mother's eye more than did the obvious perversity of the little gesture.

"What's the use?"

"You used to like to."

"Yes; but things were different. There weren't so many of me then."

"Janet child, what do you mean?" Mrs. Leslie's face and voice were startled.

"What I say, mummy." The perversity had left her voice, and only the dreariness remained. "It used to be just you and I, especially after Ronald went. Of course, it was nicer, when he was there. Even then, though, it was just us. Now it is everybody."

"But everybody isn't us," Mrs. Leslie said.

"I'm not so sure," Janet made discontented answer. "It is all right for you. You like it. I don't."

"Don't like what, dearie?"

"All of it, such a crowd and fuss, the girls in here all the time, calling you *Mother Leslie* and telling you things and all the rest of it. I suppose it is good for the house, as a point of business." She laughed shortly. "However, it makes me feel," and the laugh broke into a sob; "as if I were getting slowly crowded out."

"Janet, dear child!" And Janet felt herself caught in a pair of loving arms, pulled down and cuddled into the selfsame spot where, as a little,

little girl, she had been wont to bring all her woes, bring them and leave them there.

At last, she raised her head and flung her arms around her mother's neck.

"Mummy," she said contritely; "I know I am horrid and selfish. I know you came here for me, gave up home and everything else, and came down here to open a college boarding house," she spoke the term with untold scorn; "just so I could have education, training for a work I may never have brains enough to do. I know it is hard for you, hard and horrid. I love to have the girls like you; I wish they liked me. They don't, though. And, when I am here with the others, I can see they don't say half the things to you they would, if I weren't here. And I sit here and listen, and it seems to me you understand them and talk to them and pet them just the same way you used to do me, and — and I was the only one for so many, many years. Can't you understand? I try to tell myself that it is good for the house, good for our success; but it's no use. I don't like it any better for all that. Mummy," she took down her arms; "do you ever wish it wasn't Day Argyle who was helping us on so much?"

"No, dearie. Why?"

"Peskinness and perversity," Janet made sombre answer. "Still, I do wish it had been somebody else."

"Why?" Mrs. Leslie asked again.

Janet heaved a deep sigh.

"Because she is so popular, and so everlastingly

good," she responded. "She is good, too; she won't even give me the satisfaction of being goody and horrid. And yet, perfection is exasperating, now and then."

"Day isn't perfect, dear."

"No," Janet said restively; "but she is uncomfortably near it. That's what used to fret me so, in Quebec. Rob was a dear, and he wasn't above having a good, downright fight now and then. If he didn't like things, he spoke his mind; then he forgot all about it. Sidney Stayre is like him in that. Day, if she likes you, is adorable. If she doesn't, she smiles that sweet, superior little smile of hers and walks away, and you don't know till the end of time why she went, nor what she thought about things while she was going. I'd rather she said it out and had it over; and I am not the only one in the class that thinks so, either." And Janet nodded in vehement support of her own statement, as she rose to smooth her ruffled plumage in time for dinner.

CHAPTER SIX

NEVERTHELESS, and in spite of Janet's strictures, the Student Building, late the next Saturday afternoon, was ringing with the couplet,

"Here's to Day Argyle!
You can know her by her smile."

But Day's smile was not unique, for the whole singing, shouting freshman class was smiling broadly. They had won the president of their choice, and now they were making merry in her honour.

There had been no especial fight. One or two jealous little factions had put up their candidates, more for the sake of opposing what they were pleased to term "the Leslie house ring" than for any inherent objection to Day herself. And Day, who, from start to finish, had persisted in regarding her nomination as a superfine joke, was overwhelmed and silenced by the result of the first ballot. From the time that its result was announced, but one girl had shared with Day in the cheering. That was one of the rival candidates who moved Day's election be made unanimous without further balloting. She was the candidate of the Hatfield House grumblers,

and, by the promptness of her gracious courtesy, she won her own election for the coming year.

Sidney and Amy Pope escorted Day to the chair. Then, hoarse, breathless and exultant, they settled themselves in a corner of the room to lend a tolerant attention to the election of the other officers.

“After all,” Amy said; “it was about what we had every reason to expect.”

Sidney shook her head, while she surveyed her scarlet and aching hands.

“I didn’t expect it in the least,” she averred.

“You didn’t think that Day would get it?” Amy looked as blank as she might have done at some bit of blasphemy.

“I thought she would win out in time; but I was sure it would take time.”

“Who would vote against Day Argyle?”

Sidney nodded composedly towards a little group in the opposite corner, a group who were whispering together, glancing furtively, the while, now at Day, now at Sidney.

“Those girls.”

Amy cast a swift glance at the group.

“Who are they, anyway?” she asked. “I don’t know them.”

Sidney laughed.

“That doesn’t count. There are four hundred and seventy-three girls in the class, and you have been here six weeks. Besides, they know you. I don’t remember their names; but I blundered into one of

their merrymakings, one afternoon. They didn't find out that I was Day's roommate, till it was just a little bit too late to have the information do them any good. In the meantime, I have found out how a certain set of girls regard our house."

"How is that?" Amy asked, after both girls had paused to write their votes for treasurer.

"As headquarters of snobbery," Sidney replied succinctly.

Amy's great-great-grandfather had been Secretary of State in his day, and his descendants had imbibed his traditions. Therefore, —

"What nonsense!" Amy said, with a vigour which turned a dozen curious ears towards their low-voiced conversation.

"Of course. It's arrant nonsense," Sidney agreed. "It's not the attitude of our girls in the least; and, even if it were, I fancy Mother Leslie would take it out of us as soon as she discovered it. I was furious at first. Then, when I began to ask about those other girls, I understood it all a little better. They are girls from little bits of towns, girls with a good deal of money, but not out of a large school. They don't care about anything very much, only just to get out of all the work they can, and be leaders in something, no matter what. I hate that sort."

"But I don't see why they hate us," Amy made thoughtful comment.

"Because we haven't paid them any attention, and it has turned them jealous," Sidney replied

promptly. "Of course, we are the largest freshman house; most of you are girls who count in the class, brains and clothes and all the rest of it."

"And basket ball?" Amy suggested.

Sidney laughed.

"Not if they can keep me out," she said frankly.

Amy turned and stared at her in open consternation.

"Sidney Stayre! What do you mean?" she questioned.

Sidney laughed again.

"I have been finding out many things of late," she assured Amy. "However, sufficient unto the day — And, speaking of Day, doesn't she look distracting in that great green hat?"

Day, indeed, did look distracting. It had been chance alone, chance and a sudden cold day, that had led her to don a brand-new gown, that morning. Now, sitting there before her enthusiastic class and growing alternately hot and cold as she tried to remember the functions of her official position, she was totally unconscious that she was looking her very best. Sidney was conscious of it, though, conscious enough for two. In fact, that election afternoon, Sidney's gratification in her class's choice of president had been far, far greater than that of Day herself.

Day took her new honours carelessly, then, so carelessly as to cause a certain disappointment in the minds of those of her adherents who had voted less with the idea of the good of the class than from a wish to give to Day a season of pure pleasure. Her care-

lessness, however, merely veiled her girlish happiness. The office in itself was nothing. It counted a good deal, though, that the girls had wished her for it. The home letters counted, too, and Rob's excited telegram, and the box of roses that held Jack's card. The outward carelessness was only a mask, after all; but even the mask broke and the carelessness vanished before the announcement that a dozen of her most loyal supporters were going to give her a dinner at Boyden's, the next Saturday night.

"I just won't go; that's all!" she mutinied to Sidney, in the privacy of their own room and long after bedtime.

"Why not?" was Sidney's not unnatural question.

"Because I won't," Day proclaimed flatly.

Sidney, out of the midst of pillows and blankets, eyed her with sleepy amusement.

"You owe it to your class, dearest," she droned.

"Bother the class! I am tired of being lionized for nothing. Exactly four hundred and thirty-four freshmen have stopped me in Seelye Hall to congratulate me."

"Where are the other nine?"

"Nine? There are thirty-nine of them who didn't want me and who have the courage of their convictions enough to show it." Day laughed. "I could gladly take them to my bosom for it, too."

"Horrid crowd!" Sidney commented. "But about the dinner, Day, you'll have to go. It won't be decent not to."

Day, brushing her hair, paused to wrinkle her nose at her own reflection in the mirror.

“ Don't care. I am tired of the fuss, now at the end of the third day. At the end of the eighth, it will get intolerable.”

“ Most likely it will be over by then, and you will be glad of the dinner to warm it up once more.”

Day shook her head.

“ Besides — ” she said.

“ Besides what? ”

“ I wasn't going to tell you; I meant to give you a surprise. However, it is all spoiled now,” she said.

“ What is? ” Sidney asked sleepily. “ Either your words don't convey much meaning, Day, or else I'm not very awake.”

“ It's both; but I think I can wake you up with my news. The reason I hate the dinner so, is that Jack is coming up for Sunday.”

“ Day! Truly? ” Sidney's sleepiness vanished, and she sat up in bed with the suddenness of a Jack-in-the-box.

“ Yes. He will be up at eight forty-five, Saturday, and I was going to sneak down to meet him and then give you a grand surprise. Now it's all spoiled.” Day came to sit on the edge of Sidney's bed, her hair still covering her shoulders like a curtain.

“ Not spoiled a bit. You wouldn't have had much good of him, that night, anyway. And Sunday you can have full swing. I wonder what the girls will think of him.”

Day rose and resumed her brush.

“Who cares what they think of him?” she said disdainfully. “He is Jack, and we know him. Besides, he is coming here to see us, not them.”

Sidney sank back among her blankets with a laugh.

“Wait till bedtime, Sunday,” she advised.

And Day made tranquil answer, —

“I’m quite willing.”

There is surprisingly little place for the visiting man in Smith College life. At certain periods of the year, he becomes an absolute necessity for the success of the function of the hour, and, like all necessities, he is welcome. At Sunday vespers, he is tolerable; at Monday morning chapel, he is likely to be a thing of comment and derision; by Monday noon, he is manifestly in the way. However valiantly the young hostess may smile and chatter, in her secret heart she is well aware that, in the daily routine, the presence of a man guest gets in the way of the perfect working of the machinery. There are too many things happening from which, of necessity, he is barred out, things which she herself is loath to miss. And this condition increases, as the years go on. The freshman welcome is the heartiest one of all.

And then, there are men and men. Where fifty cloy, one attracts. The freshman hostess, knowing this, grips firmly her secret hope that her own guest may be the one to dominate his unaccustomed surroundings. Accordingly, Sidney’s heart beat high with anticipation, as she stepped out of the carriage

in which Day had insisted she should go to meet Jack Blanchard. She was but just in time, for, even while she was crossing the platform, the train rolled in, and Jack swung himself down from the rearmost car. It was an instant before their hands met and, in that instant, Sidney took heedful note of the broad-shouldered, well-knit figure, of the firm stride, the proud poise of the head, the thin, close lips and the steady eyes above, even of the ugly scar which, curiously enough, seemed only to add a dignity, an emphasis to the manly attractiveness of the rest of the face. Sidney noted it all, judged it with the added impartiality gained by her two months of separation and of mingling with her critical mates, noted it and was content. It was as she had always said: Jack Blanchard would pass muster anywhere.

“What was it?” he asked directly, as he still held her hand in his own cordial grasp.

“What was what?”

“The question in your eyes?”

She laughed.

“You are too observant, Jack. I may as well confess. I was trying to look at you through other people’s eyes for once.”

“Why not your own?”

“Because I know just how you look through them,” she made unhesitating answer.

“And the others?” he queried, half in jest, half earnest.

“You’re always Jack,” she replied. And her smile

told him the rest, told him, too, how welcome he really was.

Both the girls, next day, tried to be devoutly unconscious of their satisfaction in their escort, as they walked into church; but the attempt resulted in dismal failure. Jack, on his side, was supremely unconscious of any interest he might be arousing. A man nearing the middle twenties who, for two years, has worn the Queen's uniform, offered himself as target for Boer bullets and come home with a D. S. O., as a rule gets the self-consciousness knocked out of him. Moreover, like a true Briton, Jack had always been too much in earnest about things to have any time for self-consciousness. For the rest, he had a curious trick of making other men seem fussy and undersized beside him, of turning the best of them to the likeness of a figure on a haberdasher's fashion sheet. Rob Argyle alone had come out, unharmed by the comparison; but Rob, though more buoyant and irresponsible, yet possessed his own full share of Jack's steady, kindly dignity and unconscious poise. And Rob had scored an entire success, in those opening days of the term.

Of his own success, then, Jack was supremely, comically unconscious. He had come there to see Day and Sidney; he was glad to see all of their present surroundings, their friends included. However, it was only because they were Day's friends that Jack found them interesting. Years afterwards, he could have described Day's costume, albeit in his own

vernacular, correctly and down to the least detail. He was provokingly short-sighted and dense regarding the trio of hats and faces which blocked his every effort to see the preacher's face. Jack was unconscious; but, in the depths of his soul, he was bored. Man-like, he smiled valiantly for a time; but, in the end, he gave tongue to his boredom.

"I say, Day, isn't dress parade about over?" he murmured in her ear, as they came out from dinner.

She laughed.

"Yes, till the next event."

"What's that?"

"Vespers."

"More church?"

"Yes, with a difference," Sidney interposed.

"Sunday vespers is a place where we go to sing hymns in our party coats."

Jack groaned.

"Cut it out, Day," he adjured her.

"But I did want —"

"What?"

She had the grace to blush.

"To show you off, Jack," she confessed.

"Me!" Jack's tone betrayed his consternation at the thought. "I'm no advance show for a dime museum, Day."

"No; but you'd be so stunning, up in rubber row," she urged him.

Laughing, he shook his head.

“ I’m coy, Day; I shrink from the eye of the world, especially when my scar is on the audience side.”

“ You don’t mind that? ”

“ I don’t exactly love it,” he admitted. “ However, like most things, it’s a mere detail. But I came here to see you, Day, not to inspect the college. I like the girls; they’re pretty girls and wear good clothes. I’ve seen them, though. Now can’t we tramp off somewhere together, and have a good old talk? ”

Sidney leaned out of the window to call after them, as they went up the street.

“ Have a good time, children, and come home, all talked out. And be sure you come back in season for supper, for you know I am going to have my goddess.”

Jack turned to Day a face of utter puzzlement.

“ What’s a goddess? ” he demanded.

And Day’s answering laugh cut across the Sunday silence, as she said callously, —

“ An upper class girl who likes to be smirked at.”

None the less, Jack found himself in a mood to cavil at Day’s definition, four hours later, as he sat in a corner talking to Sidney and to Sidney’s goddess, for the goddess impressed him as being a girl of far too much character to take pleasure in the process which Day expressively, albeit not too elegantly, had termed smirking. As downright and as free from self-absorption as Sidney herself, Irene Jessup was a girl on whom one might well bestow a smirk of genuine pleasure, so pretty was she, so full of dainty decision, of sound, sweet common sense, a girl who

talked well and not too much, a girl who listened even better than she talked. Jack, consuming sandwiches and tea in his corner, felt himself moved to share Sidney's mood of obvious content.

To be sure, it was not alone the goddess who had produced this mood in Jack. Happy as he was in his work and in his home with the Argyles, he yet had missed Day intensely, missed her bright chatter, her loyalty, her quick comprehension of his thoughts and his unspoken wishes, missed, too, a certain coddling she had been wont to bestow upon him ever since, six months before, the overturning of a chafing dish and the resulting burns had threatened to result in a tragedy far worse than his scarred temple. There had been times, since college had swallowed up Day and Rob, that Jack had felt as if the larger, better half of himself had been lopped away. After two full months of loneliness, it had been good, so good, to tramp away with Day beside him, and have a long afternoon of their old-time confidential talk. The confidences had not been all upon the one side, either. Both had had much to tell, Jack of the routine of work in Mr. Argyle's office where, bit by bit, the responsibilities were falling more heavily upon him, of his glimpses of social fun by way of the one or two close friends to whose care Day had entrusted him. And Day, on her side, went over in detail the past two months, from the hour when she had watched the *Aurora* slide away out of sight, up to the moment of her election, only the week before,

went over it, narrating, explaining and demanding Jack's opinion and advice just as she had been wont to do of old. Jack had listened and sympathized and advised. Then, of a sudden, he had gone silent, so silent that Day asked him, —

“ What is it that you're meditating, Jack? ”

And his keen brown eyes had softened, as he turned to smile at the tall girl tramping by his side.

“ That college doesn't change you much. You're the same old Day, after all.”

And the contentment had lingered long upon him, and with it a relief. So many girls, under the same conditions, might have changed past all recognition. And Jack was not minded to welcome any change in Day Argyle.

Later, his contentment deepened, while he sat in his corner, talking to Irene Jessup and studying Sidney Stayre. For Sidney, he could not give the verdict he had given Day. Sidney was changing, changing fast, and the change, Jack saw, was for the better. She was as frank as of yore, as downright, as quick in all her perceptions and as kindly. In those respects and in many more, she was the Sidney he had known and liked. In other respects, even the two short months had changed her; the friction with many other girls of her own kind and class was doing its swift work. She was gentler than of old, less self-assertive, less cocksure. The old aggressiveness which had been wont to show itself now and then, the aggressiveness which is bound to come to the oldest one



"LATER, HIS CONTENTMENT DEEPENED, WHILE HE SAT IN
HIS CORNER."

of seven children, had almost completely vanished. She was still the same old Sidney in poise and loyal kindness; but now the kindness was clothed with graciousness, the loyalty was not only for her chosen friends, but for the mere acquaintances who crossed her path.

Glancing about the room, Jack felt he understood, in part, at least, the reason of the change. For Mrs. Leslie's Sunday night suppers, the long dining-room was always abandoned, the electric lamps were switched off and, in the candlelit whiteness of the great living-room, the girls and their guests swarmed about the two tables where Day and Amy Pope were pouring tea. Everywhere, the room was full of pretty, fluffy girls, of the hum of gay talk, of occasional bursts of light laughter and fun, and everywhere was the same dominant note of intense refinement, from the poses of the dozen girls sitting on the floor in a corner up to dainty Mrs. Leslie in her trailing black gown and widow's cap, moving quietly about the room in search of a few moments' conversation with each and every guest. Leaving the girls, Jack's eyes fixed themselves upon his gracious hostess, and, watching, he rejoiced that he too was Canadian and could claim himself her countryman. The influence of a gentlewoman such as that could never fail to count.

But what about that odd, dark, stand-offish young daughter?

"I beg your pardon?" He turned his face, apologetic for its inattention, to Irene Jessup.

“ I was going to tell you you must not fail to come up for the big game, next spring,” she said, as she rose. “ It is really one of our events, you know; and, besides, I think you will have a chance to see Miss Stayre do us all great honour.”

“ You mean? ” he asked, as he, too, rose.

“ That she is my favourite choice for captain of her team. Good night, Mr. Blanchard. I shall hope to see you cheering at the game.” And, with a gay little nod to Sidney, she crossed the room to say good-bye to Mrs. Leslie.

“ Well, Jack? ” Day rose stiffly from her pen behind the table. “ Have you had a good time with the goddess? ”

Jack laughed.

“ Ask Sidney,” he said.

But Sidney was too intent upon the echo of Irene’s unexpected words, still ringing in her ears, to hear Jack’s voice, or, hearing, heed.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A HONKING, as of a flight of many geese, cut across the crisp, sunshiny air, next morning. Day, snoozing still, pulled the blanket about her ears; but Sidney, up betimes in order to preëempt a trio of seats in freshman rubber row, crossed to the window and peered out.

“How funny!” she made soliloquy. “Here is a perfectly enormous touring car just in front of the house, standing still and squawking like mad, and there doesn’t seem to be a thing in the way.”

“Wish ’twould go along!” Day groaned sleepily. “Throw something at it, Sidney; there’s a dear.”

Sidney laughed unfeelingly.

“Get up, sleepy-head, and then you won’t mind,” she advised. “It is really very strange. There’s only one man in it, and — Day, it’s Rob!” The sentence ended in a strong crescendo.

“Nonsense!” Day rolled over and buried her head between the pillows.

“It isn’t nonsense, either. It’s Rob. He’s all cap and goggles; but I’d know that fur collar in Siberia. Day, do get up, and come and see.”

Grumbling, Day yielded less to the persuasion than to Sidney’s remorseless grip upon the foot of the blankets.

“ Sidney, you wretch! I did want one bit more sleep. We talked till all hours about Jack, and I don’t want to be too stupid, this morning, else he’ll never care to come again. Oh, do be still, down there! ” Day adjured the pitiless horn, as she huddled on a dressing-gown and crossed to the window. The next instant, the blind flew open with a bang, and Day’s voice went up at least two octaves. “ Rob Argyle, you cherished vision! Where in the world did you drop from? ”

“ Good morrow, little stranger! ” And a furtive creak of many blinds answered Rob’s jovial hail. “ Get up, and come have some breakfast. ”

“ What are you doing there? ”

“ Starving, ” Rob said composedly, as he pocketed his goggles, rose up and stretched himself.

“ What are you doing with that car? ”

“ Running it. At least, I was till I stopped. ”

“ Can you? ”

“ Can I mote? Yes, of course. I moted through a whole flock of cows, on the road up from Springfield. ”

“ Who taught you? ”

“ That’s the sort of thing we learn at Harvard. I say, aren’t you ever coming down to let me in? ”

“ Sidney will. I must — ” Day struggled with certain minor garments, while she spoke. Then once more she approached the window, albeit with caution.

“ But, Rob, what are you doing here? ”

Rob stepped down to the pavement, took off his fur-lined coat and tossed it back into the car.

“Visiting you, my hospitable young sister. Did you think I was going to let Jack have all the fun? Not on your life. I had an idea in chapel, yesterday morning, and I wired some things to Dad, among them the news that Jack wouldn’t be home till tomorrow. He wired back some more things. I came to Springfield, last night; and, this morning, I beat the lark out of bed by fifty-three minutes. How long does it take you girls to get on your duds? It’s time we were starting.”

“Starting where?”

“Oh, any old place. We’ll make a day of it. Where’s Jack?”

“At the Inn.”

“All right. I’ll go get him and, likewise, a little breakfast.” And, without more ado, Rob jumped back into the car, turned about and departed down the street, leaving a train of honks behind him.

Left to themselves, the two girls dropped down on Sidney’s bed and faced each other. When their astonishment had subsided enough to leave room for words, —

“Ought we, Sidney?” Day queried dubiously.

Sidney laughed.

“I don’t know so much about the *ought*; but, according to Rob’s present mood, I rather imagine that we will.”

Day rose.

“Where are you going?” Sidney asked her.

“ To talk it over with Mother Leslie,” Day made answer.

Mrs. Leslie answered Day’s question, not according to tradition, but by the dictates of her woman’s common sense.

“ Go,” she said, when she had satisfied her mind upon a dozen points. “ Of course, you don’t want to do this sort of thing, every week; but, for the once, the day in the country will do you good. Rob is here with your father’s consent; it would be foolish to break up the plan. Besides, Day,” she laughed a little; “ I am under the impression that, if you gave up and stayed at home, with this thing in your mind, your work wouldn’t be especially valuable. Go down to chapel, child, and then start off. I’ll take the responsibility of it, for you and Sidney.”

Nevertheless, outside the door of chapel, Rob balked, balked with an emphatic honk of protest which turned to him every face upon the crowded campus.

“ This thing is too loose a fit for four,” he said. “ I chose it large on purpose. Where’s Janet? ”

“ Down in the bulletin room, most likely.” As she spoke, Sidney settled her hat and tied her veil in a knot calculated to resist the worst November gale that ever blew.

“ Have her out, then, and be quick,” Rob ordered. “ Tell her I’m in no end of a hurry, and can’t start till I’ve seen her.”

Obediently, Sidney went skurrying around the

corner of Seelye Hall, and Rob turned to Day who was preparing to join Jack in the rear seat.

"Who else?" he demanded.

Day reflected swiftly.

"For me, or for Sidney?"

"Sidney, of course. You don't count; you're nothing but a sister."

"Nothing but! I like that," she protested.

"Glad you do. Now who?" Rob urged poetically.

"Hm. Let's see. What do you think, Jack?"

"Miss Jessup," he responded promptly.

"Get her," Rob commanded.

But Day was mocking at Jack.

"Love at first sight, Jack?" she questioned.

"Not a bit of it," he replied, as he stretched out his long legs and settled back into his corner. "I thought she'd amuse Sidney and keep Rob quiet, so I could have time to play with you."

"And Janet," Day reminded him. "You must be nice to her, Jack."

"Perchance she may not be nice to me," he suggested.

"She will, if you handle her right. All Janet needs is a little managing."

"Janet is a good little fellow," Rob interpolated, over his shoulder. "Her husk is prickly, though."

"Rather!" Jack offered comment.

Day looked up anxiously.

"How did you find out?"

"I tried to talk to her, last night, cornered her,

while you were busy and Sidney gone to see her idol off."

"What then?"

Jack laughed again.

"Janet could give Phyllis trumps and aces, and then take all the tricks," he said.

But Day still looked anxious.

"Oh, dear, I wish she wouldn't!" she sighed.

"But be as nice to her as you can, Jack; there's a dear." Then, with a swift change of tone, "Miss Jessup! Miss Jessup! Do wait for me just one minute till I can catch up with you," she called, and, jumping from the car, she went running across the campus to intercept a brown-gowned figure just going up the steps of Seelye Hall.

High noon found them far to the northward, camping in a small pine grove beside the wide blue river which, winding down among the northern mountains, past dingy towns, over rocky falls and through wide and fertile meadows, at no one point loses its beauty or its look of peace. Behind them, the hills rose sharply, clothed with trees, bare for the most part, save for the oaks which still held their crowns of ruddy, russet leaves. Beyond lay the level meadows, checkerboarded with patches of whitening cornstalks and squares of dark earth fresh from the plow, and dotted with great black crows which flapped heavily to and fro, filling the air with their discordant shrieks.

Seated in the shadow of the car, for the noonday sun was hot, Sidney and Irene Jessup were in full

tide of talk concerning basket ball and kindred subjects dear to the tongue of each. Rob and Day, arm locked in arm, had strolled off down the sunny road, engaged in a futile endeavour by two hours of question and reply to make good two months of a separation which had worn upon them both, a separation for which no interchange of even daily letters could atone. Rather than that, the weeks since the parting had only served to make that parting more intolerable. The meeting of the brothers and sisters of their different classmates had merely gone to prove to Rob that there never was another Day, to Day that there could never be another Rob. And this one day together, like all other perfect things, was bound to be so very short.

It was Jack who had sent them away together for the little gossip, Jack who, with the skill of the old campaigner, was busy packing up the ruins of the luncheon which Rob had produced from the great hamper in the rear. Janet, meanwhile, sat silent, watching him with intent and thoughtful eyes.

By degrees, the very intentness of her gaze cut its way through his absorption in his task. He glanced up, a question in his eyes and in his smile.

“ I was wondering how you learned to do that sort of thing so well,” Janet explained.

His smile widened at her unconscious compliment.

“ Not so well, considering the practice I have had,” he said.

“ When was that? ”

“ Six years ago, in Natal, and back of there.”

The steady intentness of her face warmed into sudden life.

“ You were in South Africa? ”

“ Yes.”

“ With the Contingents? ”

“ Yes.”

Janet's hands shut on each other, tight, hard.

“ And fought? ”

He nodded.

Janet's face blazed into sudden feeling.

“ I wish I'd been a man! ” she burst out. “ It was such a chance to show the way one felt.”

He nodded again, this time more gravely.

“ Yes,” he said. “ I found it so. I left Queen's, for the sake of going, left it never to go back there; but I wasn't sorry.”

Janet raised her head.

“ No man would be,” she said, with a quietness which yet was throbbing with her pride. “ Tell me, were you ever shot? ”

“ Once, in my leg. It was nothing serious; but it laid me up for a few weeks. The worst of it was, it knocked me out of being in the trenches at Paardeberg.”

“ Yes,” she assented, with a swiftness of comprehension which surprised him; “ that must have been the worst. But I wonder why Day never told me.”

Jack looked up quickly.

“ I have begged Day not to tell,” he said. “ As

a rule, I don't care to hear it talked about. People don't understand, down here, how we felt about the thing, and I hate to hear them discuss it. In fact," he laughed a little shamefacedly: "I don't know why I told you."

"Because I asked you, I suppose," she answered, with that same quiet gravity which already he had found so winning. "I am glad you did; and I think I understand. I was only a little child at the time; but I remember the students hissing in the streets, remember the day the men went away. My father took Ronald and me to see them marching to the pier, and, while we waited, he tried to make us understand what it was all about. His brother went, and died out there, died fighting." She paused, with an odd little smile. "Do you know, now, sitting here, I can feel the beat of the drums in my ears, just as I did then. I believe I shall hear them always, see the men, till I am dead. One doesn't forget such things."

"No," Jack said; "one doesn't." Then, after an interval, he added, "And one doesn't often find a Canadian down here."

"No," she assented drearily; "one doesn't."

The sudden fall of her voice smote sadly on Jack's ears. Nevertheless, he ignored it, and asked her cheerily, as once more he attacked the pile of plates, forgotten in their graver talk, —

"How did you ever happen to stray down here, Miss Leslie?"

Her reply was enigmatic.

“ For the same reason that took you to South Africa.”

“ And that? ”

“ Love of Canada,” she returned swiftly.

“ How do you mean? ” No wonder Jack looked puzzled.

Janet laughed a little, and the laugh broke down the last of her reserve.

“ I’m as loyal as you are,” she told him; “ but I am a girl and can’t fight, couldn’t fight, even if there were a war now. Neither would I go as a nurse; it’s too messy, and, besides, every girl does that. All I can do is to start out for myself and make a record in some other way.”

“ Well? ” Jack urged, after the silence had lasted long.

With a hasty glance over her shoulder, Janet assured herself that Sidney and Irene were wholly engrossed in their talk. Then she lowered her voice.

“ It is a good deal as it is about your being in South Africa,” she said. “ One hates to talk about it to people, as a rule; then, all at once, one finds an exception.” Again came the swift lighting and gentling of her intent, dark little face. “ You see, they tell me I have a knack of writing things, not stories and such stuff, but things that are really true and happened. And, all his life, my father had been getting together all sorts of things about the fight at home, letters and old, pale-inky journals and queer old pictures. They say his collection is famous. He

never meant to write it together, himself; but he used to show it to Ronald and me, and tell us how he hoped that Ronald would use it all, some day, and make the Leslies proud of him, and Canada, too."

"Well?" Jack said again, after another silence.

Janet roused herself.

"Well, Ronald won't. He cares for other things, is doing other work, outside of Canada. And so the chance is handed on to me," she explained slowly.

"And that was what brought you here?" he asked.

To his surprise, she faced him sharply.

"I'm not disloyal in it," she protested. "Canada is my country and the best of all; but that is no sign that it is best in every way. In spite of Quebec, we are young; our colleges for girls can't compare with this, and I was bound I would have the best, or none. Besides that, I'd get a broader view of things, if I went a little farther off to look at them. So I came down here. It wasn't easy." She faced him bravely, as she went on with her frank explanation. "We haven't as much money as we used to have, not nearly so much. I've had to earn and scrimp and save. Even then, I couldn't have come, if it hadn't been for my mother. But perhaps you have a mother, yourself?"

Jack bowed his head.

"Yes," he said reverently. "Yes, I have."

"Then you know all about it; we can leave that out. Only, after all, when people see my mother,

pretty and bright and brave, I do just wish they knew what she was giving up, what she wasn't having of the things she always has been used to. That's one of the things that hurt."

"And another?" Jack asked her, after a little pause.

Janet turned scarlet. Then, to her intense mortification, she gulped down a sob.

"The not belonging here," she answered briefly.

"You find it so?"

"Yes. Didn't you?" Her voice showed how she was clinging to the hope of his having shared her own experience, shared it and come out dominant.

"No; not even for an hour," he told her. "Still, I had Day and Rob."

"And so have I; or Day, at least. Mother enjoys her; but I don't."

"I don't see why." Jack spoke thoughtlessly, full of his own reflections on what seemed to him a knotty point.

"I don't, myself," Janet made honest answer. "In Quebec, all the last of the time she was there, we were the best sort of friends, and I always adored Rob, even when we fought. I had supposed that, when I came down here, we should go on just where we left off. Instead, I can't seem to get at Day at all; she shuts me up like an oyster, shuts me up tighter and tighter the more I know she is trying to be nice to me. Rob doesn't seem the same at all; I feel as if he were a total stranger. I don't know why it is; but, among

their friends and their own people, they seem so much more American; I feel so much more Canadian. I wish I could make you understand just what I mean," she ended, with a desperate little laugh.

"I think perhaps I do," Jack answered simply.

Janet faced him, elbows on knees, chin on her fists. Beneath her wide black hat, her eyes looked dark and lustrous, her cheeks were flushed pink with her excitement in her own confession.

"Then what ought I to do?" she demanded.

"Wait," Jack advised her gently. "Things will get right in time; they always do. Meanwhile, just remember that I'm Canadian, too, and that I can understand."

"Understand what?" Rob queried, as he dropped down at Jack's side. "You evidently do not understand packing up those plates. Man alive, you've been dawdling here for an hour and a half; it's past three, and it gets dark by half-past five, to say nothing of the fact that Mother Leslie has asked us both to dinner. Here, Janet, give us a hand with these plates and knives and things. We must be starting back." And, with a clatter of dishes and a chatter of tongues, the hamper was packed up once more, the girls were bundled into the car and, with a warning honk or two, Rob set his face towards home.

There was no chance for quiet conversation, during that afternoon spin down the sunny, peaceful valley. Laughter and jokes and reminiscences galore flew back and forth between the seats, until Jack forgot

his years and Irene her junior dignity, and both turned to freshmen with the rest.

The car slid under the arching elm trees of the ancient street, rushed down across the campus to leave Irene at her door and then came to a halt outside the Leslie house. Jack sprang to the ground and handed out the girls, Day first, then Sidney. Last of all came Janet and, as she came, she shut her hand tight on Jack's strong fingers with the confiding grip of a little child who clings to the hand which she trusts to protect her in the dark.

"Thank you," she said quite low. "I sha'n't forget."

And, as the car went speeding towards the Inn, Janet stood gazing after it, sure that, under all the arching elms of the aged town, not another soul understood her half so well as did Jack Blanchard.

CHAPTER EIGHT

FOLLOWING the threefold excitement of election, of Jack's visit and of Rob's headlong descent upon them, an epoch of flat calm fell upon the girls. November was always a short month, broken as it was by the Thanksgiving recess at the end. Nevertheless, it seemed to be the first month when the freshman class had swung into its normal stride, ready to take up its march throughout the year. The little of September which had remained to them on their arrival had been a season of unpacking, of getting settled, of learning the names of unfamiliar things and people. October, beginning with the Freshman Frolic which was supposed to be by way of welcome to the new-come class, had passed from that to Mountain Day when everybody was supposed to take to the woods and be happy, followed by a succession of mountain days which, impromptu and lacking all capitalization, were so much the more enjoyable on that account, days when people who were supposed to stay at home and study really did take to the woods and revel in the glory of the dropping leaves.

Then the leaves had dropped, the days had shortened, and the outer world had lost somewhat of its lure. And, in proportion as the call of the wild grew

lower, less insistent, the lure and charm of the college grew apace. It was as if, the neighbourhood once explored, its resources made familiar to the point of boredom, the college world sat down by its own fire-side and prepared to enjoy itself at home.

For the most part, it did enjoy itself, too. Of course, in every class there are bound to be girls who are constantly athirst for new sensations, new excitement, girls for whom the day's lawful routine counts as mere boredom. Happily, however, girls like that are few, and those few are so out of fashion as to be of small account in the large college life that goes on around them. To many and many of the girls, the mere life of the place, organized, diverse and full of change and motion as any old-fashioned kaleidoscope, suffices for weeks on end. Classes and athletics, walks and drives, teas in the rooms and at the Allen Field, chafing-dish suppers and occasional trips to Boyden's, these, with the college societies, the house plays, and the endless interchange of girlish hospitality make up an existence which, albeit simple, is yet the very reverse of monotonous or narrow. The outside girl may win a greater poise, a surer manner than her sister of the college; yet what she gains in manner, she loses in her knowledge of her kind. Few calling lists of women show such number or variety of type as does the catalogue of one Smith College class. It is no small study in adjustment to meet the requirements such a class is bound to make of even its least prominent member.

And so the three girls were finding out, as the days sped by and, little by little, their lives were focusing themselves more closely upon college concerns. Each of the three, moreover, was finding it out in her own way, a way which neither of the others could understand or compass. Day, alternating her struggles with *Rules of Order* and a belated essay, was absorbing things unconsciously just then. She was always the sort of girl to be more busy living, than watching to see how she did it; and never more so than now, when each day was so full of simple, straightforward duty that there never seemed to be any especial reason for stopping to decide what next. Sidney's one cause for stopping lay in an occasional need for meditation as to whether she could crowd more into the space of a single day. She too was not given to self-analysis; she too regarded her ideal method of life as consisting of the next things taken one at a time. However, in a life where there were so many agreeable next things, her great desire was to attempt them all. Sidney Stayre's danger, just then, was of becoming a bit of a glutton. Her consequent fits of indigestion, however, would be lessened by the fact that her tastes were entirely for the wholesome things.

Janet Leslie, meanwhile, was doing her level best to make up for what she considered a grievous lack of strenuousness on the part of Day and Sidney. Partly by race, partly by temperament, in part by reason of the stringent circumstances of the past two

years, Janet Leslie took herself tremendously in earnest. Taking herself so, it was a natural result that she took college in earnest, too. For the matter of fact, so do many girls; but those who flaunt their earnestness as a banner are rarely those who win the liking of their mates. Janet was a bit archaic. Nowadays, the most serious girls seek to cloak their seriousness beneath a veil of frivolity. Janet, from the first day, had made no secret of the discouraging fact that she had entered Smith for work and for work alone; that the lighter routine of college life, that the very girls themselves mattered nothing to her, save as incidental and indispensable adjuncts of the main establishment. Accordingly, the girls who at first had been ready to accord her the friendliness which one shows to any untried acquaintance, who later would have liked her for her mother's sake, left her to go her studious way. If she so plainly showed that she had no place for them in her interests, they would leave her to herself and go in search of more responsive mates. And Janet, gently shunted to one side, told herself she did not care. Fewer friends meant fewer distractions in her work, and work was, after all, that for which she had come there. Of course, she could not work, all the time; in the intervals, she could gain both interest and profit by standing back and watching the vast social machine sweep along its course. She took no heed of the fact that the closest study of the wheels is forbidden to the one who stands outside the engine room, that the engineer

himself is the one best knowing all that his machine can do.

And now, in mid-November, even the most casual onlooker was aware that the machine was going at a steady pace, cog catching into cog, well-adjusted, well-oiled, full of the sort of power which does its work and makes no outward sign of friction. The long vacation had drifted so far to the past as to leave no ripple on the smooth succession of days; it was still so recent that somewhat of its freshening yet remained.

Outwardly the college was putting on its winter dress. Over the buildings the vines had turned scarlet, turned brown, then shown themselves, a network of bare and wrinkled stems. The great lawns were dulling from their mid-summer green; now and then at dawn they showed a thin little blanket of snow which vanished speedily before the rising sun. The trees about the town were baring, too, and the twin little mountains at the southward lost their greenery and stood out, blue, against the dull November sky. The dreary season was upon the rest of the world; but the Northampton streets, echoing from dawn to dusk and after with the heel-clicks and careless voices of a thousand jovial girls, are capable of throwing a defiant glance even at the dreary season.

Not all the girls were jovial, however, one night in mid-November. Irene Jessup was in the dumps, a fact so rare in her experience that Sidney, halting on the threshold, caught her breath in astonishment

at the unwonted sight of Irene in something dangerously akin to tears.

During the past three weeks, Sidney had become quite familiar with the path to Irene's room. She only needed to go in across the back campus, past the yellow Haven House, and the Chapin, and the Wallace, on across the middle campus and then turn down the right-hand path. Inside the house, it was up one flight, a sharp turn to the right, to the right again, and then a knock on Irene's door which, to Sidney's mind, led the way into a room all window seat and sunshine and boisterous welcome, or else all firelight which played among the pictures and danced over the gay little table where the chafing dish stood ready among its pale green dishes, waiting its turn to come after the long, idle talk. And the talk, by now, had ranged over all things on earth, and in Smith College which, in Sidney's creed, was synonymous with heaven. The two girls, strange to say, had overleaped the gap of class, of previous life and training. Little by little, they were becoming friends, close, loyal, and singularly free from sentimental ways. Rob Argyle's love for Jack Blanchard, a love which had started almost from their first meeting, was no more free from dregs of misplaced sentiment than was the liking that was springing up between Sidney Stayre and Irene Jessup. The unwholesome maunderings which too often pose as college friendship would have been quite as repugnant to one downright girl as to the other. And the test lay

in one fact, small, but significant to those who looked on. Neither girl sought or cared to be alone or even first, in the other's love. Sidney made not the slightest secret of her own preference for Day Argyle; she made not the slightest effort to rank herself in any sense the equal of Irene's other, older friends, the girls of her own class.

Now, as she halted on the threshold of the pretty room, all green and dark brown oak, she was astounded to find Irene in a perfect fog of melancholy, a fog so thick as to render the wet night outside a blaze of moonshine by comparison.

"I-rene Jes-sup!" she said blankly.

Irene dabbed at her eyes with one hand, while she waved a welcome with the other.

"Not guilty!" she said, with suspicious promptness.

Sidney came forward, umbrella and all, and plumped herself down on the arm of Irene's chair.

"Don't deny till you are asked," she said, with a cheery composure which belied the sympathy in her eyes; "and don't deny at all, when you're sure to get found out. Your nose is red, Irene, scandalously red, and your voice is froggy. What is it all about?"

In spite of her melancholy, Irene laughed.

"Sidney, you're a Sherlock Holmes, even if your phrases aren't properly pitiful. I am a mass of woe; that's all."

"You poor old dud!" Sidney settled herself, as for a longer stay upon the chair-arm. "I'm so sorry. What's the matter?"

“ Everything,” Irene answered comprehensively, as she made another dab at her eyes which were suspiciously bright. “ I thought it was the weather; that would have been enough to account for most things, and I rejoiced that I, mere basket ball enthusiast, was developing a temperament which would have done credit to a *Monthly* poet. Then, on my way up-stairs, I stepped the hem all out of my new brown skirt, and that made me cross, viciously cross, so cross I decided I wouldn’t have a temperament, if I could get it. No; don’t laugh. That is only the preface. They say bad things always come in threes, and the last is very bad.” Irene’s voice broke a little, and she stopped to let it steady itself again.

“ What is it, Irene? ” Sidney asked. “ I’m sorry, you know, whatever it is; but I wish you felt like telling. Is it a warning, or a fight? ”

“ Warning! ” Irene echoed scornfully. “ You don’t suppose I’d sit and wail over a thing like that; do you? Or even a fight? I’d stiffen my back and work it off. No; this is worse, things at home, the sort of things one can’t help at all. My small sister has been getting herself a throat, and the whole family are starting off to California, as fast as they can get their trunks packed.”

Sidney sat up and considered the pattern of the rug. Then, —

“ Honestly, Irene, I don’t know what to say. Is it very bad? ”

Irene shook her head.

“ There’s no telling what it will be. It’s not so bad yet, and there’s a special cause, a horrid little wretch of a roommate at school who was too selfish to tell that her whole family were alive with the germs.” In her fervour, Irene spoke as if the aforesaid germs were reptilian in their habits. “ They have taken it in time, they think; they’re going to go to the mountains and camp there, all winter long, mother and all. By spring, the doctor says the danger should be nearly over; but she isn’t very strong, and one never really knows.”

Gently Sidney patted her friend’s back. It was an unconventional sort of caress; but it answered its purpose just as well.

“ I wouldn’t worry too much, Irene,” she said hopefully at length. “ Those things are horrid, while they last; they seem to take the strength out of one’s very knees. Still, they can be cured. I know what I am talking about, too, for I have a cousin at home who went through it all, three years ago. I was with him, all that summer. If absolute fear could have killed a man, it would have made an end of him. All the first part of the time, he was so determined he was going to die that he couldn’t waste any attention on the way to get himself well.”

“ And did he? ” Irene asked eagerly.

Sidney laughed, while she continued her pattings.

“ Didn’t I tell you I had him at home? He’s as tough as a pine knot now. He came out in good con-

dition, and he hasn't had a bit of trouble since. I do wish you could see him, and hear him talk." Sidney paused abruptly, as a sudden idea flashed across her brain.

"Bring him up here," Irene suggested absently, her eyes on the rug and her sudden eagerness all fled.

"I will, some fine day. He has promised," Sidney made answer quite as absently. Then, audaciously turning Irene's head about until their eyes could meet, she asked, "Irene, tell me honestly, do juniors ever accept invitations from just freshmen?"

Again despite herself, Irene laughed.

"That depends on whether they get any," she answered.

"No; but truly?"

"Of course, child, yes."

"For anything but Boyden's and things like that?" Sidney persisted.

"Yes."

Sidney abandoned that point and assailed another.

"When do your people go?"

"Next Monday morning. At least, they start then."

"So soon as that? No wonder you're feeling blue," Sidney said consolingly.

"Blue as indigo. Nobody knows when I'll see any of them again," Irene burst out tragically.

"What shall you do, Thanksgiving?"

"Stay here and riot with the other homeless orphans. Really, Sidney, that's where I feel sorriest

for myself. Thanksgiving is always our great day at home, and now there won't be any home to go to."

"Come home with me, instead."

"How I'd love it!" Irene said, with the fervour that one dares bestow upon an utter impossibility.

"Come on, then. I mean it." Sidney gasped a little at her own temerity.

"But I mustn't," Irene protested.

Sidney flushed.

"Why not?" she asked bluntly. "Because I'm nothing but a freshman?"

"What nonsense, child!"

"Then why not come?"

"Because it's not decent to accept a seventh-hour invitation that one has almost begged."

"But you haven't. I had to screw up all my courage to offer it to you, in the first place. Do come, Irene," Sidney urged, while her gray eyes seconded the bidding which even now halted a little upon her tongue. It would be so very good to show Irene to the dear home people.

Irene hesitated.

"What would your mother say?" she suggested.

Sidney's laugh echoed through the room.

"She probably would say 'How do you do, Miss Jessup? I am glad to see you,'" she answered.

"At least, that is her usual form of salutation."

"But to my rushing in upon your Thanksgiving plans?"

Sidney laughed again.

“When I came away from home,” she answered; “my mother told me, when I came home for Thanksgiving, to be sure to bring the homesickest, forlornest thing I could find. I rather think you’re It, Irene.”

Turning, Irene laid her hand on Sidney’s fingers where they still rested on the handle of her brown umbrella.

“Thank you,” she said. “I’ll come.”

Sidney rose.

“Good. Then I’ll send a note to mother now, and tell her to kill the fatted calf. You’ll find a royal welcome, Irene, for they’ve heard all about you; but you won’t find much pomp and circumstance about the house. We just have a good time there; that’s all. The place is filled with a whole lot of us, in all the different stages of getting grown up; and then, there’s Wade Winthrop. He is my cousin and a darling, and born to better things; but I tell him he is the most loyal Stayre of the whole flight, or else the newel post that we all build on. I want you to know him well.” And, nodding her farewells, Sidney went her way, in peaceful unconsciousness of the extent to which her final words were altering the course of coming Fate.

In her room, she found Day arguing with Janet.

“Rob wants you, too, Janet,” Day was saying. “I truly think you might.”

“Might what?” Sidney demanded, as she cast aside her umbrella, then her coat.

“Might come home to spend Thanksgiving at our

house. We want Mother Leslie, too; but she can't come. I can see she's needed here. But Janet—"

"Isn't needed? Thank you."

"Don't be cranky, Janet. Take the goods the gods offer," Sidney counselled her, as she hunted for her pen.

"I will, when I'm sure they are good," Janet answered.

"Polite to Day!"

"What? That I'm not sure how good it is to leave my mother?"

Day sought a new argument.

"And, after all, it's not as if it were a festival of yours, Janet. This is our day, pure and simple."

"Perhaps. Still, Canadians can be thankful now and then, given the reason," Janet retorted.

Sidney looked up.

"Oh, come now, Janet," she urged impartially; "we are sure to have a great time, all of us, and Rob, and now Irene is going home with me, too."

"Irene?" Day looked up.

"Yes. She has promised." And briefly Sidney explained.

When she had ended her explanation, Day turned to Janet, and her tone was pleading, as if she sought to ask a favour, not to bestow one.

"Really, Janet, won't you come? It would be so much nicer for us all, if we could have you. And Rob is counting on it."

But Janet shook her head.

“Thank you,” she said curtly; “but I can’t go.”

Nevertheless, she cried herself to sleep, that night. Renunciation might be the debt she owed to her mother and to her fancied dignity; but, under some conditions, renunciation was not easy.

CHAPTER NINE

*“ Of thy care forgetful never,
Bound by ties that naught can sever,
Still to thee returning ever,
Alma Mater!”*

HIGH and clear rang the girlish voices, singing for the last time in the dying year the praises of their Alma Mater, praises richly deserved and freely, fondly given.

It was the last Saturday before Christmas, and Assembly Hall was packed to listen to the Christmas concert of the glee and banjo clubs. Outside, the world was putting on its Christmas dress, a soft white blanket suit of snow. The campus was covered, and the streets, and the meadows beyond the town, and still the great, soft flakes came sifting softly down through the still gray air, blurring the nearer landscape and completely cutting out the profiles of the mountains which, for the past three days, had stood up, sharp and blue, the harbingers of coming storm.

The lights were blazing gayly inside the hall. For the hour, it looked a festal place, rather than the austerer chapel which was its more wonted guise. The great organ was half hidden in its Christmas

wreaths which hung from the choir gallery above to meet the palms that rose from the platform below. And between the palms were grouped the members of the clubs, dressed in the fluffy white things in which the daughter of Smith delights to array herself upon all occasions. And the hall itself was packed, floor and gallery, transept and rubber row, packed with students in gala dress and with an occasional guest who, for the most part, had dropped in there for a week end spent on the way to somewhere else.

It was not a critical audience, but friendly, rather, gathered there with a loyal determination to have a good time at any cost. At least, such was the only theory on which one could account for the applause that burst out at the end of every number, wholly irrespective of its merits, burst out just as lustily when the leader of the combined clubs dropped her baton and it clattered from the platform to the floor, as when the star soloist had finished her chiefest and most successful effort.

“ Good for 'em! It encourages them to go ahead; and, besides, they deserve all that's coming their way,” was the verdict of one yellow-headed youth down in the front row, while he pounded out a salvo which wellnigh blistered even his athletics-hardened palms.

His companion, less pretty than many of her mates, but by far the daintiest girl in sight, nodded her approval.

“Then you do like it? You think it was worth stopping over for?” she questioned.

“Like it! It’s a spectacle to bring tears to the eyes of a hardened misogynist. I wouldn’t have missed it for worlds. It’s my first sight of the girls in their Sunday best, and, by Jove, it beats Appleton Chapel to shreds and tatters. I’m going back to put our fellows into frilly white pajamas. Who’s the Venus on the end of the second row, Day, the tall, dark one with eyes like a Jersey calf?”

“Rob! How can you?” Day protested, though she was forced to laugh a little at the aptness of the description. “That’s my latest goddess.”

“Oh, I see.” Rob nodded sagely, for he had conned Day’s letters with heedful attention. “Venus the Twenty-Ninth, in other words. Where are the other twenty-eight? Were they as much so?”

“Hush!” Day besought him.

“What for should I hush? This is intermission, made to let the children have a chance to talk. I want to talk, Day; I want to know Miss Venus’ other name.”

“You don’t need to. Venus will do for all practical purposes,” Day assured him. “It is descriptive and quite impersonal, the best thing in the world for such a place as this.”

Rob rolled his programme into a telescope and brought it to bear upon the stage before him.

“Impersonal! I should rather say it was. By actual count, you have averaged a Venus and a

half a week, Day, since you came. Why can't you stick to one goddess, as Sidney does? "

" One would get monotonous, also conceited, if I focussed all my interest on her. What in the world are you doing, Rob? "

" Reinforcing my myopic vision with a spyglass," he returned tranquilly. " In fact, it's a regular game of *I spy*. Your Venus has a wrinkle beside her nose, Day. That means bad temper. Drop her."

" By the way," Day said suddenly, yielding to an unspoken and unspeakable connection of ideas; " did you see Janet? "

" Not till we were inside here. That is the worst of you, Day. You are so anxious I should perform all the social functions that are going, that you won't let me have any fun."

" Don't you like this? " Day asked severely.

" Like mice. It's no end of a nice little party. Still," Rob's blue eyes grew sombre; " for a fact, Day, this afternoon, I'd rather have had a good old talk with Janet."

" But Janet is here," Day reminded him, with an explanatory glance towards the back gallery.

" Yes; but she wouldn't have been, if I'd had my way. I hate losing touch with Janet, as I'm doing. She was a good little fellow in Quebec; good, that is, when she wasn't in a row."

Day's voice was as thoughtful as Rob's own had become.

“ That seems to be the trouble here,” she assented. “ She’s in a chronic row.”

“ Who’s the victim? ” But Rob’s face belied the frivolity of his words.

“ The whole establishment.”

“ You mean all the girls? ”

“ Not so much the girls, as things in general. She doesn’t seem to fit in anywhere.”

Rob shook his head.

“ The larger the college where we are, the more we have to work to fit ourselves into some crack,” he said oracularly. “ Janet Leslie is singularly well adapted to be an only child. In her own house and let alone, she can be all right. In a mob like this, she is constantly knocking her angles into other people, and then blaming them for the collision.”

“ What will be the end of it? ” Day asked a little drearily.

Rob’s answer was characteristically optimistic.

“ In time, by very force of bumping them, she will wear off her own angles, or grind them down.”

“ Meanwhile,” Day said; “ she’s having a bad time of it.”

“ Trust Janet for that, when things don’t go her way,” Rob agreed. “ I never saw anybody suffer such pangs over her own perversity. What’s happening to her? ”

“ Total ignoring. She is making a fine record in her work. People admire her; but they don’t seem to like her much. As for the girls in the house, she has

snubbed them so often that now they let her go her way in peace, except when they meet her in Mother Leslie's room, or at Mother Leslie's end of the table. Rob, that woman is a darling."

"Of course." Rob waved aside the subject of Mrs. Leslie and returned to that involved in Janet. "Hasn't she any points of human contact?"

"Mrs. Leslie?"

"Janet?"

"How do you mean?"

"Any fads, hobbies, any hankerings for the things the other girls are doing."

Day's answer came despairingly.

"Rob, how should I know?" she said.

Rob whistled softly, under cover of the buzz of talk around them.

"You bet I'd know, if I had to take a gimlet and grind it out of her! That way would mean Janet's salvation, Day; and she's got to be saved. It's an awful fate, the going through college on a single-track, narrow-gauge road; we've got, between us, to haul her over to the main line and give her a punch to set her going."

Day's eyes were on the programme in her lap.

"I've tried, Rob; truly, I have," she said.

Under the shelter of her fluffy coat which lay between them, Rob's fingers sought her hand.

"I know you have, Day," he said quickly. "I know your way of doing things. Moreover, I've seen some things for myself, and Jack has told me

some more. Still, Day, I trust Jack's judgment more than I do the whole board of Harvard Overseers, and he declares that Janet is worth the fussing with. Shut up inside her, she's got good stuff. It's up to us to get it out."

"How are you going to do it?" Day inquired, and again the inquiry was full of weary discouragement.

"I don't know. I've got to get inside her shell, first of all. That's why I wanted her to come down for Thanksgiving. Of course, she is coming down, next week; but her mother will be with her then, and Janet never has so much to say to us, when Mrs. Leslie is about. It's as if she realized the difference between them, and distrusted herself on that account. Ronald was that same stiff sort."

"I liked Ronald," Day said defensively.

"I respected him," Rob forced untold meaning into his brief phrase, and the meaning was not wholly complimentary to the absent Ronald; "but I couldn't get on with him a little bit. After our divers fashions, I did get on with Janet. At least, she wasn't monotonous."

Day sighed.

"She's monotonous enough here."

"Evidently. That's what we must go to work to break up. Does she hate it here as badly as she did?"

Day laughed.

"I'm not encouraging conversation on that theme," she made expressive answer.

"Better not. Let sleeping dogs snore. There is

no especial sense in pulling their tails to make them bark. Where's Sidney?"

"Over in the south transept gallery with Irene."

Rob nodded in manifest approbation.

"There's a girl!" he observed.

"Which?"

"Irene, of course. As far as Sidney is concerned, it isn't necessary to comment upon the wholly obvious."

"After all, they are a good deal alike," Day said. But Rob demurred.

"There'll never be another Sidney," he answered, just as the glee club rose to end the intermission.

Nevertheless, granted that Sidney was unique, Rob was ready to bestow upon Irene a good measure of the same sort of liking which he had long since accorded to his older friend. Irene's forty-eight hours in New York had sufficed to put her on a most cordial footing in both the Stayre and Argyle homes. The short vacation had been spent rather indiscriminately between the two houses. The first evening, Wade and Sidney and Irene had been invited to the Argyles' for a most informal dinner. The second night, as soon as the Thanksgiving dinner was ended, the four Argyles and Jack had appeared, uninvited, at the Stayre front door, demanding the welcome which never failed to be found within. And, through it all, Irene had been so blithe, so witty, so adaptable that Sidney, looking on, had wellnigh burst with pride in this, her newest friend. As time went on,

Irene would prove no mere substitute for Day. She was fast winning her own place, lower than that of Day, but none the less secure on that account.

However, in looking back upon their short holiday, it was not upon the memory of their merrymakings that Sidney loved best to linger. Given a frolic, Irene was always in its midst, hearty, happy, yet never strident in her mirth. But it was in her quiet hours that Sidney found her most full of charm and helpfulness, most sane and sweet in all her point of view. It was not in the evening revels, then, that Sidney had enjoyed her visit most; but rather in one long hour, Thanksgiving morning, when she and Irene and Wade Winthrop had sat before a crackling fire in the shabby, cosy library, and had talked of many things. Wade was an older man, more quiet, as was natural for one who had faced his own bad times. His chosen profession had been broken up, just as it had promised rich success, by a dubious pair of lungs which drove him from an office into an out-door life. Hampered by no cares for the fortune which was already his, Wade Winthrop worked at being a reporter as strenuously as if his daily bread depended on his turning out so many words a day, as if his salary went into his own pocket, instead of into the pockets of his less fortunate brothers with whom his work brought him into constant and unexpected contacts. Wade's New York life was bringing him rich return for his hours of bleak disappointment; none richer, though,

than his close association with his cousin, Sidney Stayre.

It was solely for Sidney's sake that he gave up other things, that morning, gave up even his long-held hope of a quiet, confidential talk with her, in order to render himself agreeable to her chosen friend. Moreover, when he liked, few men could be more agreeable than Wade Winthrop, whose young manhood had been subjected to every polishing process known to riches and brains. To his surprise, he found his efforts well rewarded; of the three, he was the sorriest when the luncheon hour put an end to the morning. The talk, by way of Irene's sister and kindred interests in the matter of lungs, had wandered off to Dresden where, as it chanced, they had spent the self-same winter, Wade as idler just out of college, Irene as a child at school. It had returned by way of Harvard where Irene's uncle had instructed Wade in Greek literature, and it ended, where it had begun, in the discussion of a story in the last-night's paper, whose authorship Wade was careful to keep a secret. And, all along the devious path of their talk, each was recording to himself his good opinion of the other.

"I am so glad you do like Wade," Sidney said, after luncheon, while the two girls were resting in Sidney's room, before deciding how to pass the afternoon.

"Of course I like him. Who wouldn't?" Irene made conclusive answer.

“ A good many people. Some of my friends call him very snobbish,” Sidney told her. “ It is only that he is so quiet, though, and refuses to talk just for the sake of saying things. It always makes me want to pound people, when they don’t appreciate him; but then, I know how good he is, and how clever.”

“ Anybody ought to see that.”

“ They don’t, though; they just think he is dull and stiff. Irene,” as she spoke, Sidney crossed the room and cast herself down on the rug at Irene’s feet; “ I wonder if you have any idea what Wade is doing for me. We aren’t rich; you can see that with one corner of one eye. It is all my father can do — more than he ought — to keep me going at a place like Smith. One night, just a week before I went away,” Sidney’s voice dropped to a murmur, and her eyes, fixed upon the rug, showed that, for the moment, her guest was quite forgotten, save as an outlet for her girlish heart; “ one night after the children were all in bed, Wade came to me in the library, and told me all he had hoped to do with his own education, all he had had to give up. Do you know, I was such a stupid, blind pig of a cousin, I had thought he had stopped caring. That night, I found out I was mistaken.” She paused for a minute or two, biting her lip, as the memory of their talk became more insistent. Then she resumed. “ And so he told me all about it. Then he went on and talked about my college, the good it would

do me, the fun I was going to have, the chance it was going to give me to do the things he'd had to let go. Honestly, Irene, it seems too sacred, somehow, to tell over, even to you; only I want you to know just what he is. And, in the very end, after we had talked for more than an hour, he started to go to bed; but at the door he stopped long enough to tell me, as if it were a thing of no especial account, that he had put money, a lot of money, into the Northampton bank for me to have for an allowance, so I could be in all the fun, and not feel scrimped or worried. And that," Sidney paused again, her eyes still fixed upon the rug; "and that, Irene, is Wade Winthrop. Do you wonder that I love him best of all the world, except my mother?"

"No," Irene made answer slowly; "no, I don't."

None the less and despite the earnest answer, Sidney could not see that Irene's attitude to Wade had changed appreciably by reason of her story. The fact was, the story had come a little late. Irene's attitude, like Wade's own, had been already taken.

Wade saw them off, next morning, saw them off with a manifest regret which was as manifestly deepened by Irene's announcement that her Christmas holidays were to be spent in Chicago. Later, Wade's frequent letters invariably held, by way of close, a message to Irene; and Sidney's letters back again quite as invariably included a message of reply. Under some conditions, she might have rebelled at this being converted to a sort of postal sub-

contractor; but not when the converting lay between two people such as Irene Jessup and her cousin Wade. She merely smiled inscrutably to herself, and underlined the messages at will, before she sent them speeding to their destination.

And now, with Irene at her side, Sidney was sitting in the gallery of the south transept, listening to the concert with heedless ears while she tried to make up her mind whether she would be more glad at the seeing Wade so soon, or sad at the parting from Irene. A little stir aroused her from her reverie, roused her to the consciousness that the last number of the programme had come, and that the clubs were massing themselves at the front of the stage.

*“Fair Smith, our praise to thee we render.
Oh, dearest college halls.”*

There was a slight sensation in the back gallery, and Sidney turned her eyes that way. Alone in her corner, a small figure with a thin, dark face and lambent eyes had risen to her feet and stood at attention, while up through the vaulted red rafters overhead echoed the lilt of the high, sweet chorus.

*“May thy children, thee addressing,
Speak in loyal hearts thy blessing,
Alma Mater!”*

The last words died away, and Janet sat down again. Later, at dinner, she explained herself a bit defiantly.

“ At home, we always rise to *God Save the King*,” she told her neighbour at the table. “ Do you suppose I’d sit through *Fair Smith*? ”

And Day, hearing, held her peace. Later, that same evening, she repeated Janet’s dictum to Rob, and they both rejoiced, as at Janet’s first sign of approaching regeneration.

CHAPTER TEN

“IT’S easy enough,” Rob explained reassuringly. “Just grip it tight with one hand, and plunk it with the other.”

“But it won’t plunk; it only just grumbles,” Janet made disconsolate response.

“Try it again a little harder,” Rob advised her. “You’ll get the hang of it in time.”

“Don’t be too sure.”

“Of course you can. Anybody can play the banjo, anybody with an ear like yours.”

“Which?” Janet queried.

“The right one, of course. The other would be left, in any comparison. But now go it; one, two, *three!*”

Thus adjured, Janet grasped the banjo and tweaked lustily at the strings which gave out a feeble moan as of injured dignity and pain.

“Horrid thing! What’s the use?” she said petulantly.

“To learn. It’s good fun, when you get the trick. Listen!” And Rob, seizing the banjo from Janet’s inert fingers, held it tantalizingly aloft while, with his jolly blue eyes glued to her face, he thrummed out the opening bars of *Fair Smith*.

The face relaxed into a smile.

“ Oh, how I do love that! ” she sighed, half to herself.

“ Play it, then. ”

“ I can't. ”

“ Not till you try. ”

“ Until I came to college, ” Janet observed a little snippily; “ I always supposed nobody but a nigger ever touched a banjo. ”

“ Then you can set down one lesson to Smith's account, ” Rob observed, while he nodded in time to his thrumming.

“ Yes, I suppose so. Still, it's not of so much account, after all. You couldn't expect me to know about your national instruments, ” Janet explained, still a little snippily.

Rob left off his thrumming and smiled at her languishingly.

“ Hi, there! Janet? ”

“ Yes. ”

“ Did you say something? ”

“ I did. ”

“ Well, you mixed yourself, and said a mistaken, as Day used to call it. Africa is yours, not ours. At least, you appear to want to claim it. ”

“ What of it? ” Janet inquired shortly.

“ Ethnology; that's all. Out of Africa came the niggers, as you term them, and under the arm of the nigger must have come his banjo. ”

Janet attacked a side issue.

“ What do you call them? ” she demanded.

“ I? I merely whistle, and say ‘ George! ’ George always seems to me a dark-complected sort of name. They call themselves coloured people, without stopping to specify whether it’s green or blue, though I believe their bluest bloods are black. Now, young woman, vacation’s over. Will you please take this banjo and fall to.”

Janet laughed.

“ But suppose I don’t want to? ”

“ Then you’ll be a sneak,” Rob answered blandly; “ a sneak that’s afraid of a little work. You told me you wanted to have a whack at my banjo, and now you’re in for it.”

“ But I can’t make it go,” Janet protested.

Hands in pockets and head far on one side, Rob smiled down at her with undiminished friendliness.

“ I wouldn’t be downed by a little thing like that,” he offered comment.

Janet looked up at him with hostility, then with the little throb of liking which never failed to stir her, when she allowed herself to meet Rob’s jovial, kind blue eyes. Then she gritted her teeth.

“ I won’t,” she answered. “ Go ahead. What next? ”

It was still three days before Christmas, but the Leslies had come down, the night before, in fulfilment of their promise to spend the holidays in the Argyle home. Two days later, they would all go out to Heatherleigh, the country place which it was the

Argyle custom to throw open upon Christmas Day. In the meantime, the younger Argyles were full of plans for showing off their city to their guests, plans which had been rudely shattered, for that day, by the snow that was falling with an industry worthy of Janet's Canadian home. Housebound, they had telephoned for Sidney; but Sidney was entirely engrossed with the varying claims made upon her time by half a dozen lesser Stayres. Then Day had vanished in the carriage, bound for the shops and for the Christmas jokes and playthings to be found therein. Deserted, Rob and Janet had betaken themselves to the library, where Rob had fulfilled his threat to Day, the threat to unearth in Janet's make-up the germs of some purely human hobby. He found it with unexpected promptness, blundered upon it when he was least aware it was in reach. Two hours later, Day came in, rosy with cold and her arms full of little bundles. She looked and listened. Then, in mercy to her aching ears, she fled lest, as she confided to her mother, the sound should get frozen permanently inside and become a lasting echo in her brain.

"I must say, Rob, you have better grit than I have," she assured her brother, when they were alone, that night.

Rob laughed.

"It is pretty gritty," he confessed. "Still, it's wholesome, even if it's not high art. She'll get the knack of it in time."

“ Or in eternity,” Day corrected him.

“ That’s not Janet. She’s not that sort. With her, once her mind is really made up, it’s a case of time or nothing. Anyhow, it’s worth while, if only for the sake of stirring her up a bit. I haven’t seen her so much like her old self, since we left Quebec.”

“ I do hope she is going to have a good time here,” Day said thoughtfully.

“ She’ll have a good time fast enough, once she gets started,” Rob predicted, as he stretched himself out at ease on the great leather couch and clasped his hands at the back of his head. “ There’s plenty to see, and enough to do, and, when she gets tired of our American ways, she can hunt up her mother and Canadianize with her to her heart’s content. In fact, that’s Janet’s worst fault: the being so beastly loyal that she never can make up her mind whether the rest of the world is more in need of snubbing or sympathy.” Suddenly he rolled over on his side and faced his sister. “ Oh, but it’s good to have you to gossip with once more!” he said contentedly.

Day, as she sat half-buried in her chair with the fire-light playing across her white cloth frock, had been studying her brother’s face with absent eyes. Now all at once, at his abrupt words, her brown eyes gathered focus and lighted until they transfigured her whole face.

“ Rob, you nice old thing!” she said, as she rose, crossed the bit of floor that lay between them, and

plumped herself down on the edge of the couch. "Then you really do keep on caring?"

"You bet I do!" Rob made sentimental answer; but his hand, shutting on the wide lace frill that edged Day's puffy sleeves, was full of gentleness. "Come up here," he adjured her. "I want you to cuddle, and, besides, you're sitting exactly on my rickety knee. I'm saving that for better things than the support of an eighth of a ton of feminine frivolity."

With a little hitch, Day nestled closer to him, bent on one elbow and fell to twisting his yellow hair.

"I wish it would get strong, Rob," she said, when a dozen diminutive pugs adorned his brow.

"Well, it won't," he answered philosophically. "I fancy it's about reached its limit. Still, I can do most things besides dancing and football, so I needn't wail too much. I'd have liked to go in for hockey, too; but that's knocked out. I say, Day?"

"Well?"

"Speaking of hockey, have you noticed what chums Jack and Janet are getting?"

Day laughed.

"Because they can Canadianize together, I suppose."

"Mayhap. I think it's more because Jack is sorry for her, and is trying to get her out of the frame of mind where she keeps her teeth on edge. Still, they do get on together. I noticed it, that day we all went motoring. Janet was positively coy, that

night, when she said good-bye to Jack. He liked her, too, said he did, when we were riding down to Springfield." Rob chuckled. "I remember I had to interrupt his monologue concerning you two girls by requesting him to get out and shoo a stray horse out of the road. He always does hate to be interrupted in a monologue."

"Jack! He doesn't do monologues," Day said disdainfully.

Rob chuckled again, It was a favourite trick of his, this rousing Day to the defence of Jack.

"Not on your life! Not when I'm about, to head him off. Where is he now?"

"Playing David to Janet's Saul," Day suggested.

"Not much. I'm up for that engagement. But has Jack come in?"

"He has." And Jack came strolling into the room and cast himself down into the chair which Day had but just abandoned. "Is there any room for me in this party?"

"Sure." Rob curled up his legs into a knot. "Would you like a corner of the sofy?"

"Thanks! I prefer this. I merely wished to know I wasn't in the way of any academic confidences."

"Never!" Day's smile confirmed the fervour of her tone. "We were just wishing you would come. Where have you been, ever since dinner?"

"Over at the Stayres'."

"See Phyllis?" Rob queried, for the old-time animosity towards Jack bestowed upon him by

Sidney's younger sister was a time-worn joke, a joke which had come near to ending in tragedy, for it was in behalf of Phyllis's safety that Jack had won his scarred face.

Now he laughed for, though time and the shadow of that tragedy had done their part towards Phyllis's softening, still no one ever was inclined to treat her moods as anything but a joke.

"Yes, I saw Phil, and she is a cooing dove, just at present. I likewise saw Sidney, and she told me to say she would be over, early in the morning."

"Shame she can't go out to Heatherleigh!" Rob made tranquil comment.

"I wouldn't go, in her place," Day said bluntly. "Of course, I'd love the having her; but I think she ought to stay at home, as long as she only has just this little while in town."

"You might take Phil in her place," Jack suggested.

"Merciful Moses! Don't!" Rob shuddered at the thought. "I'd rather have a hedgehog in a burning bush, with a ring of ravens sitting round and shrieking for manna. Phil is a good child. Likewise, she is improving. However, I think she'll improve faster under her mother's fostering care. Is she taking it out of Sidney very badly?"

"N-no," Jack made dubious answer. "I think she is pretty much dropping that sort of thing, except in seasons of great stress of mind. All the fall, I've run across her now and then by way of Wade, and I think she's never been quite so — so vigorous

since last spring's chastening. That really seemed a means of sanctification to the young woman."

Day abandoned her efforts to beautify her brother and faced about.

"That's always the way it works," she said impatiently. "She got the sanctification; you got the scars. No," for Jack flushed; "they aren't horrid at all, Jack. Truly, I almost like them; they make the rest of you so — so —"

"Messy?" he queried.

"No. So well worth while." As she spoke, she rose, crossed the rug and stood facing him, a slender, white-gowned figure with round bare arms and brown eyes which, of a sudden, had lost their mirth and grown deep and dark and tender. "I wouldn't have any of it different, Jack," she went on slowly. "I'm not even sure I'd take away all those horrid days when we were waiting to see what would be the end of it all, any more than Rob and I would be willing to give up any of those other days in Quebec, when he was laid up and aching. Sometimes one gets to know people better when things are horrid than when they all go right. I used to think you were almost like my own brother, before that night. Now I know you weren't; because, till then, I hadn't begun to know you."

Jack's eyes were very grave, in spite of his quizzical, mocking question, —

"And, now you do know me, what then?"

But Rob broke in, before Day had time to answer.

“ This library has had some strenuous scenes within its walls, Day. Do you remember the time we mumped along together, all we three? ”

Day nodded across at Jack.

“ That was when it began, ” she said.

“ Not much, ” Rob corrected coolly. “ It began when you played in the snow with Sir George and caught pneumonia. That was something worth while. We did that up in great shape: pneumonia, telegrams, snowbound trains, pretty near a shipwreck, and all the rest. When I grow up and write books for a living, I’m going to use it for a plot, only I shall kill off all the victims. ”

“ People die of mumps sometimes, ” Day reminded him.

“ Yes, and just think how it looks in the papers! ” Rob made disdainful answer. “ I’d hate to be the subject of a paragraph like that. Where’s Janet, by the way? ”

Day, once more settled on the couch, started up in sudden contrition.

“ Rob! I forgot her. ”

“ Well, keep on forgetting. Where are you going? ”

“ To hunt her up. ”

Stretching out his arms, Rob caught her by the waist and pulled her down again beside him.

“ Oh, don’t, ” he said. “ It will spoil all the tradition. This place belongs to just us three people; let’s take the good of it together. ”

And Jack added, as he settled back in his chair and stuck his feet out towards the blazing coals, —

“Most likely she has gone to bed by now, Day. I wouldn't disturb her, if I were in your place.”

And Day, who was nothing if not human, smothered her conscience and settled down again to the full enjoyment of the two people who, next to her parents, she loved best on earth.

Nevertheless and in spite of his advice to Day, Jack was in no sense disloyal to his new-made friendship with Janet Leslie. It was only that Jack Blanchard had a trick, too rare in this world, of preferring old friends to new. Rob and Day, for no reason at all and in their own off-hand, warm-hearted fashion, had totally reconstructed his life at the precise moment when his life needed it the most. It was no easy thing for a boy, well-born, well-bred, a boy who had left his university to fight his country's battles, to turn away from the last of those battlefields to face the fact that now he must fight on his own account, must do something, no matter what, to provide for the old mother left all at once without resources. Jack had done the first thing that offered, and had done it well, albeit the first thing had been the duty of a Pullman car conductor. It was in the course of that duty that he had met Rob Argyle, that, without in the least suspecting that his jovial, yellow-haired passenger was the son of one of America's greatest railway presidents, he had won Rob's liking, then his love. Later, when he had come

to New York to take a place in Mr. Argyle's office, it had been Rob and Day, first one, then the other, then both, who had drawn him, a homesick stranger, into their home life and then into at least the edge of their own social set, had stood by him in dreary days of illness, had stealthily laid their plans to bring his mother down from Toronto, to gladden the tedious time of his convalescence. And Jack, remembering all this, totally forgetting his own loyalty and devotion to these good friends of his, had mourned acutely at the breaking up of their congenial trio, when Rob had gone away to Harvard, Day to Smith. Now, quite as acutely, he rejoiced in their home-coming, in the temporary return to the old ways, and he would have been half inclined to grudge the Leslies their welcome in the family circle, the consequent interruption of certain old-time traditions, had he not known from his own experience just what that welcome meant to an expatriated Canadian.

Still, it was an interruption, all the same, and now and then he forgot to repine too loudly when Janet succumbed to early drowsiness and took herself away to bed.

However, the last night of the vacation found him standing alone with Janet before the fire in the great reception hall.

"Where are Rob and Day?" he had asked, as, hat in hand, he had halted at her side.

"Gone for a drive," Janet made answer, as she stopped thrumming on the banjo which Rob had given

her, New Year morning. "We've been skating, Day and I, all the afternoon; and, when we came in, Day had an attack of conscience for deserting Rob and dragged him out for a tour of the parks. It's nearly time they were at home."

"You found the skating good?"

"Fair. Not like ours, though."

Jack laughed.

"Would you admit it, if it were?" he asked banteringly.

Janet flushed. Then she echoed his laugh.

"No; I think not," she said honestly. "Of course, I prefer Quebec to all the New Yorks in the world. Still, I've had a glorious time down here, and I'm glad I came."

"And glad to go?" he queried idly.

"Yes," she echoed; "and glad to go. It is time. Nowadays, I'm not used to butlers and things; I never saw a house like this, and I'm not sure it's good for me. It teaches me how many things there are to want. That is partly the fault I find with Smith. We Canadian girls don't even know the names of the things the girls there feel they must have as their right. I like the things; I should adore them, if I had them. Still, I like our ways the best. It is two opposite pulls, you see, and I sometimes think they are what make me so cross-grained."

"And yet you want to go back?" he asked, watching her with the keen, kind glance of a big brother who understood her worriment.

" Yes, because it's time I was at work. I think I was meant to work, Mr. Blanchard; I'm happiest, when I'm very, very busy. And, some day, I mean to make my work tell."

He nodded.

" I remember."

Janet faced him impulsively.

" Yes; that's the joy of you," she said. " You do remember things."

His smile showed his appreciation of the little compliment.

" Why not? I felt immensely proud in your telling. But you don't mean to work all the time, Miss Janet? Why not play a little, now and then? "

He was astonished at the sudden lighting of her face, as she held out the little banjo towards him.

" I shall, on this," she answered. " Some day, you may find me in the banjo club, helping do a concert. If you do, it will be thanks to Rob; it's all his work."

" If I do, I'll applaud till my hands are blistered," he told her, laughing.

But Janet ignored the laugh. She faced him gravely.

" I have a notion it may make a difference," she went on. " Anyway, I mean to try, and Rob says I can, in time. If I could play, could play enough to be asked into the club, it would make things over for me. I should feel then as if I were a little piece of the whole," she laughed nervously; " a

little dull stitch in the whole great fabric. Can't you see what I mean?"

He nodded. Then, —

"You'd like it?" he asked.

There came a little catch in Janet's breath.

"I'd give my life to get it for myself," she confessed;
"but I'd die before I'd ask it of the girls."

And, the next moment, a rush of air from the opening door betrayed the advent of Rob and Day.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

“HUSH!” Helen Pope warned her sister.

Amy gave an anxious glance about the room. Only a thorough search, however, could detect the fact of the absence of any given girl, since, by way of promoting general conversation and breaking up incipient cliques, Mrs. Leslie had hit upon the expedient of having the napkin rings gathered up at the end of every meal and dealt out again among the plates according to the dictates of pure chance. Confronted by the alternatives of starvation and renouncing a pet animosity, the girls invariably chose the latter as the lesser evil, and Leslie house feuds came to untimely ends in consequence.

With careful deliberation, then, Amy looked up and down the room, over one shoulder, then the other. Then, assured that the object of her search was undoubtedly absent, she took up her theme anew.

“I think it is perfectly contemptible,” she said, with the downright emphasis which had first won Day Argyle’s liking.

She liked it now.

“I don’t see, I confess, what it has to do with the rights of the case,” she said.

“It hasn’t anything, not a single, solitary, lone-

some thing. They only say it has, for the sake of making trouble." Amy plunged her fork into her baked potato as if she were spearing an imaginary foe.

"But why should they make trouble?" asked another voice.

Amy turned her weapon in the imaginary foe.

"Jealousy!" she said explosively.

"What in the world are they jealous of?"

"Because we're the elect of the earth, here in this house. We know it and keep still about it; they talk about it, confirm it by the energy of their denials. Then, just because we don't fight like the cats of Kilkenny, they say we're a ring, and trying to rule the class. Mother Leslie, did you ever hear anything so absurd?" Amy lifted up her voice in a veritable wail of protest.

It was Day who once more took up the refrain.

"If their candidate were as good —" she began slowly.

Amy cut in.

"She isn't; she's no good at all. A feather bolster in dancing shoes and a court train would do better than she."

"Then why do they rush her so?"

"Politics!" screamed an irate chorus, and Mrs. Leslie looked up with what Day called her "Less noise, please" expression.

"Day," Amy's voice continued, in a solo; "you are a guileless dear."

Day leaned back in her chair, nodding, the while, at the maid waiting to take her plate.

“ Well, I am glad I am,” she confessed.

The chorus laughed. It was Helen who answered from across the table, —

“ Then you have achieved your heart’s desire, Day. What did you suppose they wanted to put that squab in for? ”

“ I — Really, I don’t know. I couldn’t see that she was good for much; but I supposed they had some reason or other.”

“ So they had,” Amy struck in. “ The only trouble is that it is a bad one.”

“ There is one comfort,” came a voice from farther down the table; “ the suspense is bound to be short. They have managed to keep the matter hanging fire till the last possible moment; but they will have to settle it, one way or the other, within a day or two.”

“ They say Irene Jessup is absolutely down on the squab, as Helen calls her,” said another voice.

Amy laughed shortly.

“ And they also say we have brought influences to bear upon Irene,” she answered.

“ What influences, I’d like to know,” Day questioned hotly.

“ Two Sunday night suppers, and Helen’s fudge party,” some one responded. “ They evidently think Irene’s judgment is an island floating around somewhere in her gastric juice. Imagine Irene

Jessup influenced by any crowd of freshmen, a girl who stands as she does for the college!"

"Anyway," Amy's spoon beat time to her words; "anyhow, if they do change things now and put in another captain, after all they've said, I'll cut my class for ever after."

"Hush!" Helen said again.

An instant later, Sidney Stayre came into the room.

"Do please excuse me, Mother Leslie!" she said contritely. "I'm sorry to be so disgustingly late; but they're still at work on trials for the team, and I really couldn't get away. Dear me! What a silence! Is anybody something wrong?" And, dropping into her chair, she attacked her luncheon with a healthy appetite which betokened her unconsciousness of all impending trouble.

Nevertheless, trouble came, came just two days later; and it was Irene who was detailed to break the ugly news.

"Sidney?" she said interrogatively, as she halted on the threshold of the great front room where Sidney sat alone, tugging away at an obstinate page of Greek.

"Come in. Oh, do just sit down and keep still, though, till I fit in this horrid participle," Sidney besought her, with a casual gesture at a chair. "I'm glad to see you, and I'm dying for a gossip; but I must get this done, and *θαυμάζοντα* won't agree with anything inside a radius of ten lines."

For five minutes more, Sidney bent her brows over the perplexing word, then, casting aside her dictionary

and Homer, she looked up. To her surprise, she saw that Irene was a little pale and frowning intently at the clasps of her gloves, which clicked nervously between her restless fingers.

“ Well, Miss Undertaker? ” Sidney accosted her irreverently. “ Who’s dead and buried at your house now? It is horribly unbecoming to you to look so glum as all that.”

As if goaded to sudden speech, Irene blurted out her errand.

“ Sidney, you darling, I’ve come to tell you something bad.”

In her turn, Sidney whitened. Then she laughed a little nervously.

“ It must be something pretty bad, to drag a *darling* out of you,” she observed. “ Out with it, Irene, and have it over.”

“ I may as well,” Irene said bluntly. “ I never could see the sense of telling bad news backwards; you only imagine worse things, while one is coming to the point.”

“ Come, then, and end my anxiety.” Sidney spoke a bit impatiently, for Irene’s manner showed that something was much amiss, and the suspense was telling even upon Sidney’s steady nerves.

Irene bit her lip. Then she said, with a brave directness that cost her far more than Sidney ever knew, —

“ Sidney, the basket ball team for your class is finally made up. I have just seen the list.”

Sidney caught her breath, grew a shade paler, then shut her teeth together hard.

“And some one else is captain?” she asked composedly at last.

Again Irene bit her lip. She knew the full weight of the blow she was about to deal. For six weeks past, now, she and Sidney had been wont to discuss the basket ball situation in its least detail; Sidney was quite well aware that she herself was the choice of the whole junior team for freshman captain, knew that, by reason of the traditional alliance between the alternating classes, the junior preference was bound to carry weight.

“No,” she said slowly; “no; you’re not the captain.”

Sidney never flinched.

“I’m sorry,” she said steadily. “Who is?”

“Agatha Gilbert.”

Again Sidney nodded, once and yet again.

“I think I understand,” she said. “It is the working of that other set. Well, as I say, I am sorry; but Agatha may do ever so much more than we have expected of her, may win both games for us, for all we know.” She was talking, Irene saw, to gain time while she digested her bitter disappointment. “Where have they put me?” she asked at length.

Irene rose and crossed the room, picked up a book that lay upon the table, dropped it, crossed back again and sat down on the arm of Sidney’s chair.

Sidney, meanwhile, watched her with eyes of mingled sorrow and amusement.

“Don’t take it too tragically, Irene,” she said whimsically, after Irene had stroked her hand for several speechless moments. “Of course, with you, there is no especial sense in pretending I’m not badly disappointed. I am disappointed. I wanted to be captain, wanted it more than I’ve ever wanted anything in all my life. I’d planned all sorts of nonsense about leading a winning team, making a record for the class that would stand for us to boast about in our reunions. I’d even planned the mascot. I suppose it was silly. I ought to have known better than to count so far ahead. Still, if I was silly, I’ve had my come-uppance.” She smiled a little wanly. “No; don’t stir. You’re a comfortable old dear, and you don’t tell things. Just let me make my moan to you, and then I’ll get a grip on myself. I promise you I won’t show the others that I have done any wailing.”

“I will, then,” Irene said stormily.

Sidney checked her, with a sudden gesture.

“Don’t. It won’t do me any good, and it will only make it hard for Agatha.”

“Who cares for Agatha?” Irene demanded hotly.

“I do. She’s really not so bad, and she plays a good game, as long as she’s able to keep her head. Truly, it has always been a mystery to me how anybody that’s so fat can do as well as she.”

“Oh, yes, if it comes to that,” Irene conceded.

“Still, you’ve half a dozen better girls.”

“ I know we have,” Sidney assented, her innate honesty downing, for the moment, her loyalty to her successful rival. “ I wonder why they chose her.”

“ Politics! She’s plastic!” Irene answered in a two-fold explosion.

“ What’s the politics? ” Sidney asked.

Irene stared at her in amazement.

“ Sidney! You mole! Don’t you know that the Harriman crowd have been working against you from the start? ”

Sidney looked up, astonished.

“ No. Have they? How should I? ”

“ Just by not being the mole-iest sort of a bat. They have been against you from the very first of the season. I supposed you knew.”

“ I hadn’t time for such fusses,” Sidney replied disdainfully. “ I was too busy, training. What didn’t they like? ”

Irene held up two fingers.

“ Your being in this house.” She lowered one. “ Your being Day Argyle’s roommate.” She lowered the other.

“ What did that have to do with my game? ” Sidney demanded, in hot wrath.

“ Nothing at all. It merely had to do with their notion of politics. They have been saying, up and down the class, that you Leslie girls think you own the college, and that it’s high time somebody stopped you; that it would be a four-year scandal to allow

class president and freshman basket ball captain to be roommates, especially in a house like this."

"What utter nonsense!"

"Of course it's nonsense, nonsense of the most futile sort. That's characteristic of them."

"And they would throw over the question of play, throw over their chances to win the game, just for a little thing like that?"

"Apparently. Else, they'd not have chosen Agatha." Irene spoke crisply.

"She may not be so bad."

"She is, though. All our girls are furious at the choice."

Sidney yielded to her curiosity.

"Irene, what do they really think of her?" she queried.

Irene's answer came pat.

"That she's a brainless feather bed, as fit for captain as she is for leading an expedition into Thibet."

Sidney pondered.

"I wish I didn't think so, too," she said despondently. "I'd be willing to step back to let in some girls, Irene. I hope I'm large enough to care more for the class than for myself. Of course, I'd love the fuss and feathers, the getting the flowers and the being able to tell of it at home. Still, if I honestly thought Agatha could outclass me, I'd step down and out with a good grace. But — she can't."

"No," Irene assented; "nor ever can."

“ That’s the very worst of the whole thing,” Sidney answered slowly. “ It’s so irrevocable; Rally Day is only a few weeks off, and she needs no end of training. We haven’t the ghost of a chance to win; our only hope is to hold down the score against the sophomores, and stand by Agatha as well as we can.”

“ We can’t,” Irene mutinied.

“ We can, too. Agatha isn’t to blame.”

“ She is, then! She might have had the sense and decency to refuse.”

Sidney raised her head.

“ No girl would do that,” she said.

“ You would.”

“ No,” she confessed a little sadly. “ I might think I would; but, when it came to case in hand, I know I wouldn’t. Girls aren’t made that way, Irene.”

Then, for a while, the silence deepened, grew insistent. Sidney broke it.

“ There is only one thing for us to do,” she said decisively at length. “ When Agatha loses her head, she is good for nothing at all; it would demoralize her completely, if she thought the team and you junior girls distrusted her. We must grit our teeth and stand by her, if we have to fib ourselves neck-deep into purgatory to accomplish it. It’s a fact, Irene. We’ve got to put our consciences into our pockets, and burn much incense before Agatha, if we have any notion of keeping the class from utter, absolute annihilation.”

Irene drew a deep sigh.

“ You may be right,” she was beginning guardedly; but Sidney caught her up.

“ Of course, I’m right. I know what I am talking about. Under all her fatness, Agatha is a bundle of nerves. I’m callous as a broomstick; but even I go all to pieces, if I think the girls are saying things about me. Irene,” she looked up suddenly, as a vagrant recollection crossed her mind; “ how much is this thing known? ”

“ It will be all over college by bedtime,” Irene said gloomily. “ There are probably a dozen or two indignation meetings going on at this very moment. There’s one, to my certain knowledge.”

“ Where? ”

“ In the Popes’ room. I met Day in the hall. We came up-stairs together, and I saw her going in there on her heels.”

Sidney laughed; but her eyes glittered suspiciously.

“ Poor old Day! It will come hard on her,” she said.

Irene nodded, bracing herself, the while, for that part of her tidings which still remained untold.

“ It did come hard. Day has cared much more about this than she did about being president. She’s not the only one, though. I saw Janet Leslie, and she said Things, Things not to be repeated.”

This time, Sidney laughed.

“ Janet has a way of expressing herself plainly, now and then. Well, I suppose it’s all over college by now. I think I’ll be cutting chapel, in the morning.”

“ Not much! You can't show the white feather, Sidney Stayre,” Irene made indignant protest. “ We've arranged all that, anyway. Gladys Allen is coming up, just before bedtime, to ask you to sit in senior seats with her, and you'll lead out with Alice Powell. Even the seniors are furious, this time; they say they'd rather have the sophomores lose the game than win it by a stroke of absolute injustice.”

Sidney drew a long breath.

“ I hate the making a spectacle of myself,” she mutinied. “ It's nice of them; but I shall feel an utter idiot, and as if I couldn't fight my own battles. Still, if I must, I must; and I suppose one can't decently refuse such things. But, about its being known, Irene, I didn't mean just now; but have the others known 'twas coming? ”

Irene nodded.

“ They've spent the last six days in hoping the lightning would strike and prevent it,” she answered grimly.

Sidney faced her steadily.

“ I thought so. It explains a good many things, a few words I've overheard, and a lot of sudden silences and spurts of conversation when I appeared among the girls. Well, I am glad I didn't know it was coming; there is no especial comfort in anticipating one's woes. By the way, you messenger of ill omen, do you realize you haven't told me yet where they have done myself the honour to put me? ”

The very suddenness of the question broke down Irene's guard.

"That's the worst of all, Sidney," she burst out without preface. "You're not on the team at all; they've put you down as substitute."

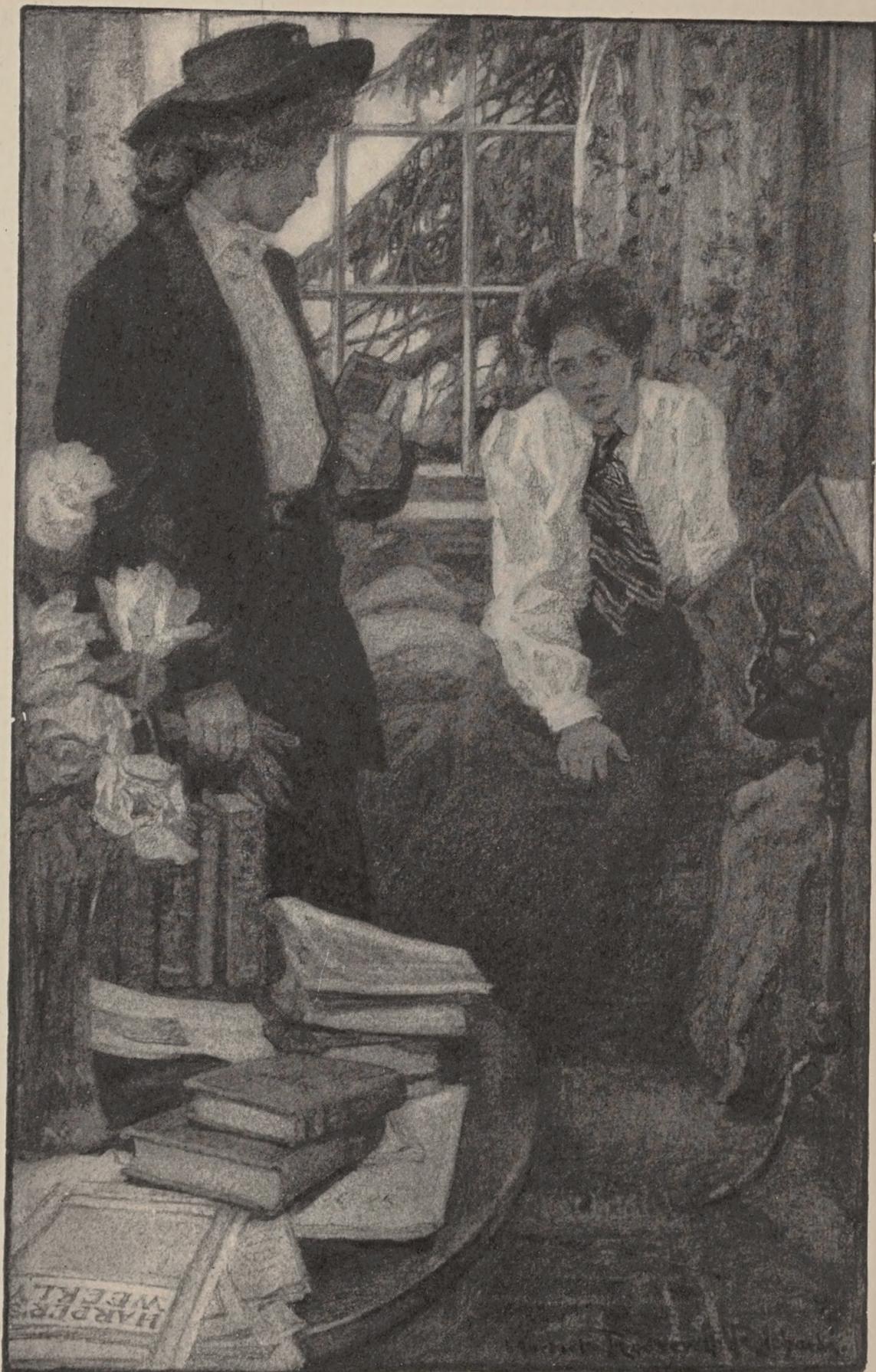
"Irene!" It was a frightened, pitiful sort of cry, as of a child in mortal pain calling to its elder for help and comfort. Then Sidney steadied to the blow which had fallen, cruel, unexpected, straight between the eyes. "Would you mind leaving me alone?" she asked. "I can't talk about it any more just now, Irene."

And Irene had the tact to rise, without another word.

At the door, she turned back at Sidney's voice.

"Wait, Irene," she said, and, crossing the floor, she put up her arms on Irene's shoulders and leaned to her in one of her rare caresses. "I am glad you told me. No one else, not even Day, could have done it with so little hurt, for you know all about it. It must have been hard for you. And Irene," her breath came a little shorter; "would you be willing to write to Wade, just a little, short note, telling him about it and asking him to tell the others? I think that you and he together can make them understand."

Then she closed the door upon her friend and went back to face it out, alone.



"IRENE HAD THE TACT TO RISE WITHOUT ANOTHER WORD."

[Page 148.]

CHAPTER TWELVE

FAITHFUL to Sidney's request, Irene did write just a note to Wade Winthrop; together, they did make the others understand, as was proved by the bundle of letters which swamped Sidney, two days later, letters which brought the hot tears into her eyes, even while they brought consolation to her heart. Still more consolation came to her, however, by way of a brief letter from Rob, to whom Day had written in hot wrath, the very night Irene had brought the tidings.

"Dear Sidney," he wrote laconically; "so we've both of us been knocked out of the race. Some day, we may get to be thankful; but doesn't it hurt infernally now? Yours always, Rob."

And Sidney, when she went to bed, that night, tucked the note under her pillow. Rob had been through it, though from another cause, and he understood. Even Wade's flowers were a failure by comparison, and it was without the slightest twinge of conscience that she made them over to Irene, all but one single dark red rose which she wore until it fell to pieces. Later, smiling to herself, she deliberately ate up the fallen petals. Wade's sympathy was true and welcome; therefore she would assimilate it in any way which lay at hand.

If Sidney had been the sort of girl to enjoy sensations, she would have had her fill of them, the next few days. The choice of freshman captain had become a veritable storm centre, around which raged the entire college, — the entire college, that is, which knows that basket ball exists and has a mission above sprained ankles and shrieking enthusiasm and consequent rivalries. For the first time in the history of the college, the honour of athletics had been threatened; and the athletics-loving end of the college rose, as a single girl, to resent the insult. It was all a part of the resentment that Sidney should be lionized, not so much as the individual, Sidney Stayre, as the victim of a political manoeuvre which had been so skilfully planned and executed that even the official powers, albeit indignant, were unable to prevent it. Sidney not only led out of chapel, the morning after Irene's visit, arm in arm with the captain of the senior team; she spent the next week in a bower of sympathizing roses and violets, and she feasted at Boyden's until her physical indigestion was as upset as her psychological one.

Of course, it was the expectation on all sides that this general demonstration of hostility would force Agatha to resign; but, to the surprise of everybody, Agatha showed herself impenetrable, and sat tight upon the pinnacle to which she had found herself exalted. At first, this was the result of the inability of even such pointed signs of disapproval to penetrate her flesh to the extent of lodging in her brain. Later,

when it really began to dawn upon her that she was not popular with her own team, nor with her class, nor even with the college, a certain stolid obstinacy asserted itself and joined itself to the urgent appeals of her faction to hold her place at any cost. She did hold it, held it though the irate team broke training, skipped practice, and showed themselves to be in all respects upon the very verge of mutiny.

It would be useless to deny that Sidney had her hours of secret mourning, her moments of open lamentation made to Day and Irene. Those two friends, of all the girls she knew, she felt she could trust. She felt sure, unless she spoke out her woe to some one, she would end by betraying herself to the world at large. As it was, however, helped on by the expressed sympathy and wrath of Irene and Day, buoyed up by the kindness which met her upon every hand, Sidney succeeded in presenting a brave, bright face to the college world, succeeded even in resisting the indignant impulse to send in her resignation from the substitute team. Even Day advised her to this end; but Mrs. Leslie, overhearing, came promptly to the support of Sidney's argument. It would be childish to withdraw entirely, Sidney maintained, when all the college knew how her heart was in the game, how she was hoping for the victory of her own class. It might be the part of injured dignity to cast aside the meagre crust bestowed upon her in place of the promised loaf; but Sidney read other meanings into the word *dignity*, and Mrs. Leslie, who took the matter

to heart as much as any of the girls, agreed with Sidney's reading. If Sidney were in it for herself alone, then let her resign at once; if she were in it, as she had always claimed, for the sake of her class, then let her remember how it had happened within the history of the college that some unforeseen accident had given to a substitute the chance to win or lose a game.

Then, her say once said, Mrs. Leslie departed on her way, leaving the girls to argue it out as they might choose. Nevertheless, she remembered, that night and for many nights to come, to send hot milk to Sidney's room at bedtime. The girl was plucky, and she made no open moan; but, to Mrs. Leslie's questionings, she confessed to sleepless nights, and, half the time, she left her food untasted on her plate. It is not easy for a girl of Sidney's sort to find herself cast to one side completely and through no fault of her own. Neither does the mere detail of bearing it bravely render the fact more bearable.

Meanwhile, as a matter of course, Wade had replied to Irene's note. Later, he had written again, asking for further news of his young cousin whose letters, although noncommittal, were causing him some anxiety. And Irene answered, fully and without reserve: Sidney was the pluckiest girl in all Smith College, the pluckiest and the brightest, though hurt to the quick, hurt, Irene feared, more lastingly than had at first appeared to any of them. She answered again and quite as fully, when Wade wrote to beg

her to keep him informed of Sidney's welfare. And so two or three weeks passed away, and mid-year's was at hand.

It was snowing fast, on Tuesday night, when Irene came in from the Wallace House where certain of her classmates had been holding revel. The laugh was still in her eyes, the smile around her lips, as she shook the white flakes from her shoulders and opened the door to go into the house. Beside the table in the hall, she paused to see whether the postman's evening round had brought her any letters, and she gave a little start of pleased surprise, as she recognized the writing on the thick, square envelope that lay atop. With the briefest possible nod to her companions, she seized upon the letter and bore it off to her own room, to read it alone and at her leisure.

Deliberately she took off her rain coat and brushed away the last of the snowflakes which still clung to her bare head; then she drew up a chair beside the reading-lamp and opened the letter with leisurely fingers which bespoke a desire to make the reading last as long as possible. In the same leisurely fashion and lying far back in her chair, she unfolded the thick cream-coloured sheet and read the opening lines. Then she started up in quick attention, while her brows arched themselves and drew together into an anxious frown.

"My dear Miss Jessup," the letter ran; "I seem to be perpetually using you as a means of indirect communication with my young cousin; but the fact

of the matter is, I shall feel a good deal easier if I have some one on the spot who knows how things are going here.

“Bungay is ill. The doctor says it is nothing serious, only a cold. He jeered at the notion of letting Sidney know about it. However, I can't help feeling anxious. The little fellow is feverish, now and then delirious, and he coughs almost incessantly. Quite incessantly he begs for Sidney, and he babbles about her and a 'bear without a hair,' whatever that may be, whenever he goes off his head. It all seems to me rather serious, though of course it may have gone on my nerves more than the case warrants. However, we both know, you and I, how Sidney adores the youngster, and how she would mourn, if anything happened and she were not here.

“As I say, I am probably alarmed at nothing. The doctor says I am, and he is the one who ought to know. In any case, I don't want to alarm my aunt and uncle, so I haven't talked it over much with them. To-night, though, I've been at the Argyles', talking it out with Jack Blanchard. He feels as I do, that, if things aren't bad by now, they may get so at almost any time. Poor youngster! He looks such a forlorn little bundle, curled up in the blankets and gripping the Teddy bear you sent him. Jack went in to see him last night, and it broke him all up. Bungay has been so fond of him, you know, and now he didn't take any notice of him, didn't seem even to know him. It's really pitiful to see him, Miss Jessup, with all the

life knocked out of him. And you know what a jolly, irrepressible little beggar he always was.

“ But about this letter. I was still talking with Jack, when Mrs. Argyle came in. She advised me to write to you and tell you how things are, so that, if we had to send for Sidney, you'd be on hand to brace her up a bit. And Mrs. Argyle told me to tell you that, if it should ever reach the point where Sidney had to come home, she wished you could come down with her and stay a few days at the Argyles' house, to see Sidney through it. Day would do it, of course, do it gladly; but she is younger than Sidney is, and, in a case like this, each six months counts. Besides, you had a bit of similar bad times, last fall, and you'd know how to comfort Sidney. Pray God, though, it may not come to that! I'm sorry to throw this care upon you, and yet, I'm glad you're there to take it. Yours cordially, Wade Winthrop.”

Twice Irene read the letter through from end to end. Then, with a gesture of impatience, she pushed the loose hair away from her face, rose and began to pace the room.

“ Poor old Sidney! ” she said aloud at length. “ I thought she had about all the bad times she could bear; but the bad seems likely to be getting worse. And all I can do is to see her through it, and give her the lean consolation of knowing I am sorry.”

All the next day and the next, Irene kept out of Sidney's way. In a colony of fourteen hundred girls,

this is not hard to accomplish, when the girl to be shunned is in another class. Nevertheless, Sidney had become so well acquainted with all of Irene's haunts that it was only by the greatest swiftness and dexterity that Irene maintained her distance. Fond though she was of Sidney, by reason of that very fondness, Irene felt it was imperative, just then, that she should avoid Sidney's searching eyes. Under their steady, comprehending gaze, she felt assured, she would be certain to betray her anxiety for this new shadow which was hanging over her unconscious friend. Better than that, far better, that she should incur the charge of fickleness, of absolute neglect. Accordingly, she went her way, dodging Sidney at every point and carefully remembering to forget that that very Wednesday evening was the night she had set aside for an all-evening call from Sidney. Even through the closed panels of her door, even in the darkness of her room, she could see the hurt astonishment in Sidney's honest eyes as they read the mendacious card *asleep!* pinned to the outside of the door. She tried to smile to herself as she pictured how, later on, she could show Wade's letter to Sidney and join her in the laugh over the depths of perfidy to which their causeless alarm had driven them.

Thursday night, it stormed again, snow with a howling wind which, coupled with shrieks of laughter from inside the room, deadened the sound of Irene's tap on Sidney's door. It seemed to the girl standing there, snow-soaked, blown, and crushing a slip of

yellow paper in her hand while she waited an instant before repeating the knock, it seemed to Irene that half the household were gathered there within, holding high carnival. Involuntarily and not by reason of the snow, she gave a little shiver. Then, as the applause obtained its encore, and the clamour subsided to a single voice, she tapped again.

It was Day who threw open the door.

“Irene, you prodigal!” she said, as she dragged the guest inside. “Where have you been keeping yourself, this age? You’re just in the nick of time. We’ve all been doing stunts, and Janet has brought down the house, doing the Dean of the Cathedral, the night the cat came in and climbed on the canopy of his chair. Do it once more, Janet. I’m dying to have Irene hear.”

The chorus broke out again, and Janet yielded to its urging. To Irene, awaiting the interminable monologue’s end, it seemed a new and unfamiliar Janet, as if possessed by the spirit of the storm outside. Roused by the wind, fired by the unwonted applause, she was glowing like a red-hot coal and as magnetic as any actor who ever faced the footlights. In the vague fashion in which one, held by a dominant idea, yet notices all sorts of irrelevant details, Irene took note of the circle of admiring girls, of Sidney’s honest pleasure and of Day’s delight that, at length, their friend was showing a hint of her really attractive self. Then, as Janet once more dropped down into her corner amid a perfect whirlwind of applause,

Irene clenched her hand upon the yellow paper, holding Wade's brief message, —

“Maurice not as well. Best bring Sidney down with you in the morning.”

Strange to say, to Irene's mind, the most ominous thing in all that message was Wade's use of the name *Maurice*, so rarely associated with little Bungay.

“Sidney.” In the stillness which followed the applause, Irene's voice sounded curiously abrupt, yet so gentle that every eye in the room sought her face, as if to ask its meaning. “Do you mind coming into Helen's room for a minute? There's something I really must talk over with you.”

In the gray snowy dawn of the next day, they started southward. Day saw them off alone, for Sidney had begged her to ask the others not to come down even to say good-bye in the hall below. At noon Wade met them in New York, and his face was grave, though smiling.

“No change,” he said at once as he met Sidney's appealing eyes. “The doctor says it is worth everything, the way he has held out through the night.” But, behind Sidney's back he glanced at Irene, and Irene read little courage in the glance.

The Argyle horses, waiting at the station, were famous in the city; yet it seemed to Sidney, watching the familiar streets with hot, dry eyes, that they crawled with the pace of aged turtles. She was vaguely conscious that Wade and Irene were talking, that they both addressed remarks to her now and then,

addressed them, and then mercifully resumed their talk without awaiting the answer which she tried in vain to force from her stiffened lips. All she wished was to be let alone, and to be allowed to get on the box and whip, whip those lagging horses.

Whether the carriage stopped at the door, or whether it ever reached the door at all, she never knew. She only was aware that the carriage, with Wade and Irene inside, was turning the corner towards the Argyles' house, and that she was standing in the dear old hall at home, her head upon her mother's shoulder.

"Don't cry so, Sidney," her mother said at length. "You mustn't, child."

"Bungay?" There was infinite appeal in the short question.

"No worse than he was, last night. His pulse, if anything, is stronger. When you are ready, dear."

But Sidney's hat and coat were on a chair by now, her tears gulped back, or brushed aside.

"I am ready," she said bravely. "Shall we go?"

However, on the threshold, her bravery wellnigh failed her. Was this Bungay, the sturdy, the irrepressible, this gray-white, weazen, wide-eyed child who looked so tiny in the great, white bed, who lay there, heedless of her coming, and babbled things about her.

"There 'peared a bear,
Without a hair,
One lovely summer morning.

“ Did you write it up on a card, Sidney? ’Cause you might get homesick without me, you know, and it would berember me of you. I did berember you. I used to have a sister, you see. Her name was Sidney, and we went to Auntie Jack’s house together, and saw the nice man that prinked his necktie. And then we played squat tag. But she’s gone away, and I get so homesick for her. No; I don’t want the twins. I want my sister Sidney, the one I made the poem to keep from being homesick. And I made another one, one day. It had a lion in it, and a coon, and I thought maybe, if I could think it up again and send it to her, she’d berember me, and — come back — to — see — me.” The voice trailed off into silence.

“ Bungay dear,” Sidney said softly.

The little figure rolled over in the bed, the eyes sought Sidney’s eyes, and the weazen face took on a smile of recognition and of welcome.

“ Hullo, Sidney!” the voice said feebly. “ You berembered me and came back; didn’t you? ”

“ Yes, dear.”

“ And you won’t go off to leave me any more? ”

“ Not if you want me, dear,” she promised.

“ All right.” The voice lost its feverish insistence and grew drowsy. “ Some day, I’ll make a better poem to pay you up for coming home.”

All the rest of that day and all of the night which followed it, remained for ever branded, scorched into the very fabric of Sidney’s life. There was nothing to do. The nurses were omnipresent, and the doctor

came at intervals to hold low-voiced conferences with them, conferences which drove Sidney to the verge of frenzy. The chart on the bed-head went up, went down, its humped-up lines reminding Sidney of a profile map of the Andes she once had seen in a shop window. She tried to hold her mind steady; but it went leaping off into the future, dodging to and fro among all sorts of hideous details, then leaping back again upon the one fixed, constant question: what would life be like, without any Bungay?

“ Sidney.” The dawn was once more graying the room, when her father’s low voice brought her mind back once more to the place where she was sitting. “ You can do nothing here now. I will call you when Bungay stirs, and I want you to go away to rest.”

“ Not to bed? ” she asked, in such evident terror at the thought that her father relented.

“ Not if you’d rather not. There’s a good fire in the library, dear. Lie down on the couch there, until I call you.”

The dancing flames upon the hearth seemed to Sidney to be leaping up, one by one, to ask her the old question which as yet she could not answer, could never answer until time should bury the question in the fact. She lay down obediently, obediently she closed her eyes; but she could not shut out Bungay’s face, the unfamiliar, white little Bungay she had never seen until the day before. And how? And why? And why again? And then, all questions

left unanswered, she fell into a lethargy of sheer exhaustion.

It was the gray noon of another snowy day, when she wakened with a sudden start, to find Wade and Irene seated by the purring fire. As she struggled to throw off the last of her ugly dreams, she was trying hard to see their faces, trying to read in them some tidings from the room overhead; but Wade, hearing her stir, forestalled her effort.

“Steady, Sidney,” he said instantly. “He’s better, and the doctor says he’s coming through all right.”

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

“YOU want?” the maid observed tentatively at length, when her patience was exhausted.

With a jerk, the stranger recalled his errant, vacant gaze; with a snap, he shut his dangling lower jaw and made a snatch at his hat.

“Of course,” he assented blandly, but in an accent so foreign to the ears of the maid that she incontinently giggled, then turned the giggle to a cough.

“You wished to see — ?” she observed, still tentatively.

“Oh, yes. Rather!” The stranger fumbled about for an eyeglass which hung from a species of black cable encircling his neck. “Is Miss Argyle at home?” he demanded, when it was found and in position.

“Miss Argyle?”

“Yes. Miss Day Argyle.”

“There’s no such person living here.”

The stranger fixed his glass upon her in grave rebuke.

“Oh, but you’re sure to be mistaken,” he said. “I know she is here. She really must be, you know.”

“But she isn’t,” the maid protested a little tartly. The stranger felt in a succession of pockets, drew

out a shining coin and held it up before the astonished maid.

“ Think again,” he bade her persuasively.

“ Sir-r! ”

The stranger dodged at the broad and irate brogue which assailed his ears. In his confusion, he dropped his glass.

“ I want Miss Argyle, you know, Miss Day Argyle,” he continued to protest.

“ But I tell you she isn't here.” Again indignation brought into evidence the brogue.

“ Isn't this Smith College? ” he demanded.

“ The President's house. Yes.”

“ Then she is here. She wrote and told me that she was, you know. I'll come in and wait a bit, while you find her. She may be out at play.”

Light dawned.

“ You mean she's one of the young ladies? ” the maid asked suddenly.

“ She — Miss Argyle — is a young lady,” he made guarded admission.

“ And she's here in college? ”

“ That's what I told you,” he reiterated petulantly. “ Here is my card.” As if doubtful of the extent of the maid's education, he raised himself on tiptoe to look over her shoulder and read it aloud. “ *Lord Axmuthy*. That's me.”

The maid had lived too long in a republic to stand in awe of lords. With disconcerting suddenness, she flipped the card back into his Lordship's hand; then

she pointed over her right shoulder towards the next building.

“ Go over to the Registrar’s office,” she bade him.

Lord Axmuthy made prompt, yet feeble, protest.

“ But I don’t want the Registrar. I’m not going to get married, you know, or born, or anything of that sort,” he assured her plaintively. “ I only want to call upon Miss Day Argyle.”

“ You’ll get her in there,” the maid told him. Then she slammed the door in his face.

Left alone, Lord Axmuthy fell to communing with himself aloud, and his communing held in its note more than a trace of his former plaintiveness.

“ Funny place, this! You’d think, to look at it, that there were girls enough about, all with their hats off and their greatcoats unbuttoned, too, by Jove. You’d think they’d freeze, you know.” He chafed his own ears at the thought. “ There are girls by the dozen, passing, and they can’t seem to pick out the one I want at all. Queer thing, that! I could, if I lived here; I’d know her by the tartan skirt she always wore, outdoors. I wonder if I’d best go over to the Registrar. It might help, you know; and, on the other hand, it might make me trouble, later on. I can’t see why a Registrar should be of use in a thing like this; but it seems the only way to do. I can’t well stop here on these front steps, all day, you know.” And, peering near-sightedly about him from above the furry collar of his coat, Lord Axmuthy descended the Presidential steps and betook himself, according to

direction, towards the end door in the building just across the drive.

Once inside the door marked with its great white plate *Registrar*, he advanced upon the long desk which bars the room, and made patient iteration of his former question.

“ I say, you know, is Miss Argyle at home? ”

The Registrar was bending above her private desk in the corner by the window. At the strange voice and stranger accent, she turned and gazed at the speaker abstractedly for a moment, as if she were an entomologist and he some new and curious sort of beetle.

Lord Axmuthy had grown impatient of gazings by now. His impatience showed itself in his futile fumbling in divers pockets. The fumbling, although obviously impeded by the thickness of his gloves, at length resulted in a card and a bit of gold which Lord Axmuthy placed upon the long desk before him. Then he sought about for his glass, stuck the glass in his eye and gazed up at the Registrar appealingly.

“ Whom did you say? ” she was demanding.

“ Miss Argyle. Miss Day Argyle.”

The Registrar was not supposed to deal in nicknames.

“ Miss Aurora Argyle of Naught-Blank? ” she asked impassively.

Lord Axmuthy shook his head with a violence which dislodged the glass.

“ Oh, no; not in the least,” he made loyal protest.

“ I assure you she is very nice indeed. In fact, she’s quite too young to be anything else.”

The Registrar, dropping her handkerchief, stooped down behind the desk to pick it up. Lord Axmuthy, watching, made a chivalric snatch at the desk which rose like a barricade between them. Then he stuck into his mouth, gloves and all, the tips of his bruised fingers.

“ Really, it’s so very hard,” he offered explanation, around the stopper formed by his finger ends.

“ I think,” the Registrar spoke slowly, testing her voice with every word; “ I think you must mean Miss Aurora Argyle. You will find her at the Leslie house.”

“ Yes, that’s the very thing! ” Lord Axmuthy removed the fingers to give passage to his pleasure. “ I knew the Leslies were here, too. Young Leslie is my secretary. He attends to this sort of thing generally; but I left him behind with the boxes. Do you know if she’s at home? ”

Once more the Registrar turned upon him her gaze of perplexity.

“ Perhaps you would like to telephone her, and find out,” she offered suggestion.

“ I’m sure you’re very kind.” As he spoke, Lord Axmuthy’s two hands swept towards her across the barricade of desk.

“ What is that? ” she asked, in not unnatural surprise.

“ That is my card; I’m Lord Axmuthy, you see.

That's come up since I went home, though. When I was here before, I was only Sir George Porteous, for my late uncle hadn't died then," Lord Axmuthy made prolix explanation. "The other is your fee."

"But there is no fee," the Registrar made explanation in her turn.

Lifting his bent forefinger, Lord Axmuthy addressed her as he might have addressed a refractory milkmaid.

"Tut! Tut!" he said. Then he added, with a fresh access of dignity, "Where is the telephone?"

It proved to be upon the wall, just inside the doorway of the inner office. The Registrar left him hanging with one hand to the transmitter, as if he feared it might escape him, and returned to her desk in the corner. An instant later, Lord Axmuthy, the receiver squeezed against his ear and his face wreathed in smiles, came cautiously around the jamb of the door.

"Ripping! Oh, ripping!" he exclaimed too eagerly to modulate his accents to the limits of the room. "There are two chaps talking on the wire, and I can hear them. One of them just asked the other if she could borrow her pet — Eh? What? Are you talking to me? Are you Miss Day Argyle? You want me to get off this wire? But I can't; I'm waiting to talk to Miss Day Ar— Eh? You want to borrow my — I don't wear such things, you know. An Englishman never does. No; I won't get off till you go and tell Miss Day Argyle I'm here. I want to talk

to her, not you. No; I don't want to talk to you, you know. You're not the chap I want."

"Lord Axmuthy," the Registrar stood at his elbow, speaking with a gentle quiet which seemed to be the cloak for some deep emotion; "I think, if you don't mind, I'll call up Miss Argyle for you."

Lord Axmuthy, his lower jaw sagging until his mouth was wide ajar, his stiff hat pushed far back on his head, and a few spiky locks dangling across his brow, turned to face her blankly, the receiver still pressed against his ear. Suddenly his face grew luminous once more.

"You do want to talk to me? Are you Miss Argyle? Miss who? I can't seem to catch what you say; but, if you're Miss Argyle, it's all right. I'm glad to see you. I say, how's your brother's leg? Your — brother's — *leg?* *Leg?* *Lame* LEG? Don't know what I mean? Aren't you Miss Argyle? Who are you, then? Why the deuce didn't you say so at the first, then, and not make me all this trouble?"

"Lord Axmuthy," this time, the Registrar's hand shut upon his, as it held the receiver in a grasp which was fast becoming irate; "I think, perhaps, you aren't used to our American telephoning. You said you were from England, and — and it is quite different there. If you will go out into the main office, I will call up Miss Argyle for you and make the appointment for you to go to see her." And dexterously she steered Lord Axmuthy through the open doorway and closed the door behind him.

When, after a sufficient interval, she reappeared, her face was flushed, her voice unsteady, so unsteady that Lord Axmuthy gazed at her in ready sympathy.

“ I hope you haven't been overdoing on my account,” he said.

“ Not at all. And Miss Argyle is at home now. Take the car coming up the hill, and tell the conductor — ”

But Lord Axmuthy had vanished around the corner of the hallway.

While the Registrar was wiping her eyes, Day was rushing up the stairs to Mrs. Leslie's room.

Mrs. Leslie, sewing by the window, looked up in surprise, as Day burst into the room upon the echo of her knock. It was not like carefully-trained Day to be so precipitate.

“ Mother Leslie,” she exploded, as she crossed the threshold; “ what in the world ever shall I do? Sir George Porteous is here! ”

“ Here! Sir George! ” With a crash, Janet's books fell to the floor, and she sprang up, her eyes glowing. “ Oh, Day, is Ronald with him? ”

“ He didn't say. I didn't ask,” Day answered contritely, for, in her consternation at Sir George's ill-timed appearing, she had lost all thought of her old friend, Ronald Leslie, now Sir George's secretary.

“ I'll ask him.” Janet started for the door.

“ Wait, Janet! He isn't in the house yet; he's only coming. At least, I suppose it is Sir George.

He is Lord Axmuthy; isn't he? Anyway, the description sounded like him."

"That's his title. Where is he, Day?" Janet demanded impatiently.

"Down at college, apparently. Somebody just telephoned me from the Registrar's office, and said he was down there, hunting for me, and that, if I were at home, she would send him up here on the next car."

"And not a word of Ronald?"

Day shook her head.

"There weren't so many words in all, Janet," she answered; "it was mostly laugh." Then she turned back to Mrs. Leslie with a gesture which was really tragic. "Mother Leslie," she demanded; "whatever shall I do with Sir George Porteous in the face of fourteen hundred American senses of humour?"

And Mrs. Leslie had the generosity to detach her mind from questionings in regard to her son, long enough to laugh and shake her head, as she made reply, —

"Day, dear, I really can't imagine."

"There's the bell now!" Janet said abruptly.

"Oh, I do wish Maggie would hurry."

"Let him in, yourself, if you can't wait," Day suggested practically.

"Would you?" And then Janet departed on her errand, leaving Day to reflect upon the kindred mental traits of the English and the Anglo-Canadian.

“ Where is Ronald? ” Janet questioned, as the door swung open.

Deliberately Lord Axmuthy turned himself about from his contemplation of the tail of the car just disappearing up the snowy street.

“ Oh, how you startle a chap! ” he said rebukingly. “ I didn’t even know the door was open. I fancy you must be Leslie’s sister. How you’ve grown! Are you quite well? ”

“ I’m well enough, ” Janet answered shortly. “ Lord Axmuthy, where is Ronald? ”

“ Ronald? Oh, yes, young Leslie. He is very well. ”

“ I said *where*, not *how*. ” Janet’s tone was full of anxious irritation. “ Is he here? ”

Lord Axmuthy took refuge in his eyeglass.

“ How testy you are! ” he made frank comment. “ I fancy it’s a habit of yours. And, you know, it wasn’t you at all I was going to ask for. I want to find Miss Day Argyle. ”

Day’s step was heard upon the stairs, and Janet made frantic effort to dominate the brief instant remaining to her, before Day’s presence should monopolize Lord Axmuthy’s entire attention.

“ Where — is — Ronald? ” she urged a little stridently.

“ Young Leslie? Oh, I left him behind, to look after things. ”

Janet’s voice sagged downward through a complete octave.

“ Oh, Lord Axmuthy! In England? ”

Lord Axmuthy bestowed upon her a stare of wonder at her slowness of comprehension.

“ Oh, no. How could I cross, without him to talk to people? ” he inquired.

Day, pausing outside until the colloquy should be ended, reflected upon the fate of “ people,” should Lord Axmuthy ever be left to cross alone. Janet, however, paused for no reflection.

“ Then where did you leave him? ” she asked shortly.

For the space of a long moment, Lord Axmuthy favoured her with the blankest possible stare. Then he made concise reply, —

“ The custom house.”

“ The — what? ”

“ The custom house. I left him there with the luggage. I fancy he must be having a ripping sort of row. I brought out no end of things, you see, and those customs men are so very arbitrary. Then, if you oppose them, or even hurry them the least bit, they get drastic. One of them swore at me, swore right before a group of English ladies that I knew.” Lord Axmuthy shook his head in grieved reminiscence.

“ Really, he was very rude.”

“ When will Ronald get here? ” Janet was making heroic endeavours to keep from becoming drastic on her own account.

“ Oh, I couldn't tell that, you know. You see, there is a great deal for him to do.” Lord Axmuthy set himself to enumerate by means of his gloved

fingers. " There are the four great boxes with all my clothes, and the little box that holds my evening things, and the portmanteaux, three of them, and the long box with my shooting things. They began with that, and they were making no end of a row about my guns. Of course, I couldn't stop about and wait, so I left Leslie to see to it, and I came on up here. And, besides all that, and his boxes, there's another large one that holds my riding clothes. I should think he couldn't get here much before the day after."

" Day after what? " Janet felt her patience going fast.

" After to-morrow, you know. Or possibly the day after that," Lord Axmuthy made patient explanation. " Oh, yes! " He lifted up a final finger. " I quite forgot the case that holds the tub. Really, it is impossible to say just when."

" Why didn't Ronald tell us he was coming? " This time, there was no attempt at patience.

" Oh, that's the joke." Lord Axmuthy felt in his pocket and produced a paper. " Leslie wrote out a despatch to be sent by telegraph. I was to send it, when I left the pier; but I thought it would be a good joke to hand it to your mother, myself, and see her laugh. And now will you please be good enough to send some one to call Miss Day Argyle? It gets a bit of a bore, you know, this waiting about so long for nothing."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

RONALD LESLIE did come, the day after, came, saw and conquered. And his conquest was less a consequence of his remarkable beauty than of his devotion to his mother, his deference to all who made up her household. To most men endowed with six feet three of perfect figure, with a proudly set head and a dark handsome face, Fate denies other blessings. In the case of Ronald Leslie, she had added a character as fine as it was strong, as generous in impulse as it was full of courtesy and grace. And Ronald, with all his endowments, realized no one of them, or, realizing, took them as things of no account. Life had given him too much else of interest to leave him to spend his days in study of himself. The girls studied him, however, studied him with much approval. Nevertheless, Helen Pope gave utterance to the general opinion, in her reply to one of her sister's impetuous outbursts.

“Do you know,” Amy said, as she turned away from the window where she had been watching Day and Ronald, as they set off for a walk; “I forgive Janet Leslie for all her sins, negligences and ignorances, past, present and to come, just for the sake of her having produced a brother like that Ronald.”

But Helen glanced up from the huge crape-paper sunflower she was making.

“Yes,” she assented; “only he is so very impersonal.”

Amy picked up her books. Then she gave a little giggle, short, but exceedingly full of mirth.

“Poor old Day!” she said. “Don’t you suppose she ever has times of wishing that Lord Axmuthy were equally impersonal?”

Helen lifted up her sunflower and inspected it critically from every side. Then, —

“I’m nothing but a mere American,” she observed; “and I suppose I haven’t a proper grasp of that for which a title stands. However, I’d rather have a plain Jim Smith than a Lord Axmuthy to play with, when the searchlight eye of this place is bent upon me. Still, I know he and Day are old friends, and he may have endearing traits that we wot not of.”

“But he also has some astounding ones that we do wot of,” Amy reminded her. “All in all, including the title, I’ll choose Ronald Leslie, even if he is impersonal.”

However, Ronald was by no means impersonal. It was only that his personality, as Jack Blanchard’s before him, was directed to his kin and his own old friends, to the total exclusion of any one else. He had come to Northampton at the behest of Lord Axmuthy; but he had also come there to see his mother and sister, the two people who went farthest towards the making of his world, and to renew his

loyally-held friendship with Day Argyle and Sidney Stayre. The other girls, in so far as he was concerned, could go their ways. He treated them all alike, all with the same deferential courtesy he might have bestowed upon a lay figure from a costumer's window, temporarily humanized and left standing in his pathway. His total indifference to their words and ways was so manifest as to pique even the least self-conscious of the girls, and, as the days went on, they vied with one another to win from him some token that they had for him separate and individual existences.

Ronald was absolutely, comically unconscious of all this good-tempered strife and plotting going on around him. He was quite content to sit for hours in the little white rocking chair which creaked beneath his weight, lending a tolerant attention to the girls who happened in upon him, and forgetting them instantly when their backs were turned. In Day's hours of leisure, he scoured the country at her side, talking eagerly of his English life, or going back to laugh over some old detail of the winter they had spent together in the Leslie home in Louis Street.

Sidney, as yet, he had not seen. She was still lingering at home, tiding Bungay through the crisis of a convalescence which told equally upon his temper and upon the nerves of his next of kin. Mid-years had come and gone, bringing its flurry of examinations and its brief holiday; once more the college world was swinging along its normal orbit, and Rally Day

was close at hand. Sidney had given them all her faithful promise to be on hand for Rally Day, to swell the singing of her class, to cheer on her team in their first public game. And, because the day of her return was now so near at hand, they held a solemn council, the three Leslies, Day and Irene Jessup, and decided to hold back from all their letters the fact of Ronald's advent. He could meet her at the train, the night she arrived, and enjoy to the utmost her surprise.

It was a surprise, complete and wholly joyous. But Amy and Helen Pope, watching Ronald as he was preparing to start for the train, that night, were forced to confess to themselves that the tall young Canadian was by no means always so impersonal as he had at first appeared.

Lord Axmuthy, on the other hand, made no attempt at even a seeming impersonality. From the hour of his entering the office of the Registrar, he clung to the notion that the whole endowment and establishment of Smith College was one colossal joke designed solely with a view of tickling his British brain. He took no thought for the fact that the ticklement might be mutual. He merely set himself to inspect the joke from every possible viewpoint, and, so far as he could achieve it, he dragged Day after him as showman. Day, however, torn in divers directions by her kindly wish to make his stay a pleasant one, by her real loyalty to a certain inherent gentlehood in her old friend, by her overwhelming sense of the ludicrous,

found the days alternately unending and rushing past her with remorseless speed. Of Ronald she saw surprisingly little, for Lord Axmuthy took up her every spare moment, and some that she could ill afford to spare. In such a crisis, she longed acutely for the absent Sidney, since Sidney, she knew, would have taken her turn valiantly at the entertainment and enlivenment of his Lordship; but Sidney was as yet unavailable. Janet, even as had been her wont in Quebec, washed her hands of the Englishman entirely, and fled from his presence whenever he approached. Day, who had her satellites, as every class president is bound to have them, promptly hit upon the expedient of farming out Lord Axmuthy among them. The system was wholly feudal, and doubtless it would have appealed to Lord Axmuthy's inherited instincts, could she have explained it to him. Explanations, however, were obviously impossible; and the satellites, with many giggles, unshipped their burden at the earliest opportunity. Lord Axmuthy insisted upon observing all things, and his comments were as unexpectedly exotic in their phraseology as they were naïve in their subject matter. No human satellite, however loyal, could be expected more than once to run the risk of apoplexy from suppressed emotion. Day shook her head over the problem, and shouldered her old man of the sea anew. But, after chapel one morning, she betook herself to Mrs. Leslie's room in a mood betwixt mirth and tears.

“Ripping!” Lord Axmuthy had made too audible

comment, from his seat in rubber row. "Oh, ripping! Look at the girls swaggering out the middle aisle in jolly form, and the poor old dons sidling down the edges like a row of crabs! There's one poor chap now, hung up on the window blinds. Why doesn't somebody pick him off? Oh, this is ripping!" He brought his hands together with an ecstatic fervour which turned all eyes upon him and upon Day, scarlet at his side. Then he turned to her, question in his eyes and on his loosely sagging jaw. "I say," he inquired, still a little more audibly than the convention of the place and hour decreed; "is this the thing they call the American spirit, you know?"

"Is what the American spirit?" For the sake of example, Day's answering murmur was wellnigh inaudible.

Lord Axmuthy disregarded the example.

"This." He waved his glove at the sight beneath him. "To let the girls put on all the side they can, you know, and leave the dons to get out, as they can. Of course," Lord Axmuthy added reflectively; "with us, you know, the dons know things, and that may make some difference."

"Mother Leslie," Day's voice came appealingly through the crack of the opening door; "may I come in and wail my wail?"

"What is it, dear?" Mrs. Leslie looked up in some alarm, for wailing was not one of Day's customary tricks.

Day came in, hurled her books at the bed, and

plumped herself down on the floor at Mrs. Leslie's feet.

"Mother Leslie," she said explosively; "there's an insane asylum just the other side of Paradise. If you don't want me to go there, you must ask Ronald to send that ape away."

And Mrs. Leslie understood, without another word.

Next morning, the understanding bore its fruit.

"We're going away, you know," Lord Axmuthy announced, as preface to his diurnal visitation.

"Really?" Day vainly tried to subdue the exultation in her voice.

"Yes.. I knew you'd be sorry; but I find I must. I may come back again," Lord Axmuthy added reassuringly.

"They say the place is at its best in July," Day made crafty suggestion.

"Oh, no; I fancy not. The girls would all be wearing garden hats then, you know; and I like them best, this way. It's the girls I like, you see. I don't care much about the trees and offices and things," Lord Axmuthy explained.

"But you never can half appreciate them, when there are so many girls about."

"No; but then, you know, you do appreciate the girls." With drooping jaw and sadness written on every line of his curiously aged countenance, Lord Axmuthy sat gazing at the street outside the window. "Yes, I'm going," he added after a long pause, added

so suddenly that Day, lost in the possibilities of her coming release, jumped at the sound of his voice.

“ And so you have come to say good-bye? ” she questioned, holding out her hand.

Lord Axmuthy, staring stolidly at the hand, settled himself a bit more firmly in his chair.

“ No; not yet. We don't go quite at once. I thought I would break it to you slowly, you know, so you wouldn't be startled at the last. They say you're going to have a holiday with sports, and I thought I'd like to stop to see it. The next day will be the day we start. I'd like to stop on here; but Leslie says we've got some other sight-seeing to do, and it's time we should be moving on.”

Then Day understood. Understanding, she sent a blessing in search of the absent Ronald, for Rally Day was only four days off.

After all her promises and anticipations, a perverse fit of delay had entered into Bungay's convalescence, and it was not until the afternoon preceding Rally Day that Sidney found herself in the train and speeding away towards Springfield. Now that her home duty was at an end, her conscience at perfect rest, Sidney's mind went leaping away to the college life once more awaiting her, to the orderly routine of work and recreation, to the girls so jovial, yet so curiously in earnest about every issue which arose. Stroke down the fluff of a modern college girl, and you find the fibre underneath, fine and tough and supple; and, to Sidney's mind, the fibre was the better

for the overlying fluff. Because a girl knew Greek and higher mathematics, there was no reason she should wear lanky skirts and spectacles with bows above her ears, or even the gilt hairpin which seeks to work a compromise with fashion. It was all alike dear, the frills and the fun and the grinding work; and Sidney, in her half-hour at Springfield, felt her pulses quicken, moment by moment, while she tried to imagine what the girls were doing, and who of them, besides Day and Irene, would meet her at the station.

To her utter disappointment, the train rounded the curve to a station whose platform showed no vestige of feminine skirts, and Sidney's face fell, as she went down the steps of the car. Only one man was there, abnormally tall, and with his hat drawn down until it shielded half his face. An instant later, he had stepped forward, hat in hand, and shut his other hand on Sidney's, as it clutched the handle of her suitcase.

"Miss Peekaboo!" he said.

She whirled about and gazed up at him, gazed into an eager face with flashing dark brown eyes and scarlet cheeks and a short upper lip which now was not at all steady. The next instant, the suitcase fell with a bump to the platform, and her two hands seized upon his. But —

"You — blessed — old — Ronald Leslie!" was all she said; all, too, she needed to say in words, for her face told the rest of the story.

To the end of time, the next day spelled itself with

the reddest sort of letters in the mind of Lord Axmuthy. To be sure, he had the haziest kind of a notion why the twenty-second of February should be a day marked out for celebration, and no notion at all that the consequences of that day had any effect upon British history. He merely took it as a fact, a sort of boxing day that simply is, and he set himself to see it through to its utmost end. With that rugged determination uppermost in his mind, he sat half the morning in the chapel, lending a vacuous attention to a famous senator, imported for the purpose of stimulating in the minds of the girls some first-hand knowledge of the nation's present issues. It was all in the day's work; and though Lord Axmuthy drowsed off at times, in spite of Ronald's chiding elbow, he came in valiantly on the applause which heralded the ending of the speech, came in so valiantly that he won all for himself a little nod of recognition from the gratified orator of the day.

In the afternoon, thanks to the combined influence of Sidney and of Day, he occupied a chair upon the gymnasium floor, in the convenient nook set aside for the use of the substitute team. For the most part, he was wellnigh speechless, revolving in his British brain the problems involved in the full-skirted, pig-tailed figures so aimlessly bent upon destroying themselves and each other in connection with a flying ball. True, he dodged now and then, as the ball, or, worse, a girl, came hurtling towards him; now and then he repined at the uncomfortable honour thrust upon him,

honour denied to all men but a British Lordship, and taking the form of a seat dangerously near the bull's-eye of the game. However, he sat it out manfully, his glass in his eye and his hands clasped about the waist of the huge and dilapidated doll which serves as mascot, now thrust into his keeping by some unknown hand.

It was at the morning rally, however, that Lord Axmuthy's enthusiasm overmastered him completely. Seated in the front rank of spectators in the southern gallery of the gymnasium, totally heedless of the crowd which buzzed and surged about him, his hair tousled and his mouth agape, Lord Axmuthy sat motionless, his eyes glued to the floor beneath. In each of the four corners rose a pyramid of girls, girls costumed in the colours of their classes, scarlet and purple, leaf-green and vivid yellow. At the point of each pyramid stood the leader of the singing, her white baton trailing with her colours. The pyramids rose, tier on tier of gay robes and gayer faces, until they topped themselves with a fringe of skirts hanging from the gallery edge above. And, in obedience to the bright-tipped batons, class after class burst out into songs. They sang by turns, sang to themselves, to each other, to the college, to the faculty, to the teams who were to meet on that floor, a few hours later, sang till the walls shook, and the mythological beasts, that hung above as ensigns of their classes, seemed to be waving their inanimate tails in mute, but appreciative, applause.

And when, at a signal, the pyramids broke formation and the bevy of gay costumes went swaying towards the stage, in kaleidoscopic blendings of the four vivid colours, Lord Axmuthy arose, clapping his hands, and gave tongue to the emotions which surged within his British heart.

“ By George! ” he said. And again, “ By George! ” And then, “ If I hadn’t been Lord Axmuthy, you know, been it without my own doing, I’d have been an American college girl, singing like a ripping little angel in a tissue paper hat! ”

And more than one of his auditors agreed with the wisdom of his choice.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

IRENE'S voice preceded her knock.

"Sidney! Oh, Sidney Stay-re!"

But it was Day who called, —

"Come in."

Irene stuck her head in at the door.

"Oh, Day! Alone? You're a darling; but it happens to be Sidney that I want, this time."

"As usual," Day responded, though wholly without malice, for, in Sidney's absence, she and Irene had come to be the best possible friends.

"Yes, always. You're only second fiddle, if you are class president. Where's Sidney?"

"Skating with Ronald Leslie." Day laughed.

"In Paradise, in every sense."

"I'd like to jerk her back to earth again, for a few minutes," Irene returned.

"How merciless!" Day rebuked her. "It is Ronald's last afternoon, and the skating is ideal."

"Why aren't you there?"

Day clasped her hands demurely.

"I said I wasn't feeling well enough to go out."

Irene laughed.

"Poor Day! You've been heroic; but your martyrdom is nearly over," she reminded her companion.

“ Yes, thank goodness! ” Day responded devoutly. “ I don’t mean to gossip, Irene; but it has been somewhat of an infliction. It has been no fun to walk abroad, arm and arm with a Lordship of simian proclivities. You expect more, somehow, of Lord Axmuthy than you do of plain John Jones; and it is a corresponding disappointment, when he dashes your expectations to the ground, as often as the eye of the world is upon him.”

“ The college owes you a debt it never can repay, though,” Irene assured her. “ Lord Axmuthy is only a condensed edition of Darwin, and it is always easiest to teach by demonstration before the students.”

“ I realize all that. I likewise realize that I have been demonstrator in chief, and I don’t care about the office. And yet,” Day’s eyes met those of Irene steadily, gravely; “ there isn’t a kinder boy in all the world than Lord Axmuthy, nor one more generous and loyal. Truly, Irene, he isn’t always the utter dunce he seems.”

There came a little silence. Day broke it.

“ But I really would have liked a little chance to play with Ronald,” she said regretfully. “ We used to be such good friends, and now I have hardly seen him at all.”

Irene shook her head.

“ John Bull is a born monopolist,” she said. “ However, it is Mr. Leslie who is in the way now. I want Sidney badly.”

Day glanced up sharply.

“ Anything especial? ”

“ Very especial. Yesterday’s game.”

“ Wasn’t it awful? Did you ever suppose that Agatha — ”

“ Could make such a fool of herself,” Irene supplemented bluntly. “ Well, no; not even Agatha. You needn’t frown, Day. I know that *fool* isn’t considered a pretty word; but I mean it, just the same. Moreover, I am not in your shoes; I don’t owe any especial loyalty to the aforesaid bolster, because she is in my class. You do, so you may as well keep still, and allow me to do the talking. What I do owe your class, though, is to see that they are ready to play a decent game, next month.”

“ You? ”

“ Yes. I, me, myself. They have done me the honour, *they* being the freshman team, to raise a tempest in a teapot, and then present me with the teapot and request me to strain the tea. In other words, they’ve chosen me for coach.”

“ Naturally.” Day yawned. “ That was a foregone conclusion, after yesterday, Irene. But can you do it?”

“ Coach? ”

“ No; get any results. If not, I’ll use my office to have the game called off, see if I won’t. I never could stand by and see our class a laughing-stock, a second time.” Day’s voice was tragic.

Irene dropped down beside her on the wide window seat.

“ You poor little dear! But don't take it too hard. It was simply awful, awful; but it was so preposterous that the girls couldn't keep from laughing. I laughed, myself, wrothy as I was. Agatha is a humourist of sorts, when she takes the field.” Irene wiped her eyes. “ Still, I agree with you: for the credit of the class, it mustn't be allowed to happen again.”

“ Who can help it? ”

“ It is going to help itself,” Irene answered grimly.

“ How? ”

“ It's a secret; but it's bound to come out soon,” Irene made reflective answer. “ As long as you are freshman president, and supposed to be discreet — ”

“ Thank you,” Day interposed quietly.

“ No thanks; it's a mere fact. Supposed to be discreet, there is no reason I shouldn't tell you. Agatha has a mutiny on her hands; that's all.”

“ Mutiny? ”

“ Exactly that. I've been talking it over with our girls and the umpires, just now. It is quite an unprecedented case, and we none of us see what is to be done about it. Agatha is captain; she's hanging to the place like grim death, and I can't see any way to oust her. Meanwhile, three of the girls, Helen and Margaret Welch and Dorcas, have refused to play again, unless Agatha resigns entirely from the team, and Sidney is put in her place.”

“ I-rene! ”

“ Yes. And it must be done,” Irene said firmly.

“ Hm-m. Helen and Dorcas, both guards, and Margaret Welch is jumping centre. Her substitute is no use at all. Irene, what shall we do? It will cripple the team entirely.”

“ You can't cripple a thing that hasn't a leg to stand on,” Irene responded. “ Do you wonder, though, that I want Sidney? ”

“ What do you think she can do? ”

“ She can't. I can; at least, with the umpires and all the judgment of the junior team behind me. As protectors of the freshmen, we are bound to see you through this thing safely.”

Day pondered, her eyes fixed upon the opposite side of the street.

“ What do you propose to do? ”

“ Justice,” Irene answered briefly. “ Pry Agatha out, even if it takes a moral derrick, and put Sidney in.”

Day propounded a poser.

“ Where will you get your derrick? ”

Irene waved her hand.

“ Give me till to-morrow to think it over.”

Day propounded a second poser.

“ And suppose Sidney refuses to be put in? ”

“ Leave her to me.”

“ I'm willing. I know her better than you do.”

“ What of that? ”

“ Merely that Sidney has a moral sense that may get in your way more than you expect. It is my belief that you'll never get her to step into Agatha's

shoes, after you have had all the trouble of pulling them off."

Irene rose.

"Then I'll pick her up and stick her feet into them, myself," she said, with the refreshing intrepidity of her who knows herself to be in the right and, moreover, backed by the majority. "Anyway, when Sidney comes in, you tell her I want her in my room, want her quick."

"I'll tell her. Going? Well, if you must. But, if you meet his Lordship coming up the street, just pluck him up by the hair and take him along with you." And Day resumed her interrupted task.

It was the finest sort of skating, that day; it was the finest sort of moonlight, that night. Paradise was a sheet of dazzling glass, the sky was cloudless, the air so dry and cold and crisp as to go to one's head like wine. To Ronald Leslie, it seemed that the college had adjourned *en masse* to the ice sheet enclosed by the wooded slopes of Paradise, that each girl he met and talked to, skated better than the last had done. At least, it seemed so, as long as he stared after her; but, when he faced back to Sidney, he had his doubts.

All that long afternoon, he had skated there with Sidney, now sweeping swiftly up the sheet of ice ablaze with sunshine, until their pulses tingled with the violent exercise, now skating slowly around the edges of the lake, forgetting exercise in the mere joy of loitering along and telling over, each to each,

the least detail of the two years that they had been apart. For, just two years ago the preceding summer, they had been rare chums, the tall Canadian and the downright, gay American, chums whose friendship had lacked all taint of sentimentality. And now, after two years apart, they had just two days to make good the gaps left in their frequent letters. It was small wonder, then, that they skated slowly and left all their speed for talking.

“ It’s Janet’s chance, to-night,” Ronald said, as, in the fallen dusk, they skated to the nearer shore, and Sidney lifted one steel-shod foot and then the other to meet his deft fingers. “ I hate to go, to-morrow; but I can see it’s best. Still, we’ve had this afternoon; and, Sidney — ”

And Sidney nodded, swift to interpret the little pause.

As for Janet, that night, the girl blazed like the white, hard moonlight that lay around her. Skating was her native sport; her first skates had been fitted to her little heelless shoes, and she loved it as she loved the cold, crisp air. Now, to have the cold and the moon, the ice, and, best of all, Ronald to skate there with her as in the dear old days at home: all these filled her with a happiness which refused to be expressed by any normal mood of quiet. In Ronald’s honour, she had donned, that night, her old white blanket coat, touched with the black and scarlet of the Snow Shoe Club colours; and, under her scarlet tuque, her eyes were glowing, her face

lighted to more than a hint of the beauty which was soon to be her own. Even Ronald, large as he was and strong skater, could scarcely keep pace with her, that night; yet her eager dashes to and fro across the ice in no way slowed her tongue, and her chatter was as gay and wayward as was her progress through the thickening crowd of skaters.

Then, of a sudden, as they rounded a bend in the bank, and came into a deserted bit of ice, her gayety fell from her.

“The last night, Ronald!” she said, and his quick ear caught a little break in her voice which, only an instant before, had been so full of mirth.

“Only for now,” he told her.

“Yes,” she assented quaintly; “but too many *nows* will break my heart in time. It cracked before, when you went away to England, the sort of crack one never really can mend. And now it has to go through it, all over again.”

Bending down, he studied her face, turned to his in the white moonlight. Her cheeks were as scarlet as the tuque above them; but her eyes were ominously bright, as if the tears might come at any moment.

“Janet,” he asked her gravely; “shall I give it all up, and take you and mother back to Quebec? Say the word, dear, and I’m ready.”

“Never!” she made tempestuous answer. “I wanted you to go; it was the best, the only thing for you to do.”

“ But you? And mother? ” Ronald made each pair of words into a separate question.

“ Mummy is happy here. You see for yourself how the girls adore her, how fond she is of them, how she adores having them about. And I truly think — Of course, I know she is doing it for me; but I truly think, brother, she is not working as hard as she did, all that last year at home,” Janet replied, with an earnest sincerity which there was no gainsaying.

Once more Ronald studied her face in the moonlight.

“ And you, Janet? ” he asked then. “ What about yourself? ”

Her little laugh was brave, but wholly mirthless.

“ It’s all a means to an end, Ronald.”

“ I know, dear; but is it worth the while? ”

“ Yes,” she answered slowly, as if weighing the question for one final time. “ Yes, I think it is.”

“ But we could go back again, you know. The house is only rented till the last of July. They would take me into the office again. They told me that, you remember, when I first decided to go to England.”

Janet shook her head.

“ Ronald, that office was killing you by inches.”

“ I hadn’t missed any of my inches,” he assured her lightly. “ Besides, I have had a long vacation, and it’s time I went to work again.”

If Janet had been harbouring any indecision, his last words would have ended it for ever. Yet, knowing Ronald, she dared not dwell upon the uncon-

scious admission he had made. Instead, she laughed and shook her head.

"You may be getting rich on your great salary, and you may be seeing an interesting side of life; but I shouldn't call it much of a vacation to be expected to supply brains to a man like Lord Axmuthy," she protested.

"And yet, he's a good little chap," Ronald defended him.

"Yes; but isn't that about all you can say for him?" Janet queried, with sudden malice.

Ronald all at once grew very grave.

"Janet," he said slowly; "when you've beaten about the world as I have done, the past two years, you'll find that, when you can call a man like Axmuthy, with all his money and his chances to go wrong, a good little chap, it may be all, but it surely is a great, great deal. He may be funny; he may be as futile as you girls all say. However, in the two years we have been together, I never once have seen him forget his manhood or his honour."

Just as he spoke, they skated into a patch of shade so heavy that he could not see his sister's face; but her fingers, tightening on his hand, showed that she understood, not alone the meaning of his words, but also the traits in himself which had called out the loyal tribute to his eccentric friend.

They had passed the patch of shadow and come once more into the moonlight, when Ronald spoke again, spoke with his eyes searching Janet's face.

“Janet,” he said; “tell me truly, child, are you happy here?”

“I’m happier than I was,” she answered honestly.

“Is that all you can say?”

Again there came the quaintness to her speech.

“Ronald, we have our fun; but we aren’t here, after all, for happiness,” she told him. “You have your care for mother and for me. You feel it, all the time; it takes a good deal out of you, sometimes, even if we appreciate it, and try to make it easy for you. And, in the same way, I am trying to do something for our father, something to keep his memory fresh, and his name, something to carry out his wishes. We both of us have a care, a work that we want to do. And I suppose, if we go at it right, we shall get our happiness out of the care and work. Only —”

“Only it’s not so easy, when the people around you haven’t either care or work to fuss about?” he queried.

Her face lighted at his quick understanding of her unspoken phrase. Nevertheless, she corrected both herself and him, speaking with the greater maturity of her girlhood.

“And yet, I’m slowly coming to the conclusion that most people have one thing or another,” she confessed. “It’s only that they have the grace to keep them hidden out of sight. Sometimes —”

“Sometimes?” he prompted her lagging speech.

“Sometimes,” she went on honestly; “I even

wonder if I shouldn't have had a better time with myself and with the girls, if I hadn't persisted in poking my purposes into everybody's face. I haven't been popular, Ronald; but," she met his brown eyes bravely; "I am not sure it wasn't partly my own fault."

"Mend it, then," he advised her, with the frankness she had known and loved of old, a frankness which, coming from him, had never drawn an answering spark from her hot temper.

"I'm going to," she said simply.

Again came the silence, while they skated once and yet once more across the deserted bit of ice which seemed made so expressly for their confidences.

"I didn't fit at first, Ronald," Janet went on at length. "I was only one, and a foreigner; for a Canadian is as much a foreigner down here as a Cingalese would be. I had seen Sidney and Day, and I supposed I knew all about American girls and American ways; but I found I didn't. They were in Canada, and took our ways. I was down here, and hung to my own. It didn't work well, either. And, before I knew it, sets had formed, girls were doing things, and I wasn't in any of it, except as Day took me by the elbow and dragged me in. And that made me crossest of all, for at home, I didn't have to be dragged into things; I belonged there. I couldn't seem to realize that the girls, coming here, stood for just exactly what they showed themselves, not for

what they had been at home. So I stood in a corner and glowered; and I'd have been glowering still, if it hadn't been for Day's Mr. Blanchard. He's a Canadian, too, and he understands things, me included." Janet laughed a little nervously. "All one afternoon, we talked together, and things have been better, ever since."

"And now?" Ronald queried.

"A great deal better. I am beginning to know a few of the girls, really to know them well, and I like them so much better than I ever supposed I could," Janet made honest answer. "Under their frills and furbelows, they aren't such dunces as they look. At first, I thought they were just Paris dolls, all clothes and sawdust, and able to say 'Pa-pa,' when you pinched them hard. I know them better now. We spent the holidays with the Argyles, you know, and Mr. Blanchard taught me a good many things. Then Rob took me in hand, lectured me, told me I must make some sort of a society, or team, or something, if I were going to be of any use at all; told me I was selfish, trying to get everything out of the college and giving nothing back; that, if I could sing, or play basket ball, or the banjo, or act, it was decent to say so and let Smith have the good of it, in exchange for some of the good it was doing me. He gave me a banjo, New Year morning, and told me he'd give me just the year to make the club."

"And shall you?"

Janet shut her teeth.

“ I’ll do it, if it kills me,” she said. “ I’ve made up my mind to just one thing. As long as I’m here, it’s my place to amount to something, not just for me, or you, or even for Canada; but for the sake of doing a little credit to the college.”

And Sidney, meanwhile, was in Irene’s room, listening to a monologue upon the selfsame theme. At length, however, when Irene had reached a semi-colon, Sidney rose to her feet.

“ I’m sorry,” she said; “ but I just can’t do it.”

“ Why not? ”

“ Because it is Agatha’s place.”

“ But she can be put out.”

“ The girls put her there.”

“ The girls don’t want her there, any more.”

“ I can’t help that. She has a right to stay.”

“ But, if she stays, you lose the best three players in the team.”

“ We can put in substitutes,” Sidney made tranquil answer.

“ We can; but we won’t. What a bore that you and Agatha both play forward! If it were not for that, it could be arranged so easily,” Irene grumbled.

“ I shouldn’t go in.”

“ Not as a substitute? You’d have to.”

“ Not to take Agatha’s place.”

“ Then I won’t coach,” Irene threatened.

Sidney crossed the floor and dropped down on the arm of Irene’s chair.

“ Yes, you will, too; you’ll coach as nobody ever

coached before," she contradicted. "It is our only chance, and you wouldn't throw it over. Listen, Irene. If I would do this for anybody's teasing, it would be for you; but I can't do a thing of this sort, even for you."

"And you'll let your class disgrace itself at the big game?" Irene demanded hotly.

And Sidney answered, with some spirit, —

"Yes, sooner than let it disgrace itself by putting Agatha out of a place which is really and truly hers."

Two weeks later and when the big game was but two weeks away, Irene came up the street like a small brown cyclone, swept up the Leslie stairs in the same cyclonic fashion, and burst into the front room like a full-fledged tornado.

"Oh, Sidney! Sidney Stayre! The hand of Providence has opened and made a most glorious grab!" she proclaimed, as she seized Sidney and hugged her to her breast. Then, over her shoulder to the astounded Day, she added, "I just met Dr. Akers in front of Seelye Hall, and Agatha Gilbert is down with measles."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE whistle blew sharply, and Irene stalked into the middle of the floor, face and voice stern past all recognition.

“ Try that pass again. There is no sense at all in your muffing it like that.”

The culprit smiled, with unabashed good humour.

“ Feathers in your hair, Irene? ” she queried.

“ There will be, if you do that thing again,” Irene answered shortly, for to her the present hour was one of serious and pressing business. “ Now watch! ” She took the ball in her two brown, slim hands. “ Hold it like this, high, as if you meant to throw it, and then, before they find what you are really about, bounce it at your back centre. So! And, Helen, if you muff again, I’ll keep you here at work till bedtime. There is no excuse for that sort of thing. Now play! ” And Irene stepped back to the side of the gymnasium.

It was only for a moment that she remained there, however.

“ Foul! You blocked with your elbow, Dorcas. Start that once more, and be sure you never try that again. Dorcas! Dorcas! No shouldering! It’s one thing to guard, another to shoulder your opposite

out of the way. Dorcas! Dorcas Beach!" The whistle eked out Irene's failing breath. "If you do that again, I'll say you're disqualified for any team in college."

While Irene took the guilty Dorcas into a corner and proceeded to read her a lecture on careless blocking, the remainder of the freshman team dropped down on the floor, to catch breath and chatter for a moment, before the play began again. It was secret practice now, and the gymnasium was deserted, save for the freshmen on the floor, the irate coach, and an instructor or two lounging against the platform at the northern end.

"It's a tight fit to get our training in before the seventeenth," Margaret Welch remarked, as she tightened the ribbon on her pigtail and then gave an obvious and wholly bare-faced tweak at her left stocking. "Sidney, I do wish you had come back to us a little sooner. Besides that, I am afraid Dorcas is getting badly rattled."

"That's two of us who are in disgrace, then," Sidney made tranquil answer, while she adjusted the yellow kerchief which knotted the collar of her dark blue suit.

"Two? What two?"

"Dorcas, and mine own sweet self, and both of us for blocking things. Really, though, I don't worry about Dorcas; it is just for to-day, and it won't last. She blundered into it, the first time, and then Irene terrified her into repeating the blunder

from sheer anxiety to avoid it. Dorcas will be all right."

"Who won't?" The girls bent forward, to catch the words of wisdom falling from the lips of their new captain.

Sidney laughed.

"The forwards, especially the right one. No; I'm not going to make you hate me, by saying what I think."

"You ought."

"You're captain."

"It's what you're here for."

Sidney shook her head.

"It isn't. That's Irene's work. It's my place to watch the game, and then talk it out with her and see if we can plan to better it. You're a good team, girls; you answer signals splendidly. I only wish I had had longer practice with you."

"So do we," murmured Margaret Welch, her eyes fixed on the rail above the platform.

Sidney disdained the interruption.

"However, that was out of the question, and now we'll have to get together, the best way we can. All is, if I make blunders, you'll have to exercise what Christian patience you own, and call it Moses. We can't win the game, if we try. All we can do is to keep their score as low as we can."

"What did you think of the other game, Sidney?" Dorcas queried, as, with a running slide, she landed in the middle of the group and fell headlong over

Sidney's toes and into the lap of Margaret who picked her up, with the question, —

“Lecture over, Dorking? Where's Irene?”

“Talking with the Critic-in-Chief, probably devising punishment for my sins,” Dorcas replied impenitently.

“You deserve it. You've lost us a good half-hour of work, this afternoon,” Margaret assured her frankly. “What did you think of the game Sidney?”

Sidney hesitated.

“It seems —”

“Out with it, Sidney,” Dorcas advised her irrepressibly. “We all know you have scruples; but Agatha is too busy counting her measles to care anything about basket ball, and we'll never tell tales. We all know you thought things, so let's have it out.”

“What did you think?” Helen urged. “Do tell us, Sidney.”

Sidney hesitated again. Then, —

“I thought it was disgraceful,” she said bluntly.

There came a clamour of protests.

“Sidney!”

“As bad as that?”

“Not really?”

“Why so?”

“Because — I've gone so far, I may as well be honest — it was the sloppiest, most loose-jointed game I ever saw. You acted like a set of romps, not

like a team. You went your own ways. Among you, you did some good work; but it didn't amount to a row of pins, because you didn't pay the least attention to each other." Sidney warmed to her arraignment. "It was a rough game, too. I could stand the muffing, and the missing the basket, and things like that; but I can't endure the letting yourselves go sprawling on the floor, or getting outside the lines. It's not tidy, nor even decent. It spoils the looks of the game, and it bumps you up for nothing, and it gives all the old croakers of alums a chance to say that basket ball isn't a fit game for girls. Now you see here," Sidney rose to her feet and stood looking steadily into the faces upturned to meet her gaze; "I've played basket ball for five years; I was captain of our school team, and I have played everything from goal keeper to jumping centre. I know what I am talking about, and I say this: any girl who has brains enough to play basket ball, has also brains enough to know how far she can go without upsetting either herself or somebody else, enough to know where the lines are and to stop at them, instead of bumping into the wall beyond. As long as I am captain of a team, I can forgive the girl who muffs, or runs under a high ball; but I never, never will forgive the girl that sprawls about and messes up the game."

"Amen, and yea amen!" Irene had come up, unobserved, and now linked her arm in that of Sidney. "I'm glad to hear you girls getting a dose of doctrine."

It is all a fact, too. The three great vices of the game are sprawling, and rough guarding, and losing your grip on the ball; and every one of them is absolutely inexcusable. It's just a question of paying attention to what you happen to be about. And I am saying this in earnest. You freshmen never know how much depends on the way you work up your game, how many people there are waiting to clack their tongues and say 'I told you so,' when anything goes wrong with any of the girls. I do know, for I have a sister among the old alums, and she tells me things. The cleaner, quicker, fairer team play you work up, the more you are helping on the traditions of the game, and the more you are silencing the croakers. Moreover, it happens that our class — no; don't applaud. It's polite; but I'll forego the politeness for the sake of saving time — our class has broken all the odd-year records. We are handing on to you the record. See that you keep it up, for our sake and your own. You've been handicapped, thus far, handicapped badly. Now you have a captain — Don't sing to her. Listen! Will you be still? — a captain who is able to pull you through, if you'll do your best for ten days more, and then trust everything to her and me. Now get up and go to work. You can cheer us, when you've won your game. Margaret Welch, put your two feet together. Now!" And the ball rose on its wonted arc.

Ten days later, the heavens were weeping, and the back campus was a sposhy horror; but neither

heaven-sent tears nor earth-made sposhiness could damp the ardour of the girls who, white frocks held high beneath their rain coats and bare heads glistening with mist-drops, waded through the pools which surrounded the Alumnae Gymnasium. Enthusiasm and expectation were written upon every face; class colours strayed out from under every umbrella; snatches of song floated down from the open windows above, broken, every now and then, by little peals of laughter or a sudden clamour of cheers. Even the faculty, gathered upon the stage at the end of the building, seemed loyally to forget their sodden shoes in the general gayety of the scene about them.

And it was a scene worthy of making one forget most evils. From end to end and from side to side, the upper rafters of the great building were wellnigh veiled from sight by the long strips of bunting which, starting from the running track that also serves as gallery, met in one common centre as if to call attention to the fact that, just beneath the knotted streamers, the ball would start into play. Below the streamers and above the gallery level, the walls were covered thick with banners bearing the colours of the classes, decked with huge numerals and huger and mythologic beasts. These were the background. Before them were the girls, girls in black and brown and green, most frequently of all in white, wearing the colours of their classes, shrieking their class songs at every pause in the play, or falling into breathless silence, as the ball, rescued from a foul, flew basket-

ward; only to burst out again in mingled groans or cheering, according as the ball flew in and out, according as they sat to east, among the freshmen, or west, among the sophomore ranks. The gallery was crammed with girls, alive with them. They ranged themselves in tiers, on seats, on the backs of seats, and, forward, on the floor where they sat with their heels dangling under the gallery rail until the whole gymnasium was fringed with hanging, parti-coloured skirts, with pumps, and walking-shoes, and high-heeled slippers. More girls filled the corners of the floor, huddled together in the least possible space, more were behind the goal posts, and a few belated ones were clinging to the banisters of the stairs outside, willing to wait an hour, on the chance that some brilliant play might achieve itself within their narrow range of vision, and, meanwhile, applauding with lusty impartiality by way of echo to the clamour which arose within. And, on the floor itself, the substitute teams were huddled, each in its own recess midway along the floor, and before them stood a group of girls, linesmen and umpires and the like, chatting among themselves and casting, the while, a wary eye towards the referee who, her whistle at her belt, was holding conference with the Highest Power, in a corner which no one else dared enter.

It was the rest before the second half, and the score, beginning bravely for the sophomores, had ended in a tie.

Out in the freshman dressing-room, meanwhile, Irene was busy with her last instructions.

“Remember,” she warned them; “that, while it is no real disgrace for the freshmen to be beaten in a good, close game, it is everlasting glory to them, when they win. And remember this, too. No game is half a game that is won by the other side’s making many fouls. It’s their bad work, not your good; and there is no especial cause for thankfulness in that sort of thing. I’d rather you made one goal from the field than a dozen from their fouls; but it’s on their fouls that you’ve been scoring. Listen! They have a fine team; but Dorcas demoralized them, at the start. You’re doing good work, Dorcas. Keep it up, and, above all, keep steady. Helen, be careful in your passing. Don’t forget Sidney’s signals for one single instant. If you stand by her and play out the game she has planned, there is no reason you shouldn’t keep them tied, at least. Watch Alice. She’s a good captain, and, above all else, keep your eye on Edith Wakeley. Her high balls mean mischief. Now, all of you: play fair, watch Sidney, keep your tempers and win, if you can. If you can’t, then take your beating pluckily and admit that you were out-classed. Now go.”

An instant later, the pattering of rubber-soled feet across the oaken floor announced the coming of the freshman team. Heads up, faces alert, they came trotting in and took their stand, ready for the final half of the best game known for growing girlhood, a

game that, played properly, outranks every other for the development of poise and self-control, for absolute self-subordination, as well as for mere muscle, a game forbidden by its very essence to the lazy girl, or the selfish one, or to her who lacks in sober judgment.

The sophomore coach, also, had been making good her own ten minutes of the intermission; now her team was steadying to her teaching. Their play was more united than before, with less tendency on the part of stars to show off their individual merits. There was less fidgetiness, too, and less of the rough play that always comes with nervousness; fouls were rarer, and those that occurred were wellnigh unavoidable. As if conscious of their superior strength, conscious, too, that they had imperilled their good record, the sophomores were settling down in earnest, and the former tie was fast dropping out of sight.

Against them were the freshmen, plucky, steady, indomitable of courage, absolutely loyal to their captain, yet handicapped by fewer years, less experience, less mature judgment than their opponents, handicapped, too, by the lateness of the overturn which had given them the captain they so desired. At their head was Sidney Stayre, eager to lead them to victory. Moreover, for the sake of Sidney Stayre as captain, not a girl would hesitate to choose defeat, rather than a victory at the hands of any other leader who might be forced upon them. But,

all the time, the score was dropping, dropping backwards from the tie that, albeit made on fouls, had seemed so glorious in their eager eyes.

The sophomores had just made a goal. The referee, ball in hand, was stepping towards the middle of the floor; and Sidney raised her head, straightening her shoulders with a jerk. For an instant, her eyes swept along the freshman side of the gallery, where the girls in frantic chorus were singing the glories of their class. Then, turning slightly, her gaze swept over the faces of her team, a gaze so compelling that every pair of eyes responded to her eyes, sending back eager answer to her unspoken challenge. Last of all, she looked at Irene, standing in the doorway far beyond the goal, and, as she looked, the echo of Irene's parting words once more sounded in her ears, —

“Remember that last set of passes we tried, Sidney. They may be your salvation, and you have a team that follows you like clockwork.”

She glanced at her opposite. Two inches shorter, and obviously a little winded. The referee's whistle had sounded; there was the pad of falling rubber soles, the quick, decisive *spat* of a hand upon the ball, Margaret's *spat*, quicker than the other and more decisive. An answering *spat*, a double bounce, another pat. In the tense silence, Sidney could locate the ball to a nicety by these little sounds, without troubling herself to turn her head. Dorcas was guarding superbly, her cleanly, supple motions blocking the ball at every point, yet never once skirt-

ing the edge of a foul. Then, with a quick skurry, she crossed the floor to run in behind the other forward, jumped high in air and caught the ball just as the sophomore's hands were raised to seize it. Sidney, holding her breath, measured the two distances with practised eye, then flung up her own arm in signal. An instant later, the ball went hurtling towards her; then, while the galleries held their breath in silence, it went hurtling onward, straight over the head of her opposite, to fall cleanly through the basket.

And the moments were passing swiftly, and the two points, following on the heels of a sophomore foul, had once more tied the score.

The cheering refused to be downed, this time, by the increasing excitement of the game. It went on, evenly divided between Sidney's name and the numerals of the class, while the ball was being put in play once more; went on still, punctuated by little moans from across the hall, while the sophomore nerves once more asserted themselves and culminated in the crowning disgrace of a ball inadvertently thrown through the freshman basket.

Then Sidney shut her teeth. The moments were passing fast and faster, and it was not her will to win out on such a count as that. Once more turning, she swept the faces of her team.

The ball was again in play. Already the referee was stepping backward, and Margaret, yielding to her exultation, had failed by just one second in the

jumping, leaving to the sophomores the ball. They kept it, too. Down the floor it went, bouncing, flying, bouncing again, nearer and nearer to the sophomore goal. Once Dorcas had it; once she lost it; then it was in the goalkeeper's hands. The lane formed; the ball, poised for an instant, flew up, up and over, missing the basket and landing ignobly in a faculty lap. Sidney shook her head and shut her teeth askew. Not that time, perhaps; but, perhaps again, the next. For again the ball was drawing perilously near the sophomore goal. Then Dorcas, lithe as a little eel, light as a bit of down, leaped into the air so suddenly that her opposite, overtopping her by a good inch, had no idea of her intention until her brown hands had shut upon the ball. She bounced it once, twice, then, catching Margaret's eye, she sent it flying at her with such unerring aim that Margaret, close on her own forward line, caught it in her outstretched arms.

Then, above all the cheering, it seemed to Margaret Welch that she could hear the beating of her heart. It was her one chance of the game, for much private practice had assured her that she was almost sure to hit the basket; almost, though from that great distance. Almost. No other girl could do it; no other girl, as yet, dreamed of her skill. And it would be so glorious to hear the galleries ringing with her name. Three seconds were allowed her for her uncertainty. It was her one great chance; also, she told herself, her one great temptation. At the end

of the second second, the ball was flying on to Sidney Stayre.

And after that, the end. And after that, chaos. The walls did hold the racket. Sidney was not dismembered. However, at her second circuit of the floor, borne on the shoulders of her team, she cried for mercy and the firm foundations of the oaken boards.

“It wasn’t my doing, girls,” she said, when she had regained breath and voice enough to speak. “Irene planned the game, and you did all the work.” Then, turning suddenly, she gripped Margaret Welch’s hand in both of her own. “This is the girl who made the record,” she added, to Margaret’s intense surprise. “This time, she has outclassed your captain.”

And the girls who, during her short uncertainty, had watched Margaret with keen understanding of her desire, now caught her on their shoulders and, with Sidney at their head, went racing down the floor.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

BUNGAY'S chiefest treasure was a battered xylophone; and upon it, obedient to Wade's patient instructions, he hailed Sidney's return, the next week, with *Conquering Hero*, played with a true martial clash, albeit in a blending of every key known to diatonic, chromatic and even the Chinese scales.

Wade and Jack had added their share to the chorus of congratulations, the one in all love, the other beaming with honest pride in her success. Nevertheless, it was Rob whose appreciation and understanding touched her most keenly, Rob who came dashing in upon her, the very night of his own return, his lips smiling widely and his clean blue eyes alight with happiness.

"Good for you, Sidney! I knew you'd win out and bring them through all right, once they gave you a chance!" he burst out, gripping her hands in his, before he even halted to lay aside his overcoat. "Day says it was a great old game; says it is only once in a parrot's age that freshmen win, anyway. You don't know how glad I am."

"I inferred it from a ton or two of roses," Sidney made suggestion.

“ Hang the roses! ” Rob said jovially, as he let go her hands long enough to slide out of his coat, then once more caught her right hand in his and led the way towards a shabby Morris chair which he had come to regard as his own especial property. “ There, athlete, down you go. ” He dropped her into a seat beside the Morris chair which he appropriated for his own use. “ Don’t you believe I was wild, when Day wired me, that night? Crazy message, too! Being a girl, she wouldn’t go over her ten words; but nine of them were adjectives. However, I read between the lines, and drew my own inferences, so I shipped on the roses, on the chance of their being all right. Harvard colour, you know. ”

Sidney laughed.

“ What about the big white one? ” she asked.

“ That was you, only one, as you observed. The red ones were me, lots and lots of me, all doing homage. If I’d been clever, I’d have decapitated them, as symbol that I’d lost my head over your glory. ” His laugh was jolly, carefree; but suddenly it went away and left him very grave. “ Fact is, Sidney, ” he added; “ I know all about it, my own self. I went through one such moment, a few years ago. The only difference is, you came out on top, and I didn’t. ”

Bending forward, Sidney laid her hand on his strong brown one, shut on the arm of the Morris chair.

“ I understand it better now, Rob, ” she said.

“ I never knew before; but now I see how it would hurt, all the sudden stopping. It was a cruel thing to happen.”

For a moment, Rob sat silent, his blue eyes glued to the fire. Then, —

“ Not only was; but is,” he offered terse correction.

“ Don’t the years since make any difference? ” she asked, as appealingly as if she were demanding some favour for herself.

He shook his head.

“ Not the way you mean. They make a difference, for they make it stronger. At Exeter, I’d made my record once for all. At Harvard, it — isn’t fun to sit on a bench and see a game played out by fellows whose football isn’t as good as yours, to know you’ve got to sit it out for four whole seasons, perfectly aware that, if your knee hadn’t gone wrong, you could put up as good a game as any man in the university. I don’t mean to make too bad a row, Sidney; but things like this are the ones to make a fellow grit his teeth and say ‘ Oh, fudge!’ ”

Silently, gravely, Sidney nodded at the fire. At last, she spoke.

“ I really have learned a few things, this year, Rob,” she told him. “ You are one of them. You seem larger to me than you used to do, larger, and infinitely more plucky. And I’ve learned enough now not to spend my time kindly pointing out to you the things you can do as well as ever. Football is the one thing you wanted most to keep on doing, and there isn’t

any especial consolation in the fact that you can do golf, instead. I've tried both sorts of thing, the being in it, and the being down and out, and I know a little how they both have felt to you. Not all, though, for I knew it was only a matter of time before I was in it once more; and you — ”

“ Know it's a matter of eternity? That's about the size of it,” he said slowly, his eyes still on the dancing flames. Suddenly he turned himself about. “ I love Day better than all the rest of the world,” he said, with even a greater slowness than he had used before, a slowness which added tenfold to the dignity of his usual speech; “ but, of all the girls I have ever known, Sidney, you are the only one to understand this thing. That was why I put in the one white rose.”

The fire snapped and crackled, and a little stick, burning in two, fell forward and balanced, a pair of tiny torches, against the smouldering backlog. When it was all burnt out, Rob spoke once more and with quite a different accent.

“ Life isn't all sunshine and fizz, Sidney. I've just had a three-day visit from Axmuthy and Ronald.”

So sudden had been his transition of mood and subject that Sidney stared back at him blankly for a moment. Then she burst into a laugh.

“ We have been through it, too,” she said. “ At least, Day has. What did you do with him? ”

“ With them,” Rob corrected her.

“ Them? ”

“ Yes, they hunt in pairs. Axmuthy does hunt, too, apparently; at least, he had his shooting kit with him, ready to bag a bear or a redskin, if any came prowling about the Union.”

“ Isn't he preposterous? But Ronald — ”

“ Ditto,” Rob supplemented gravely. “ Ronald is very strenuous.”

Sidney shook her head at the backlog.

“ You're not fair to Ronald, Rob.”

Rob balanced his stick across his more useful knee.

“ I never was,” he assented placidly. “ I like him with my mind; but I can't say I love him with my heart. He is good; but deadly, desperately dull. I respect and honour him fully; I know he is a finer character than I can ever hope to become. Nevertheless, down at Cambridge, I took Axmuthy on my own shoulders, and subcontracted Ronald over to relays of the other fellows; and I'm blest, Sidney, if I wasn't the only one that came out alive.”

“ Thanks!” Sidney laughed. “ I prefer Ronald, myself.”

Rob started up in mock alarm.

“ To me? ” he queried.

For the once, Sidney allowed her earnestness to get the better of her sense of humour.

“ No,” she made frank answer. “ Not to you. I never have to explain things to you, you know.”

Rob sank back again, with a smile of exaggerated content. Nevertheless, his blue eyes, now turned upon

the fire, held in their clear depths a gleam that would have surprised Sidney, had she seen it. Instead, however, she remained intent upon her theme.

"But Ronald really is a splendid fellow," she urged.

"Mayhap." Rob cradled his stick in his crossed arms. "He is a monument of all the virtues, if you will; but, like Bunker Hill itself, he can get to be a fearful bore. I do appreciate him, Sidney; but, again like Bunker Hill, I admire him most, taken at a distance."

Again Sidney put forth her plea.

"Janet couldn't adore him, as she does, if there were not something in him."

"You're hitting now on my one main objection," Rob assured her. "There's too much in him; he is so stuffed with goodness that there isn't room for any spice. As for Janet, she doesn't count; she'd adore anything Canadian. Witness Jack. How is Janet, anyhow?"

"Arriving," Sidney answered tersely.

"To-day? Here?"

Sidney's laugh drove away the last of her thoughtful mood. She faced Rob merrily.

"You literal-minded collegian!" she mocked him. "This is what it means to be within the Boston radius. I would proceed to explain that Janet Leslie is slowly winning the edge of a place in Smith College."

"Good! I comprehend your speech; but not Janet's method, though. From all I heard, and from

my own observations at Christmas, I thought that Janet was bound to go through four years of being an entire misfit."

"So did we all. Day and I lamented over it by the hour, for Janet really is a whole lot nicer than she seems," Sidney responded, with a loyalty akin to that she had just shown for Ronald. "All fall, she was as cranky as possible, put her nose in the air, and went out of her way to impress it on the girls that she considered them nothing but so many frilly worldlings without a brain apiece. Even Day couldn't hold her in things at all. Naturally, the girls didn't take kindly to her; they only tolerated her for her mother's sake. She has times of doing the same thing still; but not so often. I have always imagined that Jack Blanchard gave her one or two heart-to-hearts, and took it out of her a little. She needs a dash of his plain good sense, even when she is at her best. Do you know," Sidney added reminiscently; "even at Grande Rivière, I used to wonder now and then if there might not be a jealous, cross-grained little streak in Janet."

Rob smiled at the fire, as there swept across his mental retina a vision of one snowy day in the old Quebec Historical Society, and of other days that had followed after. He too had had more than a small share of the same suspicion.

"I think perhaps there may be," he admitted gravely.

"Of course," Sidney once more became thoughtful;

“ they had ever so much money then, and Janet could do about as she pleased. Do you know,” she lifted her eyes to Rob; “ it’s not nearly so hard to be born without much money, as it is to go without it, once you’re used to it. Things that drive Janet almost to a frenzy I have done, all my life, and taken so much as a matter of course that I’ve not minded them in the least. Janet makes the most of things, the best and the very most; but, down in her heart of hearts, I know she considers it a personal affront that she can’t have Day’s gowns and Helen Pope’s saddle pony.”

“ I wish you had them, too, Sidney,” Rob said quietly, and with a brotherlike, honest regret that Sidney saw no reason to resent as patronage.

“ It never seems to occur to me to want them,” she answered flatly. “ They are out of my range; I might as well peak and pine to be queen of Abyssinia with a black slave brushing off flies with a peacock’s tail. Don’t misunderstand me. There are things I want, heaps of them; but they are the little things just out of reach, not the great, gorgeous things the rich girls have. Rob,” she bent forward, chin on her two doubled fists; “ would it astonish you very much, if I told you I didn’t care to be rich, not rich as people use the word? I want just enough to keep me going as I’m going now, saving here and there and enjoying my extra things all the more on that account. But to have a lot of money — I just don’t want it.”

“ Not want the flesh pots, Sidney? ” Rob queried banteringly.

“ No; only the little ones I can get now and then for myself. We girls don't half care for things, till we go without something else for the sake of getting them. I don't want a million-dollar legacy; I'd rather feel I'd earned a two-thousand dollar income.” She laughed at her own eager speech. “ It's better so,” she added. “ I'm not the sort to get rich, and it would be a wretched waste of energy for me to spend my days wailing for what I can't ever get.”

“ And Janet does? ”

“ Ye-es, after a fashion. She frets because she can't have the same sort of things the richest girls here do. What's worse, she frets about her mother's having the house, watches to see if the girls feel above her.”

“ Do they? ” Rob queried, more for the sake of drawing the answering spark from Sidney than from any other motive. Long since, Day's constant bulletins and his own observations had answered the question for all the Argyles.

Sidney did flash, however.

“ Above her! Rob Argyle, there's not a girl in the house who wouldn't be proud to carry the hem of her dear, dainty little train, if she'd only let us. Do you suppose we girls can't tell the difference between a lady born and a golden calf? ”

“ Oh, I say,” Rob made hasty protest; “ do hang to the tail of your own metaphor, Sidney, and not

grab at the tail of another. Of course, any bat can see that Mrs. Leslie's all right. You needn't get so testy on the subject. But about Janet? I like the cantankerous little soul, in spite of myself; I always did."

"I know it; and you can get on with her better than I can do, better than Day does," Sidney answered frankly. "She'll stand a lecture from you, and get furious, if Day gives her so much as a hint. I suppose that's the woman of her."

Rob shouted at her pensive tone.

"Come now; you're a woman, yourself," he reminded her.

"I know that. That's the reason I endure your lectures, yours and Jack's," Sidney made tranquil response. "As for Day, she gave me up, years ago."

"Much she did! You'll please to remember that it's not yet two years since I dropped you into each other's arms," Rob reminded her again.

"It was a good deed, too."

"Mine always are," Rob said complacently. "But do come back to our muttons, meaning Janet. I wish you wouldn't be so constantly side-tracking the conversation, Sidney. How does she manifest her increased adaptability to her environment?"

"Her — ? Oh, her arriving? I suspect you helped it on, Rob."

"Another of my good deeds. How?"

"By starting her with her banjo. You caught her on a tender point, one that we none of us were

keen enough to discover. She is working hard at it and practises for hours at a time, sitting in the garret with the ghost, because we all get so frantic with the everlasting noise. She really plays quite well now, and she has only had a few good lessons. From a word or two, now and then, I discovered it was her heart's desire to make the club, another year, and I talked it up with Irene. The leader of the club is junior, too, and Irene knows her well. The result was that Irene — she can coax anything out of anybody — made Janet play for her, one night in our room; and, a week later, she asked Day and Janet over to her room to make fudge, and had the club leader there to meet them. Janet came home on her toes, and has sat and plunked at the ghost most of the time ever since."

" Good old Irene! " Rob said approvingly. " She's the sort that generally does do things."

Sidney laughed. Her face was very roguish, all but her eyes which were thoughtful and full of girlish gentleness.

" Rob," she said abruptly; " it's a sin to gossip; but I do tell you any number of things I ought to keep to myself. It's an old trick of mine."

" What now? "

" Irene is coming here, next week, for a few days."

" Yes, Day told me that, first off," Rob made indifferent answer. " I must say, Sidney, you have the mildest sort of taste in gossip."

" Wait," she bade him. " That isn't all, nor half."

“ What then? ”

“ Wade,” she answered mysteriously.

“ What the mischief has Wade — ”

“ Everything. No; you needn't look over your shoulder in that spooky fashion. Wade isn't in the house.”

“ He might come in,” Rob said bluntly. “ I don't want to get caught, talking over a fellow of Wade's sort. He wouldn't like it.”

“ You're safe; he's down town, gone for the whole evening. You needn't worry. I wouldn't like him to hear me, either; at least not yet. But I must tell somebody, or burst.”

“ Tell away, then. I'd hate to be picking up the fragments in a bucket. Fire away!” Rob stretched out his long legs to the blaze and turned his jolly blue eyes on Sidney's thoughtful face.

Rather to her own surprise, Sidney found it hard to begin.

“ It isn't now,” she said. “ It only may be, some day.”

“ Isn't what? ”

“ Wade and Irene,” she answered lucidly.

Rob pulled in his legs and sat up.

“ Thunder! You don't mean it, Sidney? ”

Sidney retreated before his excitement.

“ No; I don't mean anything, really. It is only a *maybe*.”

Rob lay back again with returning placidity.

“ *Maybe* be hanged! You've no business to startle

a fellow's nerves on any such count as that," he told her.

"No; but wait. There's more to it than you think. You know, last winter, Wade wrote to Irene, when Bungay was so ill. I thought it was queer, at the time, queer he didn't write to Day, or Mother Leslie; but they had just seen each other —"

"When?"

"Thanksgiving."

"Two months before; that isn't *just*," Rob commented.

"No; perhaps not. Anyway, he did it. And I discovered, just as I was coming home, that he's kept on writing to her, ever since."

"Good old Wade! Most likely Bungay had disturbing symptoms, and he felt she ought to know. What else?"

"Isn't that enough?"

"Not by a long way. Myself, I write to a dozen girls; but you are the only one that counts. We're all like that. The question is —"

"Whether Irene is the one that counts?" Sidney echoed, and, so simple was the friendship between herself and Rob that it never once occurred to her to notice the implication of her words. Rob noticed it, however; but he had the supreme good sense to pass it by, without a word of comment.

"Sure! That's the question. Mere letters don't count; it's only according to what's in them."

Then Sidney played her trump card.

“ Yes; and, another thing, Irene’s invitation didn’t come from me.”

“ No; naturally not.” Rob was trained to strict convention. “ It came from your mother.”

“ Yes, she wrote the letter. I told her she was a darling to think about it, told her, to-day; and she said she didn’t think of it at all till Wade suggested it.”

There was a silence. Then Rob whistled long and loud, whistled just as the outer door swung open.

“ That settles it,” he said. “ She’s It.”

“ What’s the whistle, Rob? ” Wade’s voice queried from the hall.

And Rob made composed reply, —

“ I was merely whistling at you.”

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

“WHERE is Day?”

Her banjo, now her almost inseparable comrade, under her arm, Janet paused on the threshold of the great front room. Sidney glanced up, at the question.

“Trailing Alpha. Come in; won’t you?”

Janet accepted the second phrase, disdained the first.

“What’s the use?” she asked, when she was on the window seat, with the pillows arranged to her liking.

“Curiosity. It’s the last time Alpha takes in, this year.”

“Alpha, yes. But Phi Beta Kappa announcements are the great thing.”

“Not for me.” Sidney held her pen suspended in mid-air while, with her free hand, she hunted down a missing word in Day’s dictionary.

Janet shook her head, with more than a trace of her old sanctity.

“It is for me. I am here to work.”

“So are we all, I suppose,” Sidney replied a little shortly. “We don’t all of us make it our main theme of conversation, though.”

“ But I believe in talking about one’s real purposes,” Janet persisted.

“ I don’t. Our actions show them, if they’re any purposes at all. I never could see the sense in wasting one’s breath over discussions of the wholly obvious. Being here, it is a matter of course that we’re doing our fair share of work. Else, we’d get dropped. Some of us may be, anyway, for all I know.” Sidney whacked her dictionary leaves about with noisy vehemence.

Janet flushed.

“ Does that mean me? ” she queried.

“ No, you little dig! Don’t fish for compliments. You know you are one of the class prodigies, grinds, anything else you like to call it. If you keep on, you will be sure of Phi Beta Kappa in senior year.”

“ Sidney! I don’t dare think about it; it takes my breath away. Do you honestly think so? ”

“ Yes, if you want it.”

“ I can think of no greater honour.” Janet clasped her hands across her banjo and spoke solemnly.

“ I can, then, any number of them,” Sidney answered, with a composure which Janet found flippant in the extreme. “ I’d rather have Alpha, myself.”

“ Alpha! But Phi Beta Kappa — ”

“ Yes,” Sidney interposed. “ It is decent and dull and dreary. It means brains and grind; but that’s all. You have to have brains for Alpha, too, good, useful brains that you can put to all sorts of tests, and you also have to have a little human adaptability.”

Janet pursued her own train of thought.

“ One is given you; one you earn,” she observed.

“ Exactly, and there lies the pith of the whole matter. In a thing of that sort, I’d rather feel the girls had a hand in the giving. It’s all a matter of win; but it just pushes it back another step or two. Popularity alone can’t give you Alpha, nor brains alone. You’ve got to have a mixture of the two, and no two girls need the same mixture. What’s more, you can never tell just what the mixture ought to be, for yourself or anybody else, until you blunder on it. That’s why I like Alpha. It takes the all-round girl, sometimes takes her when she least expects it. If I hadn’t had to get this essay done before chapel, I’d have been out with Day, helping hunt down the girls and give them the cheering they deserve. Are you ready for chapel? Wherefore the banjo? ”

“ The leader of the club, Miss — ” Janet hesitated.

“ No posing, Janet! ” Sidney rebuked her gayly, as she gathered up her books. “ You know Miss Selwyn’s name has been on top of your mind for two months. It’s too late to pretend you’ve forgotten her; you might as well — ” Suddenly the girl cast her books on the bed, rested her two hands on Janet’s shoulders and looked straight down into Janet’s eyes. “ Janet child,” she said gravely; “ I am the oldest friend you have here, older than Day, and you ought to let me lecture you a little bit. Don’t take things too much in earnest here. Have your fun, dearie,

with the rest of us, and talk about it while you're having it. That's the way the rest of us do, and we work all the better, after we have been frivolling. You act as if your fun were a disgrace. Don't. We all of us are working, working as hard as we know how; but we have any amount of fun, in between scenes, and we glory in the fun. Try it yourself. Do stunts with the rest of us, work till you make the banjo club; and then, when you do make it, show your teeth and let us know you are perfectly happy over it. Your Greek and things will be just as good, and the girls will like you a whole lot better. Cross, honey? No? All right; come along, for we're most indecorously late." And, with Janet at her side, she went running down the stairs and across the street into the back campus whose wide stretches of green lawn were full of hurrying figures bound to one focal point, the chapel.

None the less and in spite of her haughty denial, Janet was more than a little cross, as she went dashing off at Sidney's side. It was her first impression and her second, as well, that Sidney had presumed upon her two-years seniority, presumed upon the length of their acquaintance, in taking it on herself to lecture so. Her first impulse had been to draw away from Sidney's touch; but this impulse she had smothered, as being childish, immature. Moreover, it had not been altogether easy to show resentment, with Sidney's friendly hand upon her shoulders, with Sidney's frank voice sounding in her ears.

Not even Janet in her wayward moods could bring herself to deny that Sidney Stayre had charm. Nevertheless, as Sidney dropped her hands and, turning, led the way down-stairs, Janet's resentment came back upon her, came back to go with her across the sunny campus and, mounting the stairs, to sit down beside her in the freshman seats in chapel.

They were late in arriving, so late that the guardian at the door had barely time to allow them to cast aside their books and hurry to their seats, before she shut the door upon the luckless ones who followed close behind.

Inside the chapel, and withdrawn a seat or two from Sidney by reason of her own resentment, Janet watched the familiar routine with listless eyes which lacked all shadow of devoutness. Mechanically she arose and sat, to mark the passing of the President; she found the places in the books; she uttered her usual long-drawn and tuneful *Amen* at the ending of the prayer, but the prayer itself fell upon deaf ears, even as the reading before it had done. Instead, she was acutely, uncomfortably aware that Day, down in senior seats, was topped with a rampant and beautiful new hat which set off every atom of prettiness she owned; that the banjo club's leader, Miss Selwyn, sat next her, guest of Day's hostess's roommate and forming with her a square party which, to Janet's mental vision, justified even Day's magnificent headgear. Janet was also hatted, for

no amount of local custom could bring her Canadian soul to the point of considering it quite decorous to go bare-headed; but her hat was already in its second season, and its stiff little bows bore unmistakably the hallmark of a Quebec hand, and that of Erin, not of France. And Day and Miss Selwyn had whispered together twice, three times, during the hymn. Why had Rob given her that horrid old banjo, after all?

“Thank you; no,” she said to Sidney curtly, as the seniors went filing out, with Day and Miss Selwyn in their midst. “I’m not going to the bulletin room, this morning.”

However, she went. One of the sophomores, meeting her in the after-chapel bedlam of the lower hall, told her of a note awaiting her, and so it chanced that Sidney, going down the steps in the side of Seelye Hall, discovered Janet just ahead of her. At the sight, Sidney had a little twinge of conscience, the conscience that might assail a youthful doctor watching a child make a wry face over one of his bitter pills. Janet needed just the admonition; of that Sidney was quite convinced. She was by no means so thoroughly convinced, however, that she herself was the one to give it. Nevertheless, no one else had seemed disposed to throw herself into a breach which was open to every thoughtful eye; and, in despair, Sidney had taken on herself the irksome task, forgetting until it was quite too late that, once upon a time, Janet had called her “bossy,” and that, on

Janet's tongue, the word had no association with a barnyard. With the best intentions in the world, and with a friendliness few girls could withstand, then, she had had it out with Janet, earnestly, yet laughing a little at her own earnestness. And Janet had resented it, not promptly and hotly, but with a growing indignation which had rendered Sidney uneasy. Janet's resentment had been manifest in all sorts of ways: the poise of her determined little chin, the way she crushed the crisp green grass beneath her feet, the rigid silence she maintained, all the way across the campus, and the care she had taken to leave an empty seat or two between herself and Sidney. And now, this refusal to go together on the usual morning migration to the bulletin room, this rushing off alone, when she had plainly stated that she would not go: this seemed to Sidney like underlining the italics of her wrath.

Nevertheless, Sidney forced herself to speak to Janet in her accustomed offhand tone, when she came upon her later, standing by the window to read her note, her brow puckered to a little frown. Around her, the buzz and chatter of many girls filled the place and drifted out the windows to greet the girls outside. Beside the long, quartered strip of panelled boarding, the girls clustered like swarming bees; but the space by the window was comparatively empty when Sidney, stepping out of the thickest of the swarm to exchange a word with Irene, discovered Janet almost at her elbow.

“ Changed your mind? ” she queried, nodding as blithely as if no cloud lay upon Janet’s brow.

“ Yes. I had a note,” Janet made answer shortly.

“ So I observe. ’Wish I had. I hope it’s good news.”

“ Good enough.” And Janet turned, pressed her way through the ever-thickening crowd, and left the room. A moment after, they saw her walking swiftly away across the campus.

“ That’s a winning little dear,” Irene observed.

“ She’s not always so bad,” Sidney made conscientious reply. “ Sometimes, she can be perfectly fascinating.”

“ When? ” Irene laid down the question, as she would have laid an insurmountable obstacle in Sidney’s path.

“ When — when nothing has rubbed her the wrong way.”

“ What has rubbed her the wrong way now? ”

“ I have,” Sidney confessed. “ I took it on myself to give her some moral suasion, and — ”

“ And, like all the rest of the world, she took it as an insult? ” Irene laughed. “ Mark my words, Sidney Stayre, there is no single human being in the world who isn’t the best possible person to administer moral suasion to herself. Let your neighbours alone; they’ll not only manufacture their own moral pills, but they’ll swallow them, too.”

“ Yes, I know,” Sidney assented; “ but now and

then I do love to hurry up the dose a little. I hate to see them wasting time."

"Let them," Irene advised her briefly. "You don't save their time, and you do waste your breath. If you must have an outlet of some sort, lecture the penitent sister who comes to you for sympathy; but, as you value your head and ears, do let the rest alone."

Sidney laughed at the mock-tragic fervour of Irene's tone.

"You've touched me on the point of my besetting sin," she said. "I've always had a notion, though, that my especial talent lay in salutary admonitions."

"Drop it, then," Irene said tersely. "Have you all your notes? All right. Then hurry up, if we are to have any sort of a walk before your history."

The old town was basking in the Maytime sunshine now, and the spirit of the spring was showing itself on every hand. The streets lay wide and white and clean in the gay noon sunlight; the lawns upon either hand and the broad stretches of the campus were like crisp, soft green carpets. Above, the huge old elms were bursting into a foam of tender green, against which their massy trunks loomed large and black, a soft blackness as of deep-piled velvet. Among them, the maples, as if forgetful of their recent wanton gorgeousness, lifted their demure green bundles of thicker foliage, and an occasional ever-green added the mossy tone needed to throw into relief the paler tints of the new-born leaves. This was by day. By night, the greens were changed to

dusky silver, as the full white moon of May crept slowly up from behind the four-spired college tower, to send its dainty light across the building-spotted, student-dotted campus.

And all this glad and dainty beauty of the new-fledged summer was wrapping itself about Sidney and Irene, as they went tramping out the Bay State Road, was arching over Janet, as she trudged away alone across the campus, heedless of the note she was clutching in her hand, heedless even of her appointment with Miss Selwyn, while she digested bit by bit her wrath at Sidney, digested, too, the pill which Sidney had bestowed upon her. Under all her crotchets and her whims and faults, Janet Leslie had an inherent wish to find out where the real right lay, and, finding out, to march towards it as swiftly as possible, however irksome she might find the path. Sidney's words had opened up new avenues of thought, wide avenues, cutting across and across the narrow path she had found out for herself. She must think things over, things, and Sidney. For Sidney really did take a great deal on herself now and then.

She was still thinking them over at noon, when Sidney came into the house and, a little later, up the garret stairs.

Janet had fully adopted the garret as her own by now. Driven there first by the exigencies of her banjo, she had discovered great possibilities in this dusky retreat, where the light slanted palely in across the long rows of trunks, where the ghost walked

Klip! Klop! on certain stormy nights, the ghost who might be Jenny Lind, or else Burgoyne. Janet liked the ghost, for he remained hidden and silent by day, and only added a flavour of mystery to what otherwise might have been a humdrum retreat in a nook among the dusty, dusky trunks. And the garret was so quiet, so safe from interruption, whether one wanted to make up arrears of work, or whether one, as now, wished to sit and brood, chin on fists and elbows on knees, pondering upon the problems known only to girlhood, among them the great problem of them all: how to strike a proper balance between one's duty to one's neighbour and one's obligation to make the very, very most of one's self. Absorbed as she was in this problem, world-old, yet always new, she looked up resentfully at Sidney's tread upon the stairs.

Nevertheless, Sidney was bearing in her hand an olive branch of peace. All morning long, in the midst of her gay walk and talk with Irene, through the gay band of mote-flecked sunshine, she had heard and seen Janet's resentment, and she had admitted herself to be its just and lawful cause. Irene had touched upon her sin, her great and besetting sin. And Sidney, sinning, had yet the saving grace of penitence.

All morning long, she had dwelt upon the question of how best to make her peace. Do what she would, she could not say she was sorry for her own opinion, or for what that opinion, spoken out, might yet do

for Janet. And, in Janet's present frame of mind, she might not welcome an apology which said, —

“ I'm in the right of it; I'm only sorry that I let you know it.”

Her face was almost as cloudy as Janet's had been, when she mounted the familiar stairs.

Day met her on the threshold, met her with an eager question.

“ Have you heard the news? ”

Sidney shook her head.

“ Nothing especial. What? ”

“ Janet has made Blue Pencil.”

“ Janet! When? Why? How? ”

“ This morning. She had a note on the board, rather unofficial; but the rest will happen, this afternoon. Isn't it fine? ”

“ But I saw her there, talked to her while she was reading a note in the bulletin room, this morning. Do you suppose that was it, and she wouldn't tell me? ” Sidney's eyes and voice both showed that the hurt went deeper than she would have liked to admit, even to faithful Day.

As was her custom, Day read her friend like an open, large-print page.

“ Don't worry, Sidney. It's only Janet's way,” she said lightly. “ Besides, it might have been another note.”

“ No; it was the only one she had. I stood there, while she read it.” Then Sidney rallied, and forced the wonted briskness back into her voice. “ I didn't

know she had aspirations," she added. "Where is she now?"

"I'm sure I don't know. Why?"

"I want to congratulate her; that's all." And Sidney departed in pursuit.

The pursuit was long and devious. In the end, it led her to the garret where Janet, despondent as any ghost, sat enthroned amid the trunks. Before Sidney could put in a word, she spoke.

"What do you want now?" she demanded, too pugnaciously for absolute politeness.

"Congratulations, of course; heaps of them."

"On what?"

"Blue Pencil."

"Oh, that!" Janet looked up and her eyes, like her tone, were disdainful. "I'm not sure I care for that," she said coldly, and there was a heavy, falling emphasis upon the final word.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

“JANET can send herself to Coventry and take up her permanent abode there, for all I care,” Sidney said hotly, as soon as she was inside her own room once more.

Day, writhing before her mirror in a vain effort to button up the back of a too starchy blouse, forgot her starch and her buttonholes, and faced about abruptly.

“What on earth is the matter, Sidney?” she demanded, for the past year of daily intercourse had taught her that Sidney Stayre seldom lost her temper.

Sidney laughed, partly at herself, partly at Day’s blank amazement. Even in the midst of her temper, she saw the ludicrousness of her own misapplied vigour. She laughed; then she cast on her bed the book she had neglected to drop, before betaking herself in search of Janet, and crossed the room to Day’s assistance.

“Let me do that for you, child,” she said, as she deftly turned Day face about. “You’re getting warm, all for nothing.”

Day made a grimace over her shoulder.

“So are you,” she mocked. “Still, you are a blessing of a maid, Sidney; it is one of your strong

points. As a rule, I hate to have people handle me. Where did you learn the knack? ”

“ Dressing a pair of fractious twins who were always lying low to find something they could make a fuss about. There, ma’am! You look as fresh as — as Dawn.”

“ Bah! I thought better of you than that,” Day remonstrated, while she rummaged in her top drawer for a fresh white belt. Then, when the belt was fastened, she turned to Sidney with one of the little outbursts of affection which, as a rule, she reserved for Rob, and for Rob alone. “ Sidney, you’re a dear old soul! ” she said. “ This year wouldn’t have been much fun, without your being here to spoil me. Now do sit down and tell me what’s the matter with Janet. I’m not going to sit by and see her making herself obnoxious to my chiefest chum. Out with it, dearie! ”

Sidney returned the caress which, however, on either side had been too slight for words, yet on that very account the more acceptable. Gush was alien to their natures; they seldom kissed, more seldom still, they cuddled. Instead, although that first year of theirs together in one room, the year that mars so many friendships, makes so few, had bound them with a tie which would outlast their lives, it was a tie which showed itself by glances of swift understanding, the pressure of a hand, the turn of a head, the arching of an eyebrow. The other girls in the house, gay, demonstrative young things, made all

manner of fun of this devotion which manifested itself by such tacit tokens; but Sidney and Day, knowing each other, trusting each other absolutely, could afford to turn a deaf ear to all the gibing. So long as each sufficed for the other's needs, it mattered little what the rest of the girls said or thought. It was no one else's concern at all whether they kissed a dozen times a year, or as many times an hour. A friendship such as theirs held itself apart from gossip, and far, far above it.

"About Janet?" Sidney said at length. "Really, Day, I don't know whether I am to blame or not; whether Janet is obnoxious, or just my conscience."

"Bother the conscience!" Day made inelegant protest. "You've too much of the thing, Sidney; I always said you had, even if Rob won't admit it. But Janet can be a terror, when once she begins."

"Yes," Sidney responded soberly. "The only question is which of us did begin it, she or I. Somebody is a terror, and somebody else is a victim. The only trouble is that I'm not clear in my mind which is which."

"'Tother, probably." Day's very tone was full of comfort. "Tell it out, Sidney. You'll feel lots better, if you do; and I know Janet well enough so anything you say isn't likely to make any difference in what I think about her."

Sidney dropped down upon the window seat.

"Day," she said; "you're a tower of strength and a searchlight of consolation. There's not so much

to tell. I only gave Janet a little good advice for her soul's salvation, and now she's mad; not angry, but mad, madder than a March hare."

"What did you say?" Day queried, her curiosity overmastering her discretion, in the face of Sidney's description of the irate Janet.

And Sidney told, accurately and briefly. Then, —

"Sidney, you always were a darling," Day sighed contentedly. "I had made up my mind to have it out with her, myself, and now you've saved me a very bad half-hour."

"But Janet —"

"Let her get over it," Day advised tranquilly. "She will, in time. I've seen her before, when she was on the rampage."

"As much as this?"

Day giggled, as at some sudden recollection.

"Ask Rob," she said; and not another word could Sidney extract from her upon the subject.

Late, that selfsame evening, the girls all sat huddled in an indiscriminate group upon the broad south veranda of the Leslie house, talking of next year's plans, while they watched the fat white moon ride up across the cloudless sky above the elm-tops, or let their eyes fall upon the irregular procession of white-gowned figures which sauntered slowly through the dazzling circle made by the electric lamp a little farther down the street. Nearer the house, the shadows lay in heavy patches; but even there the ceaseless click of many heels betrayed that all the

college world was abroad, that night, revelling in the moonlight and in the soft, heavy air.

In the midst of the veranda, Mrs. Leslie sat in the solitary chair, a fluffy bit of lace across her shoulders, for she had passed the term of years when a May evening, however prematurely warm, could drive her to bare neck and arms, like those of the girls who sat clustered at her feet. Day was beside her, one round, bare arm flung up across her knee; and, in the white light of the moon, her face showed more grave than was its wont, thoughtful and full of a gentleness which scantily escaped being sad.

“ It’s like the water going over Niagara,” she said slowly. “ It never can come back again, and it knows its place is sure to be filled, the very instant it gets empty. Mother Leslie, who’ll have my room, next year! ”

“ I think — ” Mrs. Leslie was beginning; but Day lifted her hand.

“ No; don’t tell me her name. I don’t want to be thinking about her, and a name would only make her seem more real. I wish I could stay on in the dear old house.”

“ Why can’t you? ” Janet queried prosaically, from her place on the lower step.

“ Because I don’t think it would be wise,” Day answered, while her arm on Mrs. Leslie’s knee pressed down a little harder against the soft black folds of skirt. “ You understand me; don’t you, Mother Leslie? ” she went on appealingly. “ It isn’t as if it

were outside of college, just living here, you know. Then I'd stay on inside this house till the end of time, stay on here and love it always. But it is college, you know; it can't last but four years, so I think I really ought to move on. We were sent here to get broader, to see all sides of things, and I know I ought to do it."

"All sides, even to the point of going into an invitation house?" some one asked, from the farther corner of the group.

Day raised her head, as at a direct challenge.

"Certainly, if I get asked," she said. "Why not?"

"You'll get asked fast enough," Amy Pope predicted glibly. "In fact, the girls are saying you are more than likely to be asked to make up White Lodge."

"Nonsense. And, anyway, it is too soon to tell," Day answered flatly. "Besides, with all the talk about the snobbishness of this house, we none of us will be asked to make up another one."

"But if you should?" somebody else inquired, from the step where Janet was sitting, her moody brow resting on her fingers and her eyes intently following the sluggish motions of a glowworm at her feet.

"Should what?"

"Should be asked to make up a house."

Day laughed carelessly.

"I should probably smother my elation as best I might, and proceed to take a census of my friends."

"Then you would go into one?"

"After a year or so of campus. Yes. Why not?"

“ Day, you snob! ”

Now and then Day cast aside her girlishness and spoke with the dignity of a woman grown. She did it now.

“ Why, please? ” And her clear young voice dominated the group.

“ Why, because — ” The answering voice trailed off into a hesitating silence.

Day laughed.

“ I suspect that is the fate of most of the *becauses*, ” she said, with some scorn. “ They’re in the air, a fashionable sort of microbe; but you can’t catch one of them and give a good look at it, if you try. ”

Sidney bent forward suddenly, clasping her arms across the lap of her pale yellow skirt where it lay over her knee.

“ Now you listen, ” she said audaciously. “ It takes a freshman to settle senior concerns, and I am coming to Day’s rescue in the argument. Keep still, Helen Pope. You’ll get your turn later on. I want to talk. ”

“ As usual? ” Amy Pope queried flippantly.

“ Yes. I always did love to expound, ” Sidney replied, with unruffled calm. “ But, about the invitation houses: what on earth is the harm of them? The campus can’t hold us all. Nobody ever thinks of sulking and saying things, because girls don’t go on. What is the use of their saying it, when they go off of their own accord, in senior year, to make room for some of the rest of us who are trying to coerce the

Registrar to put us on, out of turn? As a rule, the invitation girls have had their turn. It is only fair to pass it on to somebody else."

"Yes; but they are so clique-y," Amy urged.

"If a girl is clique-y, she'd be just as clique-y in a circus-day mob as in a college invitation house," Day answered swiftly. "That's the fault of the girl, not the house. Besides, if you come to that, go into any of the largest campus houses. They're every one of them made up of a clique and a frazzle."

"I love your English, Day," Mrs. Leslie told her.

"I'm not talking English, only arguing, Mother Leslie," Day responded, quite unabashed.

Then Janet took her turn, took it without troubling herself to raise her head.

"Everybody admits that the invitation houses are for the rich girls, anyway."

"Everybody doesn't, then," Day flashed back hotly. "Beulah Bates is in Twenty Belmont, this year; she has worked her way, all through college, half-starved herself, they say, in freshman year, living on the baked stuff her father brought her, once a week, when he drove in to market with his farm things. Then the girls found out about it and gave her things to do, mending and shampooing and all sorts of things. I tell you what, girls, Smith College is a great deal less snobbish than it generally gets credit for being. It hasn't any use for the self-help girls who shirk and feel above their places; but, if a girl comes who works clean, and laughs and makes the best of it, and isn't

totally a dunce, the girls will give her anything from Alpha to — ”

“ Omega,” Amy capped her solemnly, and the discussion ended in a burst of laughter.

“ What is your final decision, Day? ” Helen Pope asked teasingly at length, when the conversation was running quietly once more.

Day flushed a little at the reminder held in Helen’s question. In the multitude of good things offered her, she had been finding it hard to make a choice.

“ The Chapin,” she answered. “ We’ve southwest corner, looking out on the other green saplings. Therein lies a whole allegory.”

“ We? ”

Day cast upon the speaker a look of absolute and blank amazement.

“ Of course,” she said. “ Do you suppose Sidney and I have any idea of parting company? ”

“ But I thought you and Amy Pope — ”

Day interposed.

“ Amy is a darling,” she said. “ No; nothing is expected by way of response, my dearie. She did me the honour to say she was sick and tired of Helen, and that she’d like to trade her off for me; but Sidney likewise did me the honour to balk at the bargain, so poor Helen is still on the market. She’s a good investment, too.” Then suddenly Day rose and stood drawn up to her full, girlish height. “ Listen,” she added slowly; “ and remember what you hear. When Sidney Stayre and I part company, it will be Sidney’s

doing, not mine." Once more she cast aside her gravity. "In proof of which, I'm sleepy, and I'm going to bed. Come along, Sidney Stayre."

But Sidney, though her eyes were a little wet, nevertheless mutinied.

"Oh, Day! It is so early and so warm. How can you leave this glorious moonlight?"

Day waved her hand tragically.

"Bear witness, girls. It will be just as I say, and this is the thin edge of the wedge. Good night. I go alone."

The talk ran on fitfully, after Day's departure, fitfully and broken by long intervals of silence. Then, one by one, the girls arose, shook out their flattened skirts and wandered off to bed. At length, only Mrs. Leslie was left there, with Sidney by her side and Janet curled up on the step, her chin on her fists and her eyes now lifted to the fat white moon. The moon went behind a cloud, a housemaid came in search of Mrs. Leslie, and the two girls were left alone together, with only a few feet and, seemingly, the half a world, between them. In the unbroken silence, each felt the strain of the situation. Sidney dared not, Janet perversely would not, break it. And every moment made it seem to her less breakable.

All that day, things had been happening in Janet's brain. All that day, her clouded brow had been the mask of restless thoughts which had grown more self-accusing with the passing hours. At chapel, her resentment towards Sidney had seemed to her wholly

natural, wholly justifiable. At noontime, as she listened to Sidney's retreating heels upon the garret stairs, a little doubt had crept in and had not crept out again, in spite of all Janet's efforts to dislodge it. By night, the little doubt had grown up and given birth to a whole colony of other doubts, and the doubts, strange to say, concerned herself, not Sidney.

In such circumstances, many a girl would have sought a confidante; but not Janet. Even her mother had a trick of seeming too grown up, at times, to enter fully into questions such as these. Ronald had always understood; but Ronald was in Chicago with Lord Axmuthy, who was taking the stockyards as an object lesson in Americanisms in their most characteristic form. To Janet's mind, Ronald in Chicago was vastly more remote than Ronald had been in England, too remote in any case to serve as confidant and oracle in any present crisis. Lacking Ronald, she gritted her teeth and fought her doubts alone, cropping off their heads only to have them turn and waggle all their tails at her, as in derision over her futile attempts to kill them off entirely. And yet — And yet — Janet's conscience was of the New England species; her keen, shrewd eyes had always been quick to see where the real right lay.

“ Sidney! ”

The voice came so unexpectedly that Sidney started violently. Then, knowing Janet, she repressed her surprise.

“ Well, dearie? ”

Janet rose and stood facing her, a dark little silhouette against the white moonlight on the lawn beyond.

“ I’ve been thinking things, all day; and I begin to know you were right about it, this morning. I was cross at you, very cross. You knew it at the time. It seemed to me you were putting your hand in where it didn’t belong.”

“ Perhaps I was, dearie,” Sidney answered humbly, touched by Janet’s contrite confession.

Janet stiffened her shoulders and waved her hand impatiently.

“ I’m not *dearie*, Sidney,” she said; “ and I don’t care about being cuddled; at least, not by anybody but by mother and Ronald. It’s not my way; I wasn’t born so. I think we English girls aren’t. But I do want the girls to like me, and, for the sake of that, I’m glad to have your lecture, even if it did hurt and make me so very angry.”

“ I’m sorry that I hurt you, de— ” Sidney caught the word up short. “ I oughtn’t to have done it.”

“ Not you, perhaps; but somebody. It might as well have been you, you see,” Janet made answer. “ And, all day long, I have been thinking about it. I believe I agree with you a good deal. I have been smug, and flapped my — my what I called *earnestness* in everybody’s face, like a toreador’s flag. No wonder the girls turned bulls and longed to gore me. I mean to stop it, stop it now, and not take myself so much in earnest. And it seemed fairer, Sidney, to tell you

this at once, and let you know that perhaps you had helped me out a little, in spite of myself."

Very small and slight she looked, standing there, silhouetted darkly against the pale moonlight and making her downright, unreserved confession, unreserved, yet, after all, so full of reservations. Sidney longed with all her girlish might to take a quick step forward and gather up the girl in her strong arms; yet some subtle intuition warned her to beware.

"But, after all, it's not all my fault," the voice went on. "It's in the blood, Sidney, the English blood and the Canadian. We take ourselves in earnest more than you American girls do; we think it right to show our earnestness, not bury it up under a heap of nonsense and of frills. Your way makes life prettier than our does, prettier, and, perhaps, a little easier for the people who are looking on. Still, it is contrary to all our notions. We think, if a girl is really in earnest, really bound to accomplish something worth the while, she should show it in her face and talk and — walk. And — and — it takes a little while to get used to the other sort of thing."

Sidney yielded to a second intuition, and laid her hand on Janet's shoulder.

"I know, Janet," she said, and both speech and gesture were almost masculine in their paucity of endearments.

To her extreme surprise, she felt Janet's hand shut hard on hers. An instant later, Janet's head came

against her shoulder, with a queer, strangled little sob.

“Then give me time — Sidney — and be as patient with — me as you can.”

Next morning early, Sidney knocked at Irene’s door.

“Irene!”

Irene looked up from the letter in her hand.

“Sidney? Come in, child,” she said.

Too absorbed to notice the becoming flush on Irene’s cheeks, Sidney came in and cast herself down on Irene’s bed.

“Irene,” she said abruptly; “do you know, I begin to think we’ve none of us been quite fair to Janet Leslie. She doesn’t go to be so cantankerous; it is only a case of racial incompetence, and curable.”

Half an hour later, Irene detached herself from the subject of Janet Leslie, and picked up her letter once more.

“Sidney, I have some news for you,” she said and, as she spoke, the flush came back into her cheeks. “I’ve a letter here from your cousin, Mr. Winthrop, and he is coming up for Sunday.”

“From Wade?” Sidney questioned blankly. “Wade coming up? Why in the world didn’t he write to —” But her mind, leaping forward with an answer to the question, made its ending wholly needless.

CHAPTER TWENTY

“ I WISH,” Sidney spoke with weighty deliberation; “ I wish I didn’t have a cousin in the world.”

This time, even the loyal Day was shocked.

“ Sidney! What a thing to say!”

Sidney yielded to the rebuke, or, perhaps, to a wave of penitence.

“ Oh, Wade, of course,” she admitted. “ But then, he’s like any brother, only nicer.”

Day’s mind flew to Cambridge and to Rob.

“ Doubted!” she said.

“ Of course. I knew you’d say that. However, even I do admit that Rob is an exception to most rules,” Sidney answered frankly. “ He and Jack and Wade are different. But listen. I have thirty-one first cousins. Most of them I’ve never seen; nine of them are grandmothers. Do you wonder I don’t feel any especial yearnings towards them? ”

“ They’re your relations,” Day reminded her.

Sidney laughed.

“ That’s the Scotch of you, Day. For my part, I don’t love people any more because we had an ancestor or two in common. But that’s theory. The fact is that my cousin Judith — ”

Janet, in her old place beside the window, looked up sharply. During the past three weeks, she had taken up the habit of spending much of her spare time in the great front room to which Day, six or seven months before, had worked so hard to lure her. The past three weeks had shown that some sort of a change was taking place in Janet. Her classroom work had always been above reproach. It was holding its old level now, or even rising bit by bit; but she appeared to accomplish it much more easily than of yore. Heretofore, she had seemed as if weighted with ambition and with fear lest she let slip some golden opportunities. Now she did her work well, and then forgot the doing. Now she was merry, irresponsible at times, and Janet, irresponsible, was second to none in magnetic charm. She brandished her banjo on all sides, in these latter days, serenaded the girls or, sitting on the stairs, picked gayly at the strings in the intervals of the gossip which, a month before, she had disdained. In the old days, she had practised by stealth and in the garret, burying her ambitions in her own heart. Now she made no secret of her keen desire to make the club, no secret of her rapture over each encouraging word vouchsafed her by the club's leader, Margaretta Selwyn.

All this did not take place at once, nor did it accomplish itself by leaps and bounds. Nevertheless, that it was accomplishing itself, every one in the house was well aware. They had only to institute comparison between the dumb, reluctant guest whom

Day occasionally forced upon them, and Janet as they had seen her, just the night before, holding the parlour-ful of girls breathless with smothered and smothering mirth, lest they lose one syllable of her impersonations of the various faculty stars. Whether from brooding on the peculiarities of others, whether from some inherent talent all her own, it would be hard to say; but Janet had of late developed a skill in mimicry, a clever knack of emphasizing a phrase with a characteristic twang of her omnipresent banjo which was fast bringing her into a notoriety that reached far beyond the limits of the house. Such of the seniors as were not totally engrossed in the coming *Hamlet*, yielding to the general flavour of dramatic criticism which tinctures college conversation during summer term, were watching Janet keenly. While they watched from the summit of their four-year pinnacle, they predicted great things for Janet, three years hence. But Janet and her classmates set down the seniors as a stage-struck race of beings, laughed at the predictions and straightway forgot them. Three years later, though, they laughed at their own laughter.

Day, meanwhile, was rejoicing frankly over the change in Janet. Underneath all her apparent unconcern, she had always been prone to regard the Leslies as her own discovery; it had been a source of keen regret and keener mortification to her that Janet had in no way justified her enthusiastic prophecies. Even better than Sidney because she had known her

longer and under conditions that were far more a test of real character, Day had realized to the full Janet's possibilities, her inherent nobility. It had been vexatious, then, when Janet had signally failed to show herself for what she really, truly was. Day could not blame the girls for not liking Janet; she had not blamed Janet for her contrariety; she merely had been disgusted and exasperated by the whole false situation. She rejoiced the more heartily, then, when the situation ended, when Janet cast aside her shell and set to work in earnest to become a girl with other girls. Day was far-sighted. She rejoiced over Janet; but her thanks she gave to Sidney Stayre.

But Sidney, as was her wont, paid scanty heed to causes and effects. She merely rejoiced that Janet was daily growing more agreeable, met her advances fully half-way across, said a good word for her when she could, and then let the matter drop. Nevertheless, she too, like Day, encouraged Janet's frequent appearings on their threshold.

And now Janet looked up from a lapful of books.

"Judith Addison?" she queried.

"Yes." Sidney's cadence was a falling one.

"You sound as if your last friend had already taken flight," Janet commented.

"I feel so, or as if I'd like to fly. Judith wants to make me a visit."

"Sidney!" Day's hands fell to her side in consternation. "What do people think we're made of?"

It seems to me we have been visited to death, this year."

"Only Rob and Jack," Sidney reminded her. "Of course, Wade has only just gone home; but not even my egotism could make me think he came here to see me."

"I don't know why it is," Day said reflectively; "but I feel as if we'd been in a perfect whirl of visits. Rob and Jack don't count; they're us. I know there must have been some others."

"Judith isn't so very bad," Janet put in encouragingly. "She's pretty, and she can be very nice."

Sidney made a wry face.

"When she isn't critical. She generally is, though."

"I hate that sort," Day said reflectively, and quite forgetful that it was Sidney's cousin she was maligning. "I don't wonder you dread her, Sidney. There is so little of the term left that you really don't want her here in the way; and outsiders are dreadfully in the way, you know. Can't you put her off?"

Sidney shook her head.

"Auntie Jack has been too good to me," she said dolefully.

Janet puckered up her mouth. Then, yielding to some hidden thought, she burst out laughing.

"Misfortunes never do happen in on one singly," she said whimsically. "I think I may as well take the present hour of mourning to break my own bad news."

“Janet! What now?” Sidney spun about and faced Janet in obvious dismay.

“Don’t pluck out all your hair, Sidney; it is Day’s place to do that. Lord Axmuthy is coming back here, the twenty-first.”

“Oh, Me-hitabel! I foresee my end,” Day groaned. “Can’t Ronald break his leg, or something, Janet? I will not be seen by returning alums, walking abroad with that chimpanzee.”

“Alums!” Sidney interpolated swiftly. “They don’t count, Day; they only think they do. Moreover, fie upon you for maligning an old-time friend!”

“Fie all you like! Much you know about it,” Day retorted, completely jarred from her usual careless composure by the woe which threatened her. “You just go gadding off with Ronald, and leave me with that anthropoidal, addle-pated ape of an Englishman. There! I’m ashamed of myself, and my mother wouldn’t give me any jam for supper; but I don’t care if she wouldn’t. Janet, what is your brother thinking of, to bring the creature back?”

Nobody was ever known to take Day’s tempers seriously. Janet only laughed.

“Poor Ronald! He isn’t to blame,” she said. “All spring, he has been keeping Lord Axmuthy away from here. Really, his letters have been pitiful. Lord Axmuthy has been determined to come back again; and Ronald has been like a nurse, dangling toys in front of a baby that persists in crying for

sweeties. He is absolutely loyal to Lord Axmuthy; but I fancy he has his hands full sometimes."

Sidney, meanwhile, was once more riding along on her own train of thought.

"Me, too, with Judith," she observed suddenly. "Judith is pretty; but — well, ask Wade."

"Wade has ceased to be a judge of things feminine," Day commented irreverently.

"Maybe he has; but he judged Judith, some time ago. One gets acquainted with a half-sister at an early date."

"I should think it might depend somewhat on the age of the half-sister," Day suggested, still irreverently.

"It wouldn't; not with Judith. She was never young," Janet remarked thoughtfully. "She was born grown-up and finical and critical. I don't believe she ever had her garter break down in all her little girlhood; and that really does stand for a good deal, as much as losing off one's hair-ribbon. I liked her at first, that summer in Grande Rivière. Ronald liked her, too, she was so soft and dainty; but we did get most awfully tired of her. I used to wish she'd fall down and bump her nose till it was black and blue. How she always did stare at your shoes, Sidney, when you came home muddy!"

Sidney laughed.

"I generally did come home muddy," she returned. "Moreover, if my memory serves me right, it was you who fell head first into the river. However, we shall be spick and span enough here, even for Judith."

Janet planted her elbows on her knees, as she sat, tailor fashion, among the cushions of the window seat, and the attitude changed her to the likeness of a wise little frog, lifting himself to add his voice to the discussion.

“I may have grown so good that even Judith won't tempt me,” she observed at length. “However, unless she has radically changed, she will lead me to take a plunge into Paradise, shoes and all, and then go to chapel without changing, before she has been in town for forty-eight hours. When will she come, Sidney?”

“So you can be getting ready for the plunge? She wants to come, the twentieth.”

Day sprang to her feet excitedly and cut the college girl's equivalent of a pigeon wing.

“Girls! Sidney! Janet! The very thing! I always had a business sense; I inherit it from Daddy. It was I, myself, who set Janet to work to turn her embroidery into college tuition. That was brilliant; but it was nothing to the cleverness which has inspired me now.”

“Tell it, Day. You'll feel better then,” Sidney advised her compassionately

“Better! I'm best now. Listen! Once I heard a farmer, haggling over a bargain, say he made one hand wash the other. We'll do it now.”

“How?”

“By pooling — isn't that the market word? — our obnoxious guests.”

Janet was the first to catch Day's idea, but only in part.

"Beautiful, Day! And let them fight it out together?"

"Fight? No, child! Let them amuse each other. They were foreordained for chums. Judith, from all accounts, would forgive all things for the sake of that *aw* of an accent; and, to my knowledge, Lord Axmuthy would prefer beauty to brains."

"Day!" Sidney remonstrated. "Have you cracked your mirror, dear?"

Day laughed, quite unabashed.

"I? Dear me, no! I was only his guide, philosopher and friend. I taught him snowshoeing and the American way to waltz. But Judith —"

"Yes, Judith —" Sidney echoed. "But wait till Judith comes."

Judith did come, just ten days later, come bag and baggage for a ten-day visit. Sidney, with Lord Axmuthy's immediate advent in view, tried her best not to repine. Even her first glance at Judith, standing there beside the car and waiting until the porter handed her her little bag and umbrella, just that swift first glance assured Sidney that her Boston cousin differed from the Leslie house girls by all the nameless shades which separate the *débutante* from her college-bred sister. Judith was smoother, gentler, of well-poised bearing, well-guarded speech; yet Sidney had a shrewd suspicion that, in resourcefulness and self-control, the college girl would more than

prove her equal. Then she smiled to herself, as she saw the haughty little nod with which Judith took the umbrella in her outstretched hand. The college girls, as a rule, did not take the trouble to buy parlour-car seats for the short run up from Springfield. They rode in the day coaches, and their suitcases they lugged, themselves, setting them down now and then to change hands, or to settle a refractory lock of hair. Judith, veiled and dainty, looked as if she had never known a refractory lock of hair in all her life. Sidney drew a long breath, twisted her lips into a smile of welcome and went forward with outstretched hand. At least, it was the same old Judith; she knew about what to expect.

Lord Axmuthy, however, when he came, next day, surpassed all limits of her expectation. The kindly haze of three months' forgetfulness had wrapped itself about his peculiarities, had caused Sidney, and even Day, to grow oblivious to his wrinkled and aged face, his dangling jaw, his spiky hair, even to his accent which defied all orthographic rendering in its strange variants of the letter A. Sidney discovered him straying aimlessly about the campus, under the impression that he would find Day there, likewise straying; she received with manifest disfavour his suggestion that he accompany her upon her errand. The errand was to Judith; and Sidney tried to picture Lord Axmuthy, viewed in Judith's eyes, tried and signally failed in the trial. For four and twenty hours, Judith had maintained towards all things an attitude

of tolerant criticism: towards the girls' manners, the faculty clothes, the grounds, the buildings, even towards the sleepy old town itself. And neither girls nor faculty, college nor aristocratic, staid old town were accustomed to criticism from snippy young *débutantes* with their noses in the air. They, of necessity, were dumb; but Sidney had felt it needful to wax voluble in their defence. But, if Judith patronized the wellnigh perfect in such royal fashion, what would she do to poor Lord Axmuthy? Sidney had gooseflesh all up and down her spine, as she preceded Lord Axmuthy up the steps to the veranda where Judith sat awaiting the arrival of her cousin.

Judith took her departure on Monday morning, ten days later. The afternoon before, Mrs. Leslie had stretched her supper invitations to include both Judith and Lord Axmuthy, had included them with some forebodings as to their combined effect upon the other guests. Her misgivings had been wasted, however. According to his custom of the past eight days, Lord Axmuthy had pinned himself to Judith's apron string, and together they had betaken themselves to the extreme corner of the back veranda where they consumed tea and sandwiches in a silence which, to judge from their rapt expressions, was far more eloquent than many words. Sidney and Ronald discovered them there, quite by accident, when they went to rescue a neighbour's dog from collision with the family cat; but neither Judith nor Lord Axmuthy appeared to become aware of the invading presence.

Two fine white handkerchiefs, bearing a crested G, served to keep their persons from all contact with the veranda floor; two cups were on their knees, Judith's untasted, Axmuthy's stirred by a contemplative hand; but the plate of sandwiches on the floor between them showed that their appetites had not yet yielded to the sentimental surroundings of the place and hour. Nevertheless, Sidney made a sign to Ronald, and together they withdrew themselves on tiptoe.

An hour later, Sidney watched them going down the street. When they had vanished around the little bend, —

“Day,” she said fervently; “you are a genius.”

Day laughed.

“Did you ever have a guest that was so little trouble?” she inquired. “I'm going to write a treatise: *Entertaining Made Easy*.”

Sidney tapped thoughtfully upon the sill of the open window.

“What do you suppose will be Judith's impression of Smith?” she queried.

Late that same evening, Lord Axmuthy knocked at his secretary's door.

“You have come in, then?” Ronald said, as he offered his guest a chair.

“Oh, yes, long ago.” Lord Axmuthy, his hat still on the back of his head and his hair in the wild disorder which betokened thought, stood gazing at his friend with drooping jaw.

“ What have you been about? ” Ronald asked idly, as he sorted out the pages of a long letter which lay on the table before him.

“ I’ve been — busy.”

“ Anything I could do? ”

“ Rather not! ” The reply came with emphatic haste. “ I’ve — I’ve been sitting in the moonlight, you know, and thinking,” Lord Axmuthy announced weightily.

Repressing his mirth as well as he could, Ronald shook his head.

“ That sounds bad, old man,” he said.

“ Oh, no. Quite the contrary, it was very nice. I quite enjoyed it,” Lord Axmuthy assured him gravely.

There came a pause, a long one. In fact, it was so long that Ronald stole a glance and then another at Lord Axmuthy’s impassive face, thinking he might have inadvertently fallen asleep. Suddenly and with unexpected briskness, Lord Axmuthy spoke.

“ I think I will go to Boston, Wednesday night,” he said. “ I’ve got an errand there, you know, and it may keep me there a bit. You’d best stop on here with your mother; she may need you, and I shall come back for the play. I think I’d best go Wednesday, after tea and before you get about your dinner. Else, you’d hate to see me off.” He rose and started for the door; but, on the threshold, he turned back again. “ She’s really very pretty, you know,” he announced.

Then he departed, presumably to rosy dreams.

CHAPTER TWENTY - ONE

LORD AXMUTHY was wellnigh beside himself with enthusiasm.

“ By George, they’re trundling hoops, you know! ” he burst forth shrilly, as the advance guard of the line bore down upon him.

Over the campus, the June day was dying from sunset into afterglow, from afterglow to dusk, and then towards starlight. The great brick houses loomed large in the softening twilight; overhead, the aged elms drooped heavily, laden with their fullest leafage, now saturate with dew. From the corner of the Tyler House, past the Students’ Building, past the little hollow which lies beyond, the back campus was thronged with girls bareheaded and in their pale summer frocks, with faculty, and with the sprinkling of townspeople who can be counted upon to put in an appearance at any and every open function of the college.

Gathered into little knots, they talked and laughed together, nodding greetings to returning alumnae of sufficiently recent date for purposes of recognition, racing across the intervening stretch of grass to fall into the arms of last year’s girls, feigning an absorbing

interest in their immediate surroundings, yet ever and anon casting furtive glances over their shoulders to the point where the long, straight walk leading up from the Students' Building lost itself among the other walks leading from other buildings farther up the campus.

At the crest of the little ridge midway between the Students' Building and the hollow to the north of it, just at a point whence could be obtained the best view both of the hollow and of the steps of the building, stood a group of six: Day and Ronald, Sidney and Lord Axmuthy, Janet and Jack Blanchard who had come up, that afternoon, to remain till Day's exit, two days later.

"All here but Rob," Sidney had said contentedly, that night, as they started for the campus.

"And he gets here at noon, to-morrow," Day added, as she fell into line, with Ronald at her side. "Shame that horrid examination kept him from getting here, to-day! To-morrow, at this time, we'll all be here together."

"Yes, you know; only —" Lord Axmuthy offered fragmentary remonstrance.

"Only what?" Sidney asked, while she endeavoured to keep his lagging steps up to the pace set by those in the rear.

In vain, however, for, —

"By Jove! Ou-uw!" Lord Axmuthy remonstrated once more, and, this time, his remonstrance concerned itself with things physical. "I say, Mr. — Mr.

Blanchard, will you be good enough to keep off my heels, you know? ”

Jack expressed a proper degree of contrition and smothered his own amusement as best he might. He had been continually smothering it since, an hour before, he had discovered that Lord Axmuthy's sense of decorum had been affronted by the need of greeting as acquaintance the man whom heretofore he had considered a candidate for fees. Once upon a time, when he had been conductor of a Pullman sleeper, Jack Blanchard had had the mirthful honour of presiding over Lord Axmuthy's journeyings. There had even been a difference of opinion, a quiet maintenance of Jack's authority. To five of the group, the matter, buried in the past, was of no especial account; and among the five was Jack. He was far too sensible to be ashamed of any honourable task honourably fulfilled. Lord Axmuthy, however, was the sixth, and to him the matter was of vast account. To his mind, Jack was still the uniformed conductor, off for a day's outing, to be sure, and hence divested of his uniform, but still the uniformed conductor who was in league with the porter to extract his meed of quarters. No one had thought it needful to explain Jack's identity to Lord Axmuthy; but Lord Axmuthy's memory for a face was uncomfortably alert. His recognition of Jack had been as instantaneous as was the stiffening of his whole manner. Moreover, he was too absorbed in maintaining the distance demanded by his British dignity to heed the fact that

Day and Sidney were overwhelmed with mirth at his attempts to snub this inflated hireling whom they were pleased to accept as their own equal.

Now he saw fit, by reason of his dignity, to disdain Jack's proffered apology.

"Fellow always was arbitrary, you know," he muttered. Then, for Sidney's ear, he added, "How jolly American you are, Miss Stayre!"

"Why not?" she asked, so flatly that Lord Axmuthy edged a bit nearer the outer edge of the pavement.

"No reason," he responded hurriedly. "It's very nice, of course."

"Of course." Sidney, even in her emphatic assent, began to wonder what bee was buzzing in his Lordship's bonnet.

"Yes, by George; that's what I say! We don't do it, over in England. That's what makes it so interesting, you know," Lord Axmuthy explained volubly.

"What does?" Sidney felt her brain reeling, with its effort to comprehend the utterances of her companion.

"This." Lord Axmuthy pointed his right forefinger back over his left shoulder. "The taking a porter chap to be your friend, you know."

There was a pause. Then, —

"Lord Axmuthy —" Sidney began.

But Day interposed. She had heard what went before; on one or two occasions she had also heard

that metallic ring in Sidney's voice, and she had no wish that, on such a festal night as this, even Lord Axmuthy should be flayed.

"Jack, you are a blessed old thing," she said; "and I never was gladder to see anybody in all my life; but your train has made us very late. What if you and Lord Axmuthy and I rush on ahead to get good places, and let the others stop at the Music Building for Janet's score?" And, turning in beside the gray stone church, she led the way by all the short cuts possible, accompanied upon either hand by an escort, the one filled with mingled disgust and wrath and mirth, coupled with loyal gratitude to the two girls who stood his friends, the other vaguely aware that he had recently been smitten between an earthquake and a tornado for whose sudden emerging into existence he was totally at a loss to account.

By the time the Leslies and Sidney had rejoined them, however, Lord Axmuthy had so far recovered from his momentary pettishness that he greeted Sidney with a forgiving nod, and, an instant later, once more slid into his old place at her side.

"I say, you know," he observed confidentially at length, when this manœuvre had been accomplished to his satisfaction; "I really wish you wouldn't row me now."

For the life of her, Sidney could not keep a ring of haughtiness out of her tone, as she made answer, —



“DOWN THE PATH THEY CAME CHARGING ALONG.”

[Page 275.]

“ Lord Axmuthy, I shall always row the people who are rude to my best friends.”

“ But not now? ” he urged.

“ Why not now, as much as ever? ”

“ Because — why, by George, because we’re going to be cousins, don’t you know. A chap never rows his cousins.”

“ Cousins! ” Sidney echoed blankly.

Lord Axmuthy faced her, his countenance slit wellnigh from ear to ear by his proud and expansive smile.

“ Yes, cousins,” he iterated firmly. “ She’s your cousin, you know, and so I’ll get to be your cousin, too, in a year or so. We’re very young, and your aunt wants to find out about me, and that; but, in time, after a year or so, it’s going to be quite ripping.” He pulled himself up short, as if fearful lest his enthusiasm had carried him too far, and added guardedly, “ She quite fancied me, you know; she did it at the very first.”

A little cheer from the waiting throng about her saved Sidney from the necessity of speaking. Still biting her lower lip to steady it, she turned and looked up across the campus, now lying dusky in the fallen twilight.

Down the path they came charging along, out from among the buildings at the upper end of the campus, straight towards the Students’ Building steps, a long, gay irregular row of fluttering gowns and flying feet and loosening brown hair: the procession of the

senior class, holding their final revel of the senior vacation week which precedes the actual business of being graduated. On they came, a merry mob of girls, comely, eager; and every girl drove before her in the mad race a hoop, and the race was set to end at the wide flight of steps before them.

Lord Axmuthy, beholding, gave vent to a shrill crow of rapture; but, by this time, Lord Axmuthy had become a sight far too familiar to be able to draw more than a passing glance upon any but his worst vagaries. A few visiting parents raised their brows, a few returning alumnae asked a question; then the attention flew back again to the gay line of girls, fast piling themselves, hoops and all, upon the wide, low flight of steps of the building which was their very own.

There came a flutter of settling skirts, a clashing of hoops, passed up from hand to hand to go clattering down on the paved floor above. Then the girls began to sing, and the singing was not wholly mirthful, in spite of the gay words. They sang to their class, to all the classes, to the faculty as a whole and with respect, to the faculty individually and with much friendly chaff. They sang to every known species of goddess that a college can afford: intellectual, social, musical, and simply all-round good fellow. In fact, it was to this last that they sang the loudest. And then, as ever, they sang *Fair Smith*; and the chorus, albeit sweeter, was far less strong, as voice after voice fell silent.

Then, with a change of mood swift as any whirlwind, they sprang to their feet and, steps and sentiment left behind them, went racing away again, this time to the little hollow where they clasped their hands to form a huge ring, ringed about with other rings made of the three descending classes. And Sidney and Day and Janet, in the outside ring, forgot their guests left standing on the top of the slope, while they lifted themselves on tiptoe to see what might be happening inside the central circle.

Later on, Jack and Janet walked away together.

“It is too dark to see any more of the stunts,” Janet had said regretfully. “Do you care to stay longer, Mr. Blanchard?”

Jack faced about to meet her question.

“If I waited for my interest to die, I should never tear myself away,” he said, laughing at his own enthusiasm, even while he spoke. “This place fascinates me completely. As I can’t well be student, I think I shall try for a professorship.”

As he spoke, he turned and, following Janet’s lead, he worked his way out of the heart of the crowd, circled around the little hollow, and came down again into the low ground about the plant house where the fragrant shrubberies lay heavy with the dew.

“It’s a good little place,” he added then, as he gave a backward glance at the darkening hollow, now a mere confused blur of light gowns and moving figures. “No wonder Day adores it. Canada can’t show anything to equal this.”

“ McGill? Toronto? ” Janet questioned loyally. Jack shook his head.

“ Not to be mentioned in the same breath, ” he assured her, laughing. “ I’ve seen them both. They are as much like Smith as a black-and-tan terrier is like a thoroughbred collie with his frills on. One may know just as much as the other, though I doubt it; but, anyway, he hasn’t half the charm in his manner of showing it off. ”

Janet faced him gravely.

“ Mr. Blanchard, are you getting Americanized? ”

In spite of himself, he laughed at the solemn rebuke.

“ Not one bit, Miss Leslie. I’m as much a Canadian as ever, as proud of being one. That doesn’t blind me, though, to the fact that some things are better in the States. Why shouldn’t they be? And really, ” even in the starlight, she could see that his brown eyes were quizzical as they looked down into her own; “ really, you must have felt the same way, yourself; else, you never would have come down here in the first place. ”

When Janet spoke again, her mind had leaped all manner of connecting links of conversation.

“ Did you know I’m going to be in the orchestra for dramatics? ” she asked.

“ No. Really? ”

“ Yes. You can’t think how I have loved the rehearsals. The music is charming. One of the seniors did it; but it is really good, like professional things. We’ve been rehearsing, all this week.

This afternoon, we went through the last dress rehearsal."

"How was it, the play, I mean?"

Janet shut her hand on the folds of her skirt.

"Wait till you see it," she advised him, and there was a slight catch in her voice.

"All girls?"

She lifted her chin in the old way, and spoke with spirit.

"Wait," she bade him for the second time. "You'll change your accent, when you see it. Amateur acting has always bored me. This time, though, I went to crow, and I remained to —"

"Play the banjo?" he asked in swift flippancy.

"Never! Shakespeare didn't run to anything so skittish as a banjo. I merely bang on the drums now and then. It is interesting, and not too bad training, even if it's not the highest form of art. Anyway, I was immensely proud of myself, when they came to ask me."

"No wonder," Jack said heartily, for he was finding Janet very winning, in this new, rare mood of confidence.

"You see, it was a great feather in my cap," she assured him, with grave frankness. "I haven't been in things much, till just lately. I enjoy it, too. It sounds a queer thing to say; but I truly think I have worked a good deal better, since I've been a bit more frivolous. It's contrary to reason; but it seems to be the fact. Did you know I've made the banjo club?"

Turning a little, Jack held out his hand.

“Congratulations, Miss Leslie! I am proud of my countrywoman.”

“Wait,” she bade him yet once again; “till you see what work I do in it, next year. And, besides, it wasn’t all my doing. Rob was the one to give me my start.”

“Rob? Yes. But not the one to keep you going,” he reminded her.

“No,” she assented slowly. “That was Day.”

Across the heavy, fragrant night air around them came a gay burst of laughter, a quick patter of applause. Then, when the silence dropped once more, Jack spoke, spoke with a grave, gentle reverence in his voice, which Janet had not heard till then.

“It generally is Day who does those things,” he said. “I’ve found that out, myself.”

CHAPTER TWENTY - TWO

AT first glance, the theatre seemed filled with white: soft, fluffy white things, lace and silk and muslin, ostrich and marabout, covering the floor, the balconies, the boxes. Even the aisles were dominated by white-gowned, white-wanded ushers. Then, little by little as the eye became accustomed to the scene, it picked out here and there a stray black coat, worn by some prematurely arrived guest: brother, father, or even some more vague relation. Four such black coats sat together in the front of the first balcony, flanked on either hand by Day and Sidney. Now and then, they smiled down upon Irene, ushering in the middle aisle below; now and then, they smiled across at Janet, pounding away for dear life in the right-hand corner of the orchestra. For the most part, however, their eyes were turned upon the stage, richly set for Shakespeare and peopled with a cast which held the great audience intent, only to be dominated in their turn by the single melancholy figure of their foremost actor.

It was undergraduate night at senior dramatics.

Rob had arrived, that very noon, happy and hilarious as an incipient sophomore could be; yet

even his hilarity was for the moment stilled before that single black-clothed figure who was rousing the freshmen into frenzy and sending seasoned play-goers away to question whether, after all, the last Shakespearean word had yet been said. And then, —

“ *The rest is silence.*”

The house was emptied; the lights were out; the play was done. But not, perhaps, in all its consequences. Those, perchance, might fill another volume. Janet's whole attention, that night, had not been fixed upon her drums, nor yet upon the front of the first balcony where Ronald, huge and handsome in his evening clothes, sat between Lord Axmuthy and Sidney Stayre. Even to Janet's loyal mind, Ronald, that night, was but of secondary interest. Jack Blanchard, meanwhile, found himself forgetting the stage, forgetting even Day beside him, as he sat watching Janet in her corner. Older by several years than the rest of the group, by chance and temperament and training made accustomed to study humanity in its every mood and phase, he was finding his great interest now in the face of the girl before him, who, totally oblivious of her prominent position in the house, was allowing her every thought to show itself in her expressive, eager face, in her keen brown eyes, fixed so intently on the actors. Jack watched, and wondered, and even worried a little. Seen with his graver and maturer eyes, Janet was only a child; and no child, he told himself, should feel things so intensely.

“ Yes,” she had said to him, that very afternoon. “ I am glad I came; I think I love the place better than some of the other girls who say a great deal more about it.”

And Jack, watching her intently, gave his mental assent to her words.

Sidney and Day had preëmpted the side veranda of the Leslie house, that afternoon, and were serving tea for the three Leslies, Irene, Jack, Rob and his British Lordship. The other girls in the house, for the most part, were busy with their packing, in obedience to the tradition that freshmen are in the way at commencement time. Even Day was to depart on the morrow, taking Jack and Rob off with her. Janet remained, by reason of her mother and her own place in the dramatics orchestra, while Sidney, bidden by Mrs. Leslie, also waited until Irene, her usher's duty finished, could go home with her to make a long-promised visit for which the need had all at once become insistent.

The afternoon was hot and stuffy. It was pleasant to lounge there in the shady veranda, listening to Rob's nonsense, watching Day's deft hands as they made the tea; doubly pleasant, since their own comfort was enhanced by the contrasting sounds which came down from the open windows above: bumpings, and patterings of hurrying feet, and demands for news regarding the whereabouts of this missing article and that.

Above his third cup of tea, Lord Axmuthy who, all

the afternoon, had been unduly pensive, gave tongue to the emotions welling up within him.

"I say, you know, it's lonely here," he remarked sadly, the while he disdainfully prodded with his spoon the bit of lemon Day had dropped into his cup.

"Thank you." Rob's accent was cheerily ascendant.

Forgetting his lemon, Lord Axmuthy turned himself stiffly about, slowly and as if all of one piece, and gazed upon Rob with a fixed stare which might have looked a basilisk out of countenance.

"What for, old man?" he queried.

"For being lonely in our midst," Rob told him.

"Oh, don't mention it. I should be quite as lonely, you know, if you were not here," Lord Axmuthy reassured him calmly.

"Very likely. Is it a trick you have?"

"Yes." Lord Axmuthy gave a strident sort of sigh. "I'm so quite often, when I'm not in Boston."

Then it was that, in spite of his years and consequent decorum, Jack strangled till he spilled his tea. With gently sagging jaw, Lord Axmuthy watched the operation. Then he turned to Sidney, whom, since his avowal of the night before, he had chosen as his chiefest confidante.

"Fellow seems rather rude, you know," he made comment, as casually as if Jack had been centuries and miles distant from their group. "I suppose he's

not used to this sort of thing, and gets to feeling fussed."

For an instant, Rob threatened to share Jack's condign fate. Then manfully he rallied and threw himself into the conversational breach.

"Has it ever occurred to this syndicate of friendship," he remarked, with every appearance of exceeding thoughtfulness; "that, whereas we have been chums for two or three years, this is the first time we ever have met?"

"Rob! What nonsense!" Day protested, more for the sake of keeping the talk going, than for anything else.

"Not nonsense at all," Rob persisted. "This present hour is really the very first one we all have spent together."

Lord Axmuthy turned himself about in his chair and eyed him with manifest and absorbing interest. Then, —

"Oh, that," he commented laconically at last.

And Rob gave up completely, and joggled his tea all over Mrs. Leslie's white linen skirt.

Next noon, the Argyles and Jack Blanchard went away. The others, even including Mrs. Leslie, went down to see them off. In the bedlam of banging trunks and frenzied baggage masters and chattering, remonstrating girls, however, conversation was practically out of the question, save in the most fragmentary scraps. Rob breathed a sigh of absolute relief, as the train moved out of the station amid a

clamour of good-byes. He lingered on the platform, smiling and hat in hand, until the train rounded the little curve. Then, smiling still more broadly, he went back to the seat where he had left Day, barricaded past all possibility of intrusion on the part of the girls who filled the train, and guarded by Jack who had received his private instructions to drive the girls away at any cost.

"Be thanked!" he said devoutly, as he dropped down at Day's side and straightened out his legs. "At last, we've got you to ourselves, Aurora."

"Hush!" she bade him hastily.

"Oh, it's out," he reassured her placidly. "I saw it in the catalogue you sent me."

"I don't mean the name," Day protested, for her inherited *Aurora* was still her tender point. "I only don't want the girls to hear you."

"Why not?" Rob took off his hat and ruffled up his yellow hair, in token of the completeness of his comfort.

"They might not understand. They might think you meant them, you know."

"So I did," Rob answered impenitently. "I meant just them. In fact, I am surfeited with girls at present."

She rolled her eyes up at him in rebuke.

"I'm a girl," she reminded him.

"No," Rob objected suddenly. "You aren't a girl; you're just my sister."

With an odd little gesture of satisfaction, she nestled back into her seat.

“ How nice of you! ” she said. “ I love the girls; they have been good to me, and I have had a happy year. And yet — ”

“ And yet you’re glad as thunder to get rid of them for a little while, and go back home to play with your own brother,” Rob asserted masterfully.

Day edged a little closer to his side and shut her hand upon his sleeve. Then she lifted her eyes to Jack.

“ Two brothers,” she corrected gently. “ Yes, Rob, I am.”

The train out of sight, Lord Axmuthy and the Leslies drove away together, leaving Sidney and Irene to stroll homeward at their own pace.

“ I really feel depressed,” Sidney said thoughtfully, as they left the station behind them and came around the corner into the main street. “ Day’s going is like the falling of the first leaf; it makes me realize that the end is near.”

“ Are you sorry? ” Irene asked her.

“ Very,” Sidney responded promptly. “ I love home and the home things, love them just as much as I did, a year ago. But, up here at Smith, I’ve had an absolutely happy year. I couldn’t well help it, with Day in the same room.”

“ You’ll have her, next year,” Irene reminded her.

“ Yes. And yet, other things won’t be the same. We’ll be sophomores then, and bound to take ourselves more seriously, just to show the freshmen how. Freshmen are such a bore.”

Irene's laugh sent Sidney's pensive mood flying to the winds.

"You're nothing but a freshman, yourself," she said.

"Yes; but so much depends on the point of view," Sidney answered gayly. "I am looking on now from the perspective of next week."

"How do you like it?" Irene queried.

"Don't," Sidney replied, with flat brevity. "We neither of us will have half so good a time, next year. Sophomores are bumptious, and seniors are always on the verge of tears, at least, in summer term. You won't look at all pretty, when your nose gets pink, Irene."

Then they walked on in silence, until the bend was behind them. Before them among its circling elms, the college tower rose sharply, and from its top the bell came clanging down the hour, an hour just like so many other hours, yet, to Sidney's mind, weighted with new meanings, weighted, too, with its own hint of sadness. It was as if the sound were the knell of her own student irresponsibility.

"It has been a good year," she said again. "I've loved it; I think I have had the very best of every hour. But, Irene, there are only three more years left."

"And then?"

Sidney's tone rang tragic.

"And then the jumping-off place of my life."

The next moment, she felt Irene's fingers meet her own, in one of their rare caresses.

“ I know, dear child,” she said and, as she spoke, some secret thought sent the blood rushing to her cheeks; “ but then, it may be only the jumping into something else.”

Five days later, a small figure, capped with vivid scarlet and clothed in white linen already a bit smudgy about the knees, was clinging, monkey-wise, to the closed gates which barred the crowd from the in-coming train at the Grand Central Station. To his small brain, the waiting time had been unending; but at length his patience was rewarded.

“ S. S.,” he shrieked in rapture, while he waved one grimy hand in salutation. “ That’s her suitcase; I see the corner. There she is, Wade! Look! Sidney! Sidney! I’m here! See me! And I’ve maked a poem for Irene to sing to you, next year, so you’ll both berember me. Listen.” His voice lifted itself until the iron girders rang in their lofty places. “ Listen, Sidney and Irene!

“ There was a bear,
Without a hair,
Who climbed a tree
And he did see
A bee.”

Sidney’s hand was already waving a welcome; but Irene had no eyes for Bungay. Her smile was all for the tall man who stood waiting at Bungay’s side.

THE END.

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