

THE "ICICLE" MELTS



HELEN E. WAITE



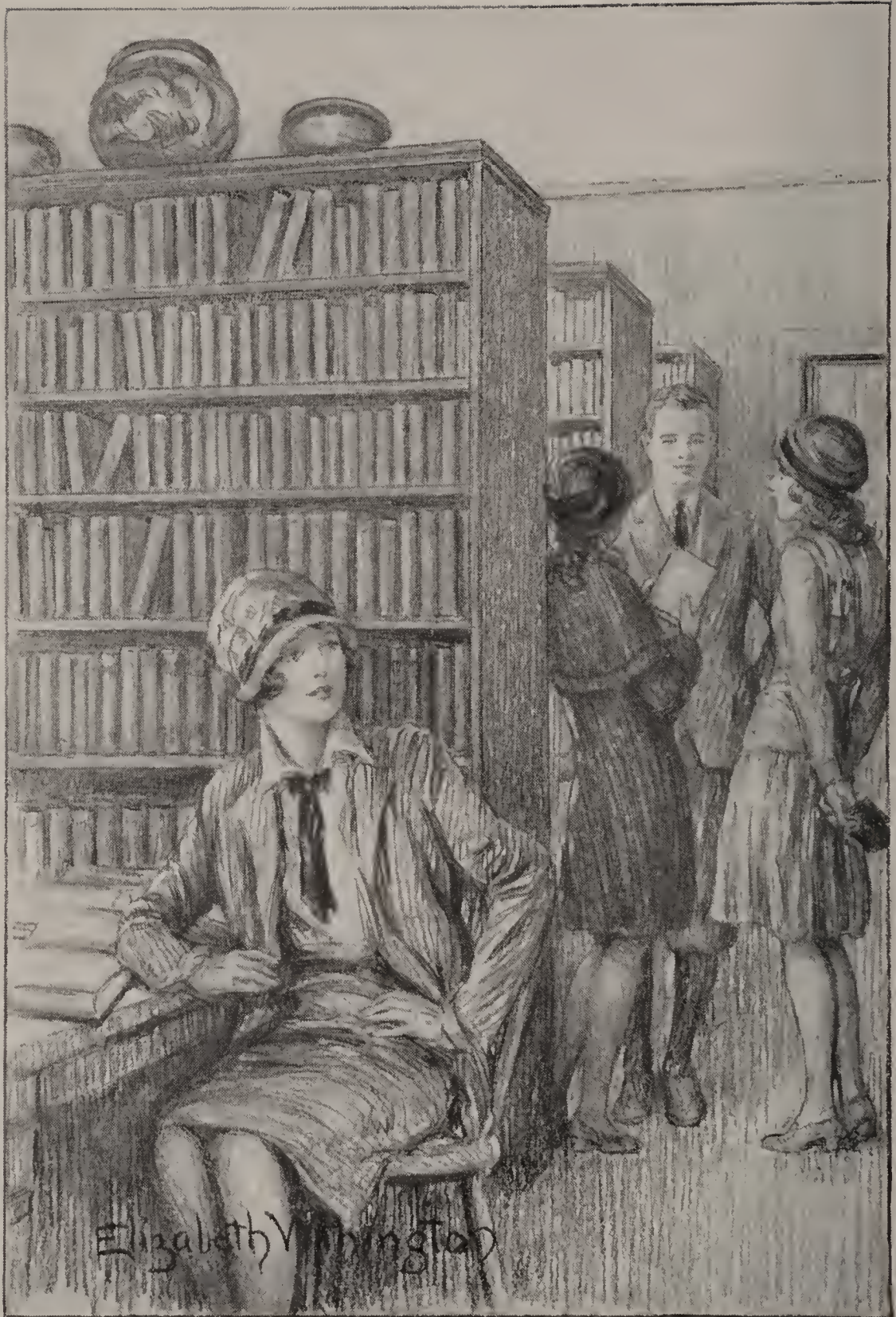
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THE "ICICLE" MELTS



THE LANCYS HAVE COURAGE! — *Page 22.*

THE "ICICLE" MELTS

A STORY FOR GIRLS

By
HELEN ELMIRA WAITE

ILLUSTRATED BY
ELIZABETH WITHINGTON



BOSTON
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THE "ICICLE" MELTS

PRINTED IN U. S. A.

SEP 18 1929

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To My Parents

A Garden is a lovesome thing, God wot!
 Rose plot,
 Fringed pool,
 Ferned grot,
The veriest school of Peace; and yet the fool con-
 tends that God is not—
Not God! in Gardens! when the eve is cool?
Nay, but I have a sign:
'T is very sure God walks in mine.

—THOMAS EDWARD BROWN.

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THE "ICICLE" MELTS

CHAPTER I

PHYLLIS THE EAVESDROPPER

PHYLLIS turned her back on the very miserable-looking girl in her mirror and looked up at the picture hanging beside her bed. "Motherdy," she said, "you certainly have got a little stupid for a daughter! Nobody who wasn't stupid would be afraid to go to a party, would they?"

The picture-girl looked down from her frame while Phyllis struggled with the last aggravatingly elusive snaps. Phyllis had only a dim memory of her mother, but the picture-Phyllis had been her daughter's confidante ever since she was placed over the foot of her bed to comfort the little Phyllis-who-was-afraid-of-the-dark.

"I wish I didn't always act like an idiot at parties!" whispered Phyllis softly.

The picture-Phyllis had very nice eyes. If you looked at them long enough, you felt that they smiled at you. It almost seemed as if her mother knew that even the envelope containing the invitation to Connie Richardson's birthday-dance had made Phyllis' heart drop down and down and down until she wondered if it would ever stop. It wasn't always pleasant to feel as if you were a foreigner in a strange country where nobody knew anything about your ways and you knew nothing about theirs, and that was the feeling Phyllis Lancy had at a party. She lived such a secluded life with her dignified grandfather and her quiet, correct governess in the stately old Lancy house that it did seem as if it was a separate country from the one the boys and girls she met at her dancing-classes and the parties to which she was politely invited because she was Mr. Jeremiah Lancy's granddaughter, lived in. And sometimes Phyllis felt as if they spoke a very different language, for when they began to talk about school and games and camping it left her as bewildered as if they had been talking in Hindustani.

All that Phyllis knew about such things was what she had learned from her eagerly-read books. Mr. Jeremiah Lancy was a busy gentleman to whom it never occurred that his granddaughter might be lonely and wishing for the friendship of somebody a trifle younger than Miss Patterson or himself, and Phyllis didn't tell him. Mr. Lancy wasn't the sort of person you told things to. He had very decided views on certain subjects. Phyllis had a governess because her grandfather disapproved of modern schools. He objected to girls' camps, and he didn't like girls who played tennis.

If Phyllis' mother hadn't been in such a hurry to leave her little daughter and follow Phyllis' father into that land of Far Away, Phyllis probably wouldn't have been the shy, lonely, friend-hungry "Phyllis the Friendless" who wanted to know other girls more than anything else in the world, but who was dressing for Connie Richardon's birthday-dance with very reluctant fingers.

No, Phyllis didn't care particularly about going to Connie's, and she didn't believe Connie

cared particularly about having her come, but since she *was* going—she upraised her chin (the chin the Lancys said " denoted determination," and other people said looked " stubborn,") to a firm little angle.

" I will! " she vowed to the other Phyllis, " I just will! I'll have *one* good time, see if I don't! But oh, Motherdy, I wish you could come and show me how! "

" Come, dear, I am ready. " It was Miss Patterson's voice. Phyllis turned swiftly. Then softly she whirled back to the picture again and blew it a swift kiss.

" Good-bye, Motherdy! "

But despite her resolutions and Mrs. Richardson's and Connie's friendly efforts, she had the old " left out " feeling, and it was the same miserable game of *watching*. Phyllis hoped she wasn't showing how forlorn she felt, but kind-hearted, watchful-eyed Connie Richardson saw it at last and drew her brother Herbert aside.

" Herbert, " she said pleadingly, " do a birthday favor for me? Have you seen Phyllis Lancy to-night? "

“The girl who looks like an icicle?” inquired her brother. “I have.”

Connie stifled a giggle. Tall, slender Phyllis, in her all-white dress, alone in the happy crowd *did* look like something of the sort.

Connie laid a coaxing hand on her brother's arm. “Won't you go over and thaw her out? You can do it!” Connie knew her brother's reputation along the thawing line, but Herbert looked doubtfully in the icicle's direction.

“Do you suppose she wants to be thawed?”

Connie laughed, but she stuck to her point. “Yes! *Any* girl would! Please go, Herbert.”

“All right,” Herbert's air was resigned, “I'll go, but I doubt if your theory holds good in the Icicle's case. Little Miss Lancy isn't ‘*any* girl.’”

Connie watched him cross to Phyllis' corner, and gave a satisfied little nod when she saw him arrive there. Somewhere he had dropped his martyr-like air, and his manner was as charming as a boy's manner could be, when he asked Phyllis Lancy if she objected to his company.

Herbert did his best along the melting line, but Phyllis was always frankly disgusted with herself whenever she remembered the next half-hour. Oh, *why* were her words so silly as to stick in her throat just when she wanted them to come out? Why couldn't she be like other girls!

" Connie says she's awfully glad she was born in poinsettia time. She says she thinks they're the prettiest flower she knows. *I* think it's because she looks like 'em."

Phyllis' eyes followed his to where Connie, with her red head above her green dress, happy and laughing, stood in the merriest group of all. It was evident Connie knew the right things to say at the right minute!

" Yes," said Phyllis a little wistfully, " yes, she's very pretty and—and happy-looking! "

Phyllis was too busy being ashamed of herself to want to talk to the picture that night. Herbert Richardon had been as nice as a boy could be, and she—Phyllis shook her fist angrily at the girl in her mirror—had acted like a stick!

Even the Aunt Margaret-letter the postman

brought next morning didn't stop the uncomfortable twinges her memory gave her. Perhaps it made them a little worse. Aunt Margaret-letters were dear things! They always sounded as if she was so near that all you would have to do would be to put out your hand and touch hers. But this letter told Phyllis all about the holiday parties Joyce was enjoying, and the ice-carnival Parkview was going to hold, and the basket-ball game Hillcrest had *almost* lost. Phyllis usually loved the things Aunt Margaret wrote about Joyce and Hillcrest, but to-day it was different. She put down the letter. She wasn't going to cry. Phyllis was not the crying sort of girl, but that letter made her want to *know* the things other girls did, harder than she ever had before!

She wanted to know Aunt Margaret! She had only seen her twice since she could remember. Phyllis vaguely knew her grandfather had once quarreled with Uncle Rob, and after it was over—well, Mr. Lancy liked to be alone. But Phyllis had once spent a month in Parkview. She didn't remember much about it, ex-

cept that her cousin Jerry had been a most unmerciful tease, and that she liked Uncle Rob, but she had never forgotten Aunt Margaret! Aunt Margaret wasn't the sort of person that you forgot!

And she wanted to know Joyce! Joyce was her cousin, but somehow they didn't write to each other very often. They didn't seem to have anything to write about. But the picture Aunt Margaret had sent in this letter made Phyllis want to know her. She stood so straight in her knickers, her skis in one hand, and you could almost hear her laugh. She looked like a girl who would know—oh, the things a girl ought to!

And she wanted—oh, she *wanted* to know Hillcrest, the place where her mother had gone to school with Aunt Margaret, and *she* wanted to go to school, too, and to learn to laugh and to play basket-ball and tennis, and be a *girl*, and not a " Phyllis the Friendless! "

School was a magic word to Phyllis, a Land of Heart's Desire, but it was also a land in which she wasn't likely to travel very soon, for once when she had shyly mentioned school Mr.

Lancy had shaken his head decidedly, and Mr. Lancy had a very discouraging shake of the head.

“No, Phyllis, I do not approve of modern schools. They may be all very well for some girls, but a Lancy, you know, is a different matter.”

Yes, Phyllis knew the Lancys were a different matter! She had spent hours in her grandfather's study learning about them. A Lancy was expected to have Courage, Courage to do the Right. A Lancy must never forget that he *was* a Lancy. A Lancy must always be ready to uphold the Lancy Honor, and the Lancy Honor was a sacred thing. There was even a poem about it. Phyllis had been very little, and her grandfather's study chairs very big, when she heard it for the first time. And her grandfather himself looked so tall and stately standing before her, it was no wonder she felt awed! And the poem itself had been almost like a bugle-call:

“Lancy hearts are always high;
Lancy men would scorn to fly;
Lancy men prefer to die!

Lancy men are strong and true;
Lancy maids have courage, too;
Lancy minds are fair to view!

Lancy house a motto hast;
Lancys down the years have passed:
Lancy Honor Is Steadfast!"

"Lancy Honor Is Steadfast!—Is Steadfast!" Oh, that was a wonderful Motto, Phyllis had thought, and the Lancys must be a wonderful family to have it! But as she grew older, Phyllis was almost tempted to turn her back on the Lancy Honor and some of the wonder of being a Lancy, if thereby she might exchange them for a few friends and the things other girls did!

"Shall we go to the Library this afternoon?" asked Miss Patterson. "There is a new book on Chinese Art that I want to see."

"Yes," said Phyllis. She liked the big, busy, quiet young people's room at the Library, with its cosy alcoves, and she wasn't overwhelmingly shy and painfully silent with the story girls who lived on the Library shelves!

There were several interesting-looking books on the "new book shelf." Phyllis selected two or three and carried them over to her own pet alcove. She decided on one of them at once, because the heroine's name was Margaret, and flipping through the pages she came upon "Joyce!"

Phyllis looked wistfully at the poinsettia on the high window-ledge. Oh, if she could only know the real Margaret and Joyce! If she could only go to Hillcrest!

There were voices just around the corner, low voices, of course, but Phyllis had good ears.

"Ready, Herbert? I have to get this Phyllis-book stamped, and then I'll be with you."

"A Phyllis-book! Don't ask me to have anything to do with it!"

Connie laughed softly.

"I saw you talking and dancing with Phyllis Lancy last night," Phyllis recognized the third voice as Mary Hildreth's, a Southern cousin of the Richardons. "What is she like near by?"

Phyllis caught her breath. She was sure that if she were in Herbert Richardon's place she wouldn't have anything good to say about Phyllis Lancy! He didn't. It sounded very much as if he groaned. Phyllis didn't blame him.

"When Connie asked me to go over and entertain her, I said she was an icicle. I wronged her. I wronged her deeply. She isn't an icicle at all—she's a nice, cool little iceberg!"

"You can't blame *her*, though!" Connie protested. "It isn't her fault she lives all alone with just her grandfather and a governess. I don't believe she ever sees anybody her own age except at parties and dancing-class. I don't wonder that she's an icicle! She must be frightfully lonely! I'm dreadfully sorry for her!"

"Well," observed Phyllis' late knight errant, "I'm sorry for anybody who has to entertain her!"

It was lucky that Phyllis the eavesdropper was a Lancy, and that the Lancys have courage! She needed it as the three moved away

and left her alone! She didn't blame them for saying those things! She *was* an icicle—no, an iceberg!

But even being a Lancy has its compensations. The Lancy courage carried Phyllis over to the Librarian's desk to have her book charged, and even helped her to return Miss Moore's smile before she slipped out the door and down to the car to meet Miss Patterson.

And it was the Lancy courage that helped her to keep her head up until she was in her own room behind a securely-locked door. Aunt Margaret's letter lay in the window-seat. Phyllis had always liked that window-seat. If she looked down at the right time, she could see the girls going to and from the large school on the corner, their arms about each other, exchanging comments on the doings of the day. And Aunt Margaret-letters were so delightful! This one had made her feel a terrible outsider, but she held it against her cheek. If Aunt Margaret had been there, she would have understood! But Aunt Margaret was in Parkview.

Phyllis picked up the book she had chosen

at the Library, but it proved to have little comfort for a girl who was an iceberg, since its heroine gathered unto herself by magic means, or so it seemed to Phyllis, a host of adoring, admiring friends, won a swimming championship, organized a tennis club, and took the leading part in a play at the last minute to save it from failure!

As for Phyllis—she watched the girls on the avenue, and learned what was expected of a Lancy, and went to Madame Felori's studio to sing, and when she went to parties she froze right up. Phyllis turned desperately towards the picture.

“ Motherdy, I don't want to be an iceberg! I don't want to be, Motherdy! ”

The other Phyllis smiled down in the gathering dusk.

CHAPTER II

PHYLLIS CHOOSES A STRANGE BIRTHDAY PRESENT

IT was late before Phyllis forgot she was an "iceberg." Consequently, although early rising was another of the things expected of a Lancy—by Mr. Jeremiah Lancy, at least,—the winter sun was up long before Phyllis was wakened by a light sound at her door.

"Phyllis? Phyllis dear?"

Phyllis started up. "Y-yes, Miss Patty?"

"It is almost eight, Phyllis. Your grandfather wished me to tell you. He would like to see you before he goes to his office."

Phyllis slipped out of bed. Eight o'clock! And grandfather's opinion of people who were not ready for their day's work at six was a very poor one, she knew. "To lie abed, after the sun has shown men it is time for work, is a sign of an indolent nature," he had told her once.

" Yes, Miss Patterson. Please tell Grandfather I will be down very soon."

She glanced at the portrait-Phyllis a little fearfully. Suppose she had missed seeing the sun on it? That was the time, in the early morning, when Phyllis confided things to the picture she never told any one else. But she hadn't. The sun was just beginning to touch the other Phyllis' chin, making the smile more alive than ever.

" Motherdy," said Phyllis suddenly, " do you know you've got an ' iceberg ' for a daughter? "

The picture-Phyllis smiled serenely at her " iceberg daughter," and suddenly it seemed to Phyllis that she did know! It was foolish, of course, but Phyllis had the unreasonable feeling that somehow her picture-mother would understand, and she poured out the whole awful story from beginning to end. And, as she talked, the sun climbed higher and higher until it reached the girl's eyes. She had very lovely eyes. They looked as if she understood just how you felt and what you wanted. Phyllis always felt comforted after she had

seen that flash of sunlight in them. She even sang a bar or two of the "Hunting Song" as she went down the stairs, despite the lateness of the hour.

Mr. Lancy was drawing on his gloves. He lifted his eyebrows. Mr. Lancy had very alarming eyebrows, and still more alarming eyes. They seemed to be looking *through* you sometimes.

"So you chose to be a trifle late, this morning?"

Phyllis crimsoned. "I am sorry, Grandfather!"

"But Miss Patterson said you seemed a little tired last night. I wanted to tell you I expect to bring Mr. James Bradford with me when I return this evening. He will take dinner with us."

"Yes, Grandfather."

That was another thing expected of Phyllis: she had to be hostess, honorary hostess at least, to her grandfather's guests. So, for the past year, when one or two of Mr. Lancy's friends had dined at the Lancy house, Phyllis had been their hostess. She had been terribly

bored sometimes, but Mr. Lancy had said she "carried herself like a true Lancy." Phyllis wondered if being a "true Lancy" meant being dignifiedly-aloof and un-get-at-able. If it did, she didn't consider it much of a compliment.

Her history recitation that day was on the Tudor period. Phyllis thought they had been unnecessary prigs, and she felt especially impatient with Queen Elizabeth, principally, perhaps, because when she asked a certain question about that lady's reign, Miss Patterson sent her down to the Lancy library to look up the answer in an old book for herself. Usually Phyllis loved the library, but to-day, as she stopped under the portrait of a certain proud old ancestress, she felt like shaking her fist at the Lady Philippa Lancy. *Why* were all the Lancys so terribly dignified and stately, anyway? Did icebergs run in the family?

Phyllis asked no more questions that day, and she recited the rest of her lessons with unusual speed. She wanted to get away! Away from the Lancy house and the Lancy portraits, and even the Lancy honor! Phyllis

was glad it was Thursday, and that she went to Madame Felori's studio for her singing-lesson on Thursdays. Madame Felori wouldn't have cared if there hadn't been a Lancy in the world, and while she was singing, or listening to Madame's singing, Phyllis didn't care very much herself.

"Will you mind being alone in the car after your lesson?" Miss Patterson asked as they started. "I asked your grandfather if I might visit my sister this afternoon, and he said I might. Will you mind, dear?"

"No, indeed!" said Phyllis very honestly. She felt that she would enjoy being alone for once in her sheltered life!

When she stepped from the car on her return home, two children racing down the avenue bumped squarely into her.

"How do you do?" said Phyllis gaily. "Did you get your scooter for Christmas?"

The children nodded shyly, without speaking.

"Well, it certainly can scoot!"

She smiled at them, but as she went up the Lancy steps, Phyllis heard one asking the

nurse as she came up, "Peg-gy, who's that nice girl-y?"

"*S-sh!*" Peggy seemed horrified to hear Phyllis called a "nice girl-y." "She isn't just a 'nice girly,' Pen! She's Mr. Jeremiah Lancy's granddaughter, and she lives in that nice big house with her grandpa."

Phyllis fled up the steps, her cheeks burning, all the swift pleasure from her music and Madame's words of praise gone. So she wasn't even a "nice girl-y"; she was only Mr. Jeremiah Lancy's granddaughter! Why, *why* did people always have to remember *that*?

"Why do they?" she stormed to the picture in her room, "why do they, Motherdy? I do love Grandfather, but oh, I would like to be *myself*, too! I'd like—yes I would!—I'd like to make people forget that I was a Lancy just for once! Do you really suppose I could if I became a singer?"

The other Phyllis looked as if she understood, and Phyllis suddenly remembered something she had found in her mother's diary, the diary that had been given to her on her thirteenth birthday, and she giggled.

“ If Daddy Lancy would only forget that he *is* a Lancy, he’d be a dear! ”

“ I guess that’s the matter with all of us,” sighed Phyllis. “ Oh, Motherdy, I wish *I* could forget! ”

But when seven o’clock came, there was no sign of the storm; Phyllis, dressed in her favorite rose, was standing on the stairs directly under the light, one hand resting on the great balustrade, when her grandfather and his guest entered. Mr. Bradford looked at her and told Mr. Lancy he was a very fortunate man.

“ I have a daughter about your age myself,” he told Phyllis, “ but she is away at school most of the time. She came home at Christmas, though, and I am sorry Christmas doesn’t come twice a year! Where is your school, my ‘dear? ”

“ I—I don’t go—to school,” stammered Phyllis, suddenly shy. She liked Mr. Bradford; she liked him very much for some reason, and she had at least a dozen questions she wanted to ask him about the daughter he had been so glad to see, and what she did at her school.

"Phyllis has a governess," explained Mr. Lancy.

"S-so?" said Mr. Bradford, "that must make it very nice for you, my dear," he smiled at Phyllis, and Phyllis found herself answering it. She leaned forward.

"Please—does—does your daughter play basket-ball?"

"*Phyllis!*" expostulated her grandfather, but Mr. Bradford only laughed and smiled at her again. "From what I have heard this past week, I think she tries," he answered. "I wish you could meet Carol, little Miss Phyllis."

Phyllis wished so, too, until she remembered that Carol would probably know she was an iceberg, and then she didn't. It was better just to talk to her father, who didn't know apparently. But somehow she liked Carol Bradford! She pictured her to herself, while her grandfather and Mr. Bradford talked. She would be a tall girl, with short, fair hair and eyes that laughed, and just lots and *lots* of friends.

Phyllis was possessed of the spirit which is either soaring among the clouds or is down in

the canyon of despair, and just now she was climbing the Heights of Imagination. She curled herself up in one of the great library chairs when dinner was over, to watch the happy little flames go dancing up the chimney. An open fireplace when all the rest of the room is dark, as the Lancy library was now, is the best place in the world to see pictures-of-things-that-aren't-there. Phyllis saw herself and Carol Bradford—just what they were doing together she didn't know and didn't care; she was too happy to bother about such an unimportant little detail! She snuggled deeper into the wing-chair with a contented little sigh.

“Phyllis.” It was her grandfather's voice that broke the spell.

“Y-yes, Grandfather?” Phyllis blinked under the sudden light.

“Mr. Bradford has come to say good-night to you.”

“I am sorry to have disturbed you, little Miss Phyllis,” Carol's father said gently.

Phyllis scrambled to her feet. “I'm not sorry a bit, Mr. Bradford!” she declared, her

eyes shining. How could she be "sorry" about anything with Carol's father? (Phyllis forgot in her excitement that she had never seen Carol, and probably never would see her!)

Behind them, Mr. Lancy nodded his approval, and, when Mr. Bradford had gone, he came back to the library. Phyllis smiled up at him from the depths of her wing-chair. It *was* nice to have such a splendid grandfather, even though he did draw his eyebrows together!

"Phyllis," her grandfather said abruptly, "you are going to have a birthday soon, are you not?"

"Why—yes, sir," said Phyllis in a surprised voice. She was, although she hadn't remembered it until just now. What could Grandfather be talking about birthdays for? She hoped, oh, she *hoped* he wasn't thinking of a birthday-dance! He was frowning, and that would be enough to make anybody frown!

"You will be fourteen, will you not, Phyllis?"

"Yes, Grandfather."

“ Ah! Fourteen. Old enough to use discretion in the matter of a gift, I think. Take Miss Patterson with you and select the thing you want most, from me.”

“ Grandfather!” Phyllis was leaning forward, all her eagerness in her voice. “ Grandfather! The thing I want *most?* ”

“ Certainly. Always using discretion, of course.”

Phyllis threw discretion to the winds. She sprang to her feet, her eyes shining, her lips parted, two pink spots on her cheeks, her hair ruffled from the chair. There was no iceberg in sight now!

“ Grandfather, I don't need Miss Patterson to help me! Oh, Grandfather, the thing I want most is to go to Hillcrest School!”

Mr. Lancy fell back. If Phyllis had said she wanted to join an expedition to the North Pole, he couldn't have been more astounded.

“ *School?* ” It took a great deal to make Mr. Lancy gasp.

“ Yes!” said Phyllis breathlessly. So breathlessly, in fact, that her words seemed to tumble over each other. “ Yes! I want to

go to Hillcrest and learn what other girls learn, and what they do, and then *I* want to do it, too—skate and ski, and play basket-ball! And I want them to be my friends! Oh, Grandfather, I don't know *how* to be friends with anybody!"

Poor Mr. Lancy looked as if he had been assailed by a hurricane.

" So," he said at last, " so—you—want—to—go—to—school. You want to leave your quiet, easy lessons with a patient, experienced teacher in your own home, and go to—school!"

Phyllis flushed under his gaze, but she did not flinch and look away as so many people did when Mr. Lancy looked at them, and she held fast to her purpose: " Yes, Grandfather, I do."

Mr. Lancy shook his head, and for an awful moment Phyllis thought he was going to say " No." But what he finally did say was neither " no " nor " yes," and when he said it, there was a twinkle in his eyes.

" So you want to go to school as a birthday present, child? Well, you have a curious taste in presents, my dear, a curious taste, indeed,

but—we shall see, Phyllis, we shall see! By September ——”

“ Oh, please! Grandfather! Do I have to wait for September? ”

“ We’ll see, child, we’ll see.”

“ Motherdy,” Phyllis whispered just before she put out her light, “ I truly believe Grandfather will let me go to school! And Hillcrest is such a dear place! Oh, do you suppose the round tower where you slept is still there, and the funny winding steps, and the brook—and do they still sing the Salute Song? ”

Phyllis had read her mother’s diary and studied the pictures of Hillcrest, and the four Hillcrest year-books her mother had received so much, she felt as if she belonged there! She knew you climbed over a little stone wall, went down through a sloping meadow and there, under a big willow-tree, was a brook, the loveliest place to study in the spring; but you could only go there if you had been *very* good! And she knew that Hillcrest girls always climbed Beech Knoll for Easter-morning service.

And Phyllis had loved the Salute Song from the first day she found it printed under Mary Kieth's picture. Mary Kieth had won it the year Phyllis' mother graduated.

"I—I hope—some girl will win it—while I'm there," murmured Phyllis, as happy to-night as she had been miserable the night before.

On her birthday, a soft, snowy morning the first week in February, Phyllis found two letters beside her plate. One was to Mr. Lancy from Miss Elizabeth Anderson, Principal of Hillcrest School, notifying him that his granddaughter might enter the school after the Easter vacation, if she wished. The other letter was from Aunt Margaret:

"DEAR SEVEN-TIMES-TWO TO-DAY:

"Grandfather wrote us about the birthday present he is going to give you to-day. I think it's quite the nicest one you ever had—it is for us, at any rate, for it's going to give us a new member for our family and let us really get acquainted with you. I'm excited. I haven't told anybody, but I'm a little bit anxious for fear you won't like me as well as

you did seven years ago! And Joy is crazy with joy—that wasn't supposed to be a pun!—at the thought of having you all to herself for so long, and she says she's going to fix the green room for you herself. I'm going to let her, because she can do it lots better than any of the rest of us could, and I want you to like it—and us.

“A very happy birthday, and may you never regret your present.

“Your loving

“AUNT MARGARET.”

CHAPTER III

PHYLLIS LEARNS THE "HORRIDEST WORD"

CLOSE on the heels of Aunt Margaret's birthday letter came another, from Joyce this time. Phyllis had only seen Joy once since her visit to Parkview, and that once she had been so busy trying to elude her cousin Jerry, who, by virtue of his twelve-year superiority in the matter of age, knew so many more ways how to tease than Phyllis did to escape, that she had almost overlooked Joyce. But Joyce's letter was not to be overlooked!

"PHYLLIS DARLING—

"'Scuse my calling you that, 'cause you really don't know me, but if you're going to live with us and go to the Light on the Hill with little me, I think it's time we were 'quainted, don't you? When Daddy got Grandfather's letter about you I'd almost forgotten I had a Cousin Phyllis, but I know lots about you now, and I'm crazy to know more!

It's an awfully long way to the middle of April! But I'm fixing the green room for you myself, and I'd hate to have you come before it was done. It's a love, that green room is! All the girls are crazy over it, and they're just wild about you, you're so like a person in a book! I must scurry to basketball practice now. Do you know basket-ball? I don't suppose so. I'll have to teach you lots of things.

"Bye!

"Joy."

So Joyce played basket-ball, too, and she was willing to teach her! Phyllis' heart glowed over that last sentence. She had never known a girl outside a story with that accomplishment, except Carol Bradford. Phyllis had dreamed about Carol so much it seemed as if she really did know her; and Joy—Joyce was certainly real, there could be no doubt about that! Phyllis sighed contentedly and settled herself to read her cousin's letter for the fourth time before Miss Patterson should call her to go out on a shopping trip. Joyce was right. It *was* an awfully long while to the middle of April, but Phyllis,

like Joyce, had work to do. There were a good many of the shopping trips, and Phyllis loved the different little shops and great stores, and found the plain skirts and simple middies and school dresses far more exciting than she had ever thought the pretty afternoon dresses and dainty party frocks she had frequently helped Miss Patterson select; and Miss Patterson, as erect and correct as ever, despite the strange twist her work had taken, wondered why a girl should look prettier in simple school dresses than she had looked in her chic Phyllis-Lancy clothes. Phyllis could have told her. Phyllis had always wanted the plain school things just as badly as other girls wanted their party dresses. Was it any wonder her cheeks were as rose as the little afternoon dress Miss Patterson had just chosen, or that Madame Felori had told Miss Patterson her voice was growing clearer and sweeter? Phyllis was happy!

“ Hillcrest is really a very good school,” her grandfather told her one evening in the library, “ and I am glad you are going to your uncle’s. Do you remember Robert, Phyllis? ”

Phyllis, on the little stool before the fire, her hands clasped about her knees, shook her head. "N-no, not very much."

"It isn't surprising, you have only seen him once or twice. Parkview Manor is only a day's journey from here, but I am afraid I am stubborn sometimes, and it seemed as though he was just as stubborn for a good many years, and as if we couldn't forgive each other, and now—well, I like to be alone. But I am glad you are going there, child. Your Aunt Margaret has wanted you before this, and Miss Patterson told me you should know other young people, and a year or two in the country will do you good."

"Grandfather ——"

"Yes, child?"

"Grandfather, out there—in Parkview—may I do what the other girls do—tennis and basket-ball, and swimming—and things like that?"

Mr. Lancy tilted her chin upwards to look into the clear grey eyes. Then he chuckled.

"'When in Rome, do as the Romans do,'" he quoted, "but I trust you, Phyllis, never to

forget our motto, in a game or in anything else."

"Yes, Grandfather."

"Yes, Phyllis." He kissed her gravely. "And a Lancy doesn't break a promise."

April did come finally, although it seemed to Phyllis who had counted the last two weeks off the calendar, day by day, that it was the slowest March she had ever seen. But the middle of April did come at last, and Phyllis, sitting amid a gay-colored pile of unpacked things, watching Miss Patterson and one of the maids deftly packing her belongings into her shining new trunk, suddenly realized she was going away! Away from her grandfather whom she had always known, away from kind Miss Patterson and even Jane Mary, the maid! And, suddenly, Phyllis felt very, very small. School—yes, she had wanted to go—she *did* want to go! She was sure of that, but she didn't *know* school, and she did know her grandfather, and she really loved him very dearly, and she *was* fond of Miss Patterson; and the Lancy house, stately and awe-inspiring as it was, had been Home! Phyllis

looked about her a little wildly, and then she saw the portrait-Phyllis. The picture had not been taken down as yet; it would follow Phyllis later; so there, where Phyllis had always seen her, the picture-girl smiled down at her daughter. Phyllis swallowed a great lump.

"You went to Hillcrest, too, didn't you?" she whispered. "I'm glad I saw you, Motherdy! I won't back down now!"

And she didn't; not even after she had donned the rose dress. She had begged Miss Patterson to leave that to be worn to-night. It was going to be a hard night, and Phyllis thought it would be easier to be brave in rose. Then she clasped her grandfather's birthday-pearls around her neck and went slowly down the wide stairs to the library. Once there, she stood very still. It was such a *nice* library, with its great fireplace and many books; its cosy window-seats and comfortable chairs and lovely pictures; and to-morrow night she wouldn't be there! Phyllis caught her breath, and then, to show that she was a Lancy and "Lancy hearts are always high," she laughed, and saluted her grandfather with a slow

curtsey, worthy of the Lady Philippa herself.

" You are very like your grandmother now, Phyllis," Mr. Lancy said.

Phyllis laughed. To be compared with lovely Grandmother Lancy was a compliment indeed.

" Am I? I'll try to be! Listen, Grandfather!

" I, a picture fair could paint you,
With a little maid acquaint you,
How she danced and how she dimpled,
Long ago—Long ago.
Laughing eyes and flossy curls,
Daintiest of dainty girls,
Little mouth demure and sweet;
How she brought them to her feet,
Long ago—Long ago!"

Phyllis, " as she brought them to her feet " did " paint a picture fair " in the quiet, shaded light of the old library.

" I could paint her more completely
As she tripped the measure fleetly,
To the harpischord's sweet tinkling,
Long ago—Long ago.

Now retreating, now advance,
Grandma knew no modern dance,
But a stately measure slow,
Trode beneath the mistletoe,
Long ago—Long a—go."

Phyllis was singing very softly, in the high, sweet voice her grandfather loved, and perhaps it was no wonder Mr. Lancy sighed even as he smiled at her, and held her very tightly when she came over to him. But, though Mr. Lancy was not hungry that night and Phyllis was troubled with the lump again, she liked to remember that her last evening at home, before she went out to enter the Land of Heart's Desire, had been full of smiles, and that neither she nor her grandfather nor Miss Patterson mentioned the change coming to her.

She woke early the next morning. She wanted to see the sunshine across her mother's eyes in the old place just once more, and as she lay watching, she whispered again:

"I'm going to school—*your* school, Motherdy!"

And after the sunbeams had reached the whimsical blue eyes that looked down at her,

Phyllis rose to greet the day and whatever it might have in store for her.

Jerry, she knew, was to meet them at the station. "I had intended taking you to Park-view myself," Mr. Lancy had informed her, "but there is an important conference I mustn't miss, and Jerry wrote me he was to be in the city to-day, and would be glad to have your company home. It is very kind in your Uncle Robert to ask you to live with them. You must try not to make any more trouble for them than you can possibly help."

After all, it wasn't as bad as Phyllis had thought it would be. The ride to the station was a swift one, and Jerry did not make them wait long, once they reached there. Perhaps he knew his grandfather's love of punctuality. He had the Lancy tallness, and direct gaze, but, though Phyllis suspected they could be keen enough if they had to be, his blue eyes had twinkles in them, and you would almost have said there were twinkles in his voice, as well. Phyllis never made friends easily, but she came nearer to liking this tall cousin at second sight than she ever had anybody else.

"This is your cousin Jeremiah, Phyllis," said Mr. Lancy. "It is extremely good in you to take Phyllis, Jeremiah."

"Terribly good!" agreed Jerry Lancy, and Phyllis suddenly made an odd little sound. The twinkling eyes were bent on her, but Phyllis, at that moment, was very much interested in the design on the floor.

Mr. Lancy took out his watch. "Your train leaves in ten minutes. Perhaps you would like to get settled now."

Once on the train, Phyllis lifted her arms. "G-good-bye, Grandfather! Oh, Grandfather! Isn't 'good-bye' the horridest word you know?"

"There, there, child!" remonstrated Mr. Lancy hastily, "remember where you are!" Phyllis let her arms drop. Too late she remembered her fastidious grandfather's dislike of "public demonstrations!"

"I—I forgot," she said penitently. "Oh, Grandfather!"

For as the train gave a warning little movement, Mr. Lancy bent and kissed her.

"There, there, child! Enjoy your school,

and remember I'm trusting you to never forget that Lancy Honor Is Steadfast!"

It seemed very easy to promise: " I won't, Grandfather," then; much easier than facing that promise was, months later. But Phyllis was—well, she was Phyllis Lancy, and she *wasn't* the forgetting kind!

CHAPTER IV

PHYLLIS BEGINS HER EDUCATION

PHYLLIS counted telegraph-poles for some miles. She had a horrible feeling that if she didn't do something monotonous she would cry, and she had no desire to introduce herself to Dr. Jerry Lancy with tears! So she counted the telegraph-poles.

But a girl who is on her way to the Land of Heart's Desire cannot have a heartache very long, fortunately, and Phyllis, having conquered the lump in her throat which had been disturbing her peace of mind for several days, wanted to know more about the land she was going to. Jerry could tell her, of course. Phyllis wished she were like most girls, with the words always ready at her tongue's end, but she wasn't; so she sat and watched the fluffy little clouds which seemed to be racing with the train go sailing over the bluest of April skies. It had been an early spring, and

already a few of the leaves were out. The train sped along beside a river that danced when the sun struck it.

"Isn't—*isn't* it a nice day?" asked Phyllis finally. It did sound flat, but she couldn't think of another thing to say!

"Isn't it?" agreed her cousin. Phyllis saw the twinkles in his eyes, and suddenly she felt the same impulse to giggle that she had had in the station.

"But April *is* a pretty nice month," said Jerry. "I'm glad you are coming to Park-view now, Phyl, and not waiting until September. The trees are beginning to show that they *are* alive, even though you hadn't believed it before, and the crocuses and daffodils are in bloom, and the fleurs-de-lis are getting out of bed about now, and Joy talks more than ever—you mustn't mind Joy, *I* never do—except when she's in school. I understand she's quite dumb there; and unless I'm very much mistaken, there are some robins that have decided to rent my pet apple-tree for the season, and I don't know a prettier place than Hillcrest Avenue is when it's covered with maple-blos-

soms. And you'll like Hillcrest, Phyl. It looks more like a castle than an ugly old school with the ivy coming out over it, and Miss Anderson stands straighter and looks more like an exiled duchess than ever, if such a thing is possible!"

Phyllis sat very still. She had seen the spring, of course, and the country, but never anything like Jerry's description of Parkview! And she liked what he said about the school—her school! Yes, it *was* her school, or it would be very soon, and why wait for that "very soon"? Why not say "hers" now? Phyllis forgot all about Jerry Lancy at her side and began to build dream castles.

The sun was just beginning to drop behind the hills when Phyllis was roused from her dreams by the conductor's cry of "Parkview—Manor! Parkview—Manor—next!"

Parkview! Parkview, where she was going to know Aunt Margaret, and go to school and do all the things other girls did! Parkview, where she wouldn't have to be "Phyllis the Friendless" any longer.

Was it any wonder that her knees felt weak

and her head spun round as she stumbled out of her seat?

It spun still more a moment later, however, for it seemed to her that she had hardly stepped down upon the platform before she was seized by somebody and hugged ecstatically.

" Oh! Oh! Oh!" cried a voice in her ear, " you lovely, lovely thing! You look good enough to eat—almost! I'm Joy," she finished a trifle breathlessly, stepping back to view her newly-arrived cousin.

Phyllis, totally unaccustomed to such a rapturous greeting, drew back, looking, as she felt, a little startled. Joyce, however, surveyed her with interest. She was a very pretty, light-haired, vivacious girl, was Joy, with freckles across her tilted nose.

" Jerry!" she exclaimed excitedly, " Jerry, are you *sure* this gorgeous girl is really our cousin? Are you?"

" I am," responded her brother. " I'm so sure of it I'm going to see to her baggage, and if you think you can take her to the car without making her think you're a talking machine,

and we've just wound you up, I think you'd better do it."

Joyce obediently piloted her cousin across the platform, chattering all the way:

"You dear thing! It was lovely of you to choose the Light on the Hill! We have more fun! And do you really mean to say you've never been to school *at all*? Oh, you lucky thing!"

Phyllis hadn't meant to say anything at all. She couldn't have, if she had wanted to. Joyce had taken away all her breath!

"Here's Daddy! Here she is, Daddy! This beautiful creature really *is* Phyllis Lancy! I couldn't believe it at first, but she came with Jerry, so she must be."

Mr. Lancy opened the car door and then took the hand Phyllis shyly offered him. He had the twinkling eyes, too, she noticed.

"We are very glad to have you, Phyllis. I am your Uncle Rob. Joyce, my dear, take care of that tongue of yours. It might run away with you sometime."

Joyce squeezed her cousin's arm. "They're always teasing me about talking too much!"

she complained. "Do you think I talk such a lot?"

"Why—I—I ——" began Phyllis and then stopped. Uncle Rob came to her rescue.

"You haven't given her a chance to think yet, Joy. How is your grandfather, Phyllis? It is very good in him to let us have you at last. I hope you'll like the Lancys of Parkview."

He smiled at her, and Phyllis found herself smiling back. She *liked* Uncle Rob, just as she had liked Jerry.

Joyce was bouncing up and down with impatience. "Oh, why doesn't Jerry hurry?" she demanded. "I want to get home and show Phyl to Muddy! Oh, here he is! Now!"

Phyllis sat very quiet on the ride to the Lancy home, which gave Joyce an opportunity to talk. Joyce seemed fond of talking, but her conversation was a bit puzzling at times. For instance, what did "spiffily-doodle" mean? Phyllis decided it must be part of the slang both her grandfather and Miss Patterson had condemned. Miss Patterson had said no lady would ever use it, and Mr. Lancy had added that "it had no place in the verbiage of a

Lancy.” But Joyce certainly was a Lancy, and could Phyllis say her cousin was not a lady? By the time they had reached their destination, Phyllis found herself sorely perplexed by several things.

“Here we are!” Joyce interrupted herself to cry. “Do you like it?”

Phyllis did like it. Seen through the slowly gathering dusk, the house, separated from the street by a wide lawn, looked like a *home*, with its welcoming light coming through the open door, and there were inviting-looking trees clustered about. Phyllis loved trees. But Joyce gave her scant time for reflection.

“Come on!” she said, and dragged her bewildered cousin up the brick-paved walk. “There’s Mother! Muddy, here she is!”

It almost seemed as if there were a halo around Aunt Margaret’s hair as she stood against the light. She held out both hands, and suddenly Phyllis knew she had come home. She hadn’t been imagining Aunt Margaret all these years. The only thing she hadn’t imagined was that she was half so lovely.

"Welcome home, Phyllis Lancy," Aunt Margaret was saying very softly, "welcome home, little Seven-times-Two. I hope I can make the other Phyllis' daughter very, very happy, now I have her at last!"

Phyllis had a sudden conviction she would be very happy anywhere, if only Aunt Margaret happened to be there!

"Oh!" she cried. "I—love you!"

Aunt Margaret held her fast a minute. "Your mother used to tell me that, Phyllis."

"Come up here!" Joyce called over the banister. "I want Phyl to see her room!"

Aunt Margaret released Phyllis with a little smile. "Come, dear, Joy's getting impatient. She has arranged your room herself, you know."

Joyce danced on ahead of them. Phyllis followed her a little slowly. "Silly!" she scolded herself. "What are you afraid of? She's your very own cousin, isn't she? And besides, she's going to be your first friend."

And then Aunt Margaret said "In here, dear," and she crossed the threshold of the green room and gave a little cry of delight. It

wasn't a large room, but, thanks to Joyce's skilful management, it looked so, and to Phyllis, who had always loved green, the green hangings and rugs, with the touch of her favorite rose in the rose cushion in the cosy chair, made it very lovely under the light from the rose-shaded lamp Joyce had snapped on.

"O-oh!" said Phyllis softly.

"Do you like it?" begged Joyce, seizing her cousin around the waist, "oh, do please say you do, and relieve my suspense!"

"Of course I do! It was awfully nice of you to arrange it for me,—Joyce." Phyllis hesitated over the unaccustomed name.

"Yes," agreed Joyce, looking complacently around her, "yes, I think it was, myself."

"Trust Joy to compliment herself," observed Jerry, bringing up part of Phyllis' baggage. "But then, I suppose we shouldn't deny her the pleasure of hearing *some one* do it."

"Jerry Lancy!" Joyce's tone was full of indignation.

"I love green," said Phyllis softly, "how did you know?"

"I?" Joyce shrugged her shoulders. "I didn't. I just fixed things the way I liked 'em, and when it was finished I almost took it for myself. The girls were all crazy about it. They're crazy about you, too. They wanted to be in here, waiting for you, but Muddy said we'd better not. You wouldn't have minded, would you?"

"I—don't—know," said Phyllis faintly.

Joyce shot her an odd look. "You don't know! Well, they aren't here. Probably couldn't have gotten Lady Elizabeth's permission, anyway. You can meet them later. Do you know if you want to do *that*?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Well, maybe to-night, Baby ——"

"Not to-night, Joy," interposed Aunt Margaret, slipping an arm about her impetuous daughter. "Phyllis is tired now. You and the girls must wait."

"Oh, well ——" Joyce surrendered for the time being. "Take off your things, Phyl; I want to see what you look like without 'em."

Phyllis, inwardly grateful for Aunt Margaret's reprieve, obeyed. She *was* tired, al-

though she had been too excited to realize it before, and the prospect of meeting more girls like Joyce was a little too much. She wanted to meet them—of course she did, but she would rather do it as Aunt Margaret suggested, later, when she was less homesick, and had had a chance to forget just how horrid a word “Good-bye” can be.

Joyce, looking critically at her simply-dressed cousin, with her oval face framed with dark, waving hair, two bright spots of excitement in her cheeks, and her head flung a little back to meet Joyce’s scrutiny bravely, admitted that, in looks at least, she was all that could be desired. She wondered what the other girls would say when they saw the real Phyllis Lancy. She had been their favorite topic of conversation ever since the day, last December, when Joyce had signaled to Francie Lang that she had something important to tell her, and later, in the gym, had told them about her cousin who sounded so much like a story-girl. They had all speculated wildly as to what she would be like. Francie’s theory that she would be a mouse, seemed nearest

right, but she didn't look like the prig of Baby's ideas nor the city Princess of Dara's imagination.

" Well, you *look* all right," Joyce was forced to admit.

Phyllis flushed under the compliment, if it were a compliment. She didn't quite know how to take Joyce's remarks, and she was glad when the evening was over and Aunt Margaret took her away from the rest, shutting the door of the green room gently, but firmly, upon even the inquisitive Joyce.

" But there are dozens of things I want to know! "

" You'll have a whole year to get acquainted with Phyllis," she answered her daughter's protests; " can't you let me have her to-night? "

" You are my daughter now," she was saying gently, " just as much as Joy is. I've always wanted you, Phyllis, and now I've got you, you aren't going to escape from my clutches very easily! I'm going to kiss you every single night you're here! I hope you won't object? "

Phyllis, lying there in the cool little bed,

thinking Aunt Margaret was the loveliest person she had ever seen, didn't object in the least.

Aunt Margaret bent and kissed her.

“And I'm going to say a verse I used to say to Joy when she was little. You weren't here to hear it when you were little, so you've got to hear it now!

“Good-night,
Sleep tight,
Dream bright!”

CHAPTER V

JOYCE INTRODUCES "JEREMIAH'S PRIDE"

"HELLO! Down so soon? I've just been telephoning Baby Harrison about you. What are you looking at—the garden?"

"Yes," said Phyllis softly, "it's lovely! Whose is it?"

"Oh, it's Jerry's," Joyce joined her cousin at the wide window, "it is pretty, isn't it? But then, it ought to be, the way Jerry fusses over it! I should think he'd be glad to rest when he's got his office hours over, but the first thing he always does is to trot and see if his precious garden is still there. Daddy calls it 'Jeremiah's Pride,' and I honestly believe Jerry is prouder of that garden than he is of all the medals and things he won at college! Say, do you suppose it would make Muddy's muffins get done quicker if we went over to introduce you to the garden? Wait till I get my sweater. Where's yours?—Oh, I suppose it isn't un-

packed yet. Here, take mine! I’ll wear Jerry’s.”

Phyllis suddenly found herself being bundled into Joyce’s gay Angora-wool sweater, dragged out of the house, and swiftly across the lawn. She gasped. The suddenness of Joyce’s movements was apt to be rather disconcerting. But she forgave her cousin for it when she stood on the fleur-de-lis-bordered path of “ Jeremiah’s Pride ” and looked about her. She drew a quick breath of delight. No wonder Uncle Rob called it “ Jeremiah’s Pride ! ” No wonder her cousin was proud of it! It was more than beautiful! It was *alive!*

“ Jeremiah’s Pride ” had been growing for several years. Phyllis learned afterward that Jerry had had it since he was a boy, and it grew lovelier every year.

Joyce watched in silence for a few moments, and silence was the greatest tribute Joyce had to pay.

“ Of course it isn’t as scrumptity-looking as it is in summer,” she explained. “ Jerry has oodles of roses and lilies and peonies and glad-

iolas and hollyhocks and things then. I don't see why he wants to fuss with them all, but he calls it his 'rest cure.' And he *is* fussy! Last year he told us about two tulip plants he wanted to save. They were awfully pretty, shell-pink things. But there were *two* plants, and I didn't suppose *one* tulip less would be anything, so I picked one. But Jerry! Why, Jerry acted *grieved!* So in June when he had a special rose—there was only one of that kind—you can make up your mind I made a nice wide circle around it, but Jerry —— Kits Saunders came over one night, and she *wouldn't* go home! It was her bedtime, and the little imp had run away. There she was, and there she wanted to stay. And then Jerry came along from a call. 'Oh, wait a minute, Kits,' he says, 'don't go yet!' which I thought was the craziest thing I'd ever heard, for Kits hadn't the slightest idea of going! 'There's something I want to show you first. It's out in the garden,' so Kits trots after Jerry, and Jerry tells her to choose the rose she'd like to take home with her, and, of course, she chose Jerry's prize rose. He might have known she would!

Now wouldn’t you have thought he’d have told her she couldn’t have it? But no! Jerry says ‘ That one, Kits? All right. Now take it home to your mother before it wilts!’ I told him he was awfully silly, but all he said was that Kits deserved it for showing such good taste!”

Phyllis laughed. She couldn’t help it, Joyce was so plainly disgusted with her brother’s short-sightedness!

Joyce bent to snap a daffodil. “ Jerry calls these ‘ Spring Tonic,’ ” she observed. “ I think it’s a perfectly horrid name, but what can you expect from a person who calls a garden a ‘ rest cure ’? I don’t see much rest about it myself, but it is a pretty fair garden, isn’t it? ”

Phyllis looked about her. “ Jeremiah’s Pride ” was a long garden. Back of her were little rose-bushes just beginning, as Jerry had said about the trees, to show they were alive, and behind them, as if each rose had a guardian, stood a slender dwarf pear-tree in blossom. Before her, lay the great spreading daffodil bed, each separate flower swaying on its graceful stem, yet looking, as the soft breeze

moved over them, as if they all moved together. At her left were the narrow pointed leaves of the fleurs-de-lis, with here and there the tiniest of buds. Crocuses peeked up at her, and there was one flaming tulip open. The only thing she didn't see was the owner of the garden, standing very still over by the cluster of evergreens. If she had seen him, she probably never would have said the thing she did. But she didn't see him, so Phyllis, who loved flowers with very nearly the same love Jerry did, forgot her shyness for a minute when Joyce asked complacently, " It is pretty fair, isn't it? " and answered quickly: " It is *very* fair! "

" Bravo! " said Jerry Lancy's voice behind them. Phyllis whirled about, and Joyce gave a surprised little squeal.

" You are so *quiet* when you come, Jerry! " she complained.

Her brother grinned. " Was I? I'm surprised you didn't hear me come, Joy. I was here first, you see. "

April can be a very lovely month when she chooses, and she had the good grace to send a

lucky omen day for Phyllis’ first day of school. Phyllis, leaning from her window to look at the garden, was glad the sun shone and the daffodils nodded so cheerfully. Surely they wouldn’t be dancing so gayly if things were going to go so very wrong at Hillcrest! It was hard to remember the daffodils were only daffodils. It seemed as if they must be a troop of golden sun-fairies, they looked so alive! Everything in “ Jeremiah’s Pride ” always did look that way, for some reason!

A robin hopped to the branch of the cherry-tree opposite Phyllis’ window, looked scornfully at the kitten below, and then up at Phyllis. “ Cheer—up! ” said the robin, “ ch-eeer up! ch-eeer up! ”

Phyllis laughed and waved her hand at him as she turned towards the stairs in answer to Joyce’s impatient call.

Joyce had no idea that this was the most important day in her cousin’s life. She simply couldn’t imagine a girl who had never been to school before, so she couldn’t imagine the sensations of a girl who was going to enter the land of school for the first time that Mon-

day, although, having put her through something strongly resembling a verbal Spanish Inquisition, during the past two days, she knew a great deal more about her cousin than Phyllis wished she did!

"Wait until you see the Lady Elizabeth, Phyl!" she chattered over her cereal, "you'll just love her! We all do! I think she has an iron ramrod for a spine! And her voice! It's the loveliest thing. Makes me feel as if I had cold water running down my back! 'Now, my dear Joyce,' and I wither right up!"

"Have you ever thought of inviting Miss Anderson out here for dinner, Mumsie?" inquired Jerry thoughtfully.

Phyllis laid down her spoon. She was not hungry somehow, although her cousin's description of the Principal had little to do with it. But her throat felt uncomfortably tight! She wanted to go to school—she knew she did! Then why, when she was going, were her knees so shaky and her hands so cold? Was it homesickness? Was it because she was going to meet the "girls." She hadn't met them. "Why don't you wait until you take Phyllis to

school to have her meet the girls?” Aunt Margaret suggested. “It’s only two days, you know, and I think perhaps she’d like to wander around and get acquainted with Parkview.”

“The peonies look very well this year,” observed Mr. Lancy suddenly.

“Yes, they do,” agreed Jerry heartily. “I was looking at them this morning. They came through the winter beautifully.”

Which, considering it had been an extremely mild winter, was very kind of the peonies!

“You will like Mrs. Hilton, dear,” Aunt Margaret said softly. “Everybody does. She teaches singing.”

Phyllis smiled at her valiantly. “I’m going to like it *all*,” she said, “I know I am!”

But for a girl who was so sure she was going to like the land of her heart’s desire, Phyllis stayed a long time in the green room, and when finally the little clock on her desk warned her she must go, it took every ounce of Lancy courage to go down-stairs with a lifted head.

CHAPTER VI

PHYLLIS ENTERS THE LAND OF HEART'S DESIRE

JERRY was standing in the door of his office watching for her. "Phyl, I'd like to give you a little talisman for to-day. The French used to think it was rather a fortunate flower. Will you take it?"

He held "it" out, a purple fleur-de-lis.

"Oh—Jerry!"

"Do you see the color?"

Phyllis nodded.

"Purple for victory, you know. I think it means good luck, Phyl."

"Oh—*Jerry!*"

And Joyce coming into the hall saw her cousin smiling, although she was holding the purple fleur-de-lis a trifle more tightly than was good for its beauty.

Near the top of the hill, they were wildly saluted by a tall girl with a striking head of

bobbed hair and a pair of very mischievous grey-green eyes.

“Hello, Baby!”

“Hello, Joy,” the girl glanced curiously at Phyllis.

“Oh yes,” said Joyce easily. “This is my cousin, Baby; Phyllis Lancy. She’s the most gorgeous of us all. Phyl, this is our class dunce, Baby Harrison. Lady Elizabeth calls her ‘Babina,’ but nobody else does, so you needn’t, unless you want to follow Lady Elizabeth’s example.”

Baby laughed. “Don’t!” she advised the embarrassed Phyllis.

“Well,” pondered Joyce, “I wouldn’t suggest it. You’re too much like her already. You’re almost as dignified as she is, and when you smile ——”

“Oh, Joy! No!” protested the horrified Baby, “she *can’t* be like Lady Elizabeth then! Nobody could! Lady Elizabeth’s smile is three-edged, at least!”

“Um,” said Joyce. “Oh, you’ll just love our Lady Elizabeth, Phyl!”

Baby laughed. “What are you trying to

do, Joy? Scare your poor little cousin out of her wits on her very first day?"

"No," said Joyce coolly, "I *have* been telling her what a nice, lovable old dear Lady Elizabeth is, and a few little things like that, but I haven't been scaring her. You can't scare a Lancy, Baby; they're unscarable!"

Oh! Were they? Phyllis set her teeth. Did Joy always talk like that; on and on and on?

And then, all at once, they were at the entrance to the school. Joyce stopped dramatically.

"Behold it!" she said. "My dearest cousin, behold Parkview's seat of learning for its girls! Gaze upon its graceful lines, upon the ancient ivy entwining itself about its walls as the walls themselves entwine about our hearts! Gaze with awe, I beg of you, upon the Seat of Wisdom from whence famous women have graduated!"

"Oh, be still, Joy!" interrupted Baby, "that's something you'll never do, if you don't enter that Seat of Wisdom yourself. And if you don't hurry, we'll be late. I don't sup-

pose you do mind for yourself, but you *might* think of your cousin's reputation!"

Joyce collapsed. "Late! The Lady Elizabeth ——"

"There's Lady Elizabeth's office," she informed Phyllis as they entered the broad hall, "shall I go with you?"

"Oh, no—thank you!" Phyllis hastily declined the invitation. What the famous "Lady Elizabeth" was going to be like, she didn't know, but she would find out without Joyce's help!

The Principal's study, at least, was very likable, Phyllis found, when she entered it after a timid knock. Miss Anderson was busy at the time of Phyllis' entrance, and merely motioned her to a seat, so Phyllis had time to study the Principal's office, the Principal herself, and the girl opposite.

Phyllis liked the room itself. It was simple enough in its almost Puritan style, but it had a fireplace, and to fireplace-loving Phyllis, any room with a fireplace was perfect! Miss Anderson herself was seated in a high-backed, curved-top chair, her hands, the hands which

every girl in Hillcrest secretly envied, resting quietly in her lap, her keen black eyes (which every girl in Hillcrest openly feared) fixed on the girl before her. Then she looked at the girl, and suddenly something Phyllis had never felt before swept over her. She *liked* this girl with her clear friendly blue eyes and her singing voice! She liked her direct answers to Miss Anderson's crisp questions; she even liked the way she sat. She liked everything about her!

And then Miss Anderson said: " That will be all, Miss Bradford," and the girl rose to go. Phyllis leaned forward with a little gasp. " Bradford!" Why, that was Carol's name. Was it possible this could be Carol's school?

The girl caught the eager light which flashed into Phyllis' wide eyes. She smiled at her with an almost imperceptible nod, and was gone.

" Now, my dear." The Lady Elizabeth turned to Phyllis, and her smile would certainly have been awe-inspiring to any girl who had not had the advantage of meeting Mr. Jeremiah Lancy's gaze frequently. Phyllis

met the Principal's searching eyes calmly, and answered her still more searching questions easily. No, she had never been at any school before. But her grandfather had seen to it she was given the regular public school examinations. Yes, Miss Patterson had taught her French; yes, Latin, too. No, Phyllis did not find her interview with the Lady Elizabeth very much of an ordeal. In fact, if there were any ordeals lying in wait for her, she was spared them for that morning, at least, by being detained in the Principal's office to undergo a rigid examination. To others, that office might be a lioness' den to be approached with fear and trembling, but to Phyllis, it was a safe retreat.

The ordeal began in the afternoon when, having finished the examination, Miss Anderson rose, saying, "I will accompany you to your classes, Miss Lancy," and she followed the Lady Elizabeth from room to room along the wide corridors and stood facing classes of curious girls, trying to hide how very self-conscious and ill at ease she was. She attempted to smile at them, a friendly smile like

the one the girl in Miss Anderson's office had given her that morning, and succeeded remarkably well in giving her classmates the impression that Phyllis Lancy was a superior-looking prig. They returned her smile with a politely cool look, and went back to their books.

The different teachers excused her from study that day, for which Phyllis was devoutly grateful. It gave her time to try to make her knees stop trembling and her throat stop throbbing. This was school! School! *School!* Phyllis shook herself to be sure it was really true. It seemed to be; the girls around her looked very much alive, and the walls seemed pretty solid!

Joyce captured her when the class was dismissed, whispering: " I'll see you in the gym afterward," and whisked away before Phyllis could ask where the gym was or what " afterward " she meant!

She found the gymnasium with the help of a directing freshman finally, and, after that, there was no difficulty in locating Joyce. You could almost always depend on finding Joyce

where the greatest number of girls were, and just now she was busy entertaining a group ready for basket-ball practice with an account of something which seemed to be very interesting. Phyllis saw her perched on a convenient locker, after she had looked around the large room with its queer apparatus, and over the heads of several girls in gymnasium suits. She hesitated as she caught the words: "No, girls, she *hasn't*, honestly!" but Joyce had seen her, standing as usual, on the edge of things, and she made a dramatic gesture:

"Come on over, Phyl! Here she is, girls. Please meet the Girl Who Has Never Been to School!"

"Oh—Joyce!" Phyllis protested, flushing up to the roots of her soft hair under the battery of curious eyes. It was true, of course, but why did Joyce have to dwell on the subject?

"It's so, isn't it?" Joyce demanded calmly, "and girls, that's not the only wonderful thing about her! Listen!" she settled herself more comfortably on the locker and proceeded: "It doesn't really seem possible, but she's never

had a regular hour to study or recite; she's never had an *examination* in her life!"

"I have," Phyllis was goaded into interrupting, "I'm not quite in the kindergarten!"

"And she doesn't know a solitary single thing about a canoe or how to play tennis! Her grandfather—he's mine, too, of course, doesn't approve of tennis. He says 'it isn't a game for a lady.' You're not a lady, you see, Francie."

Francie, a small, slight, dark girl with impish eyes, giggled.

"And she hasn't the slightest idea about camping or hiking or Camp Fire Girls or Girl Scouts," pursued the merciless Joyce. "Now, girls, what do you think of that?"

The girls, apparently, did not know what to make of it. They stared at Phyllis as though she were a girl from an undiscovered country. A remark of her grandfather's flashed through Phyllis' mind. He had once told her that "if a Lancy was a true Lancy, his work would always be thorough." Well, Joyce certainly had claims to being a true Lancy! But Phyllis would have given every-

thing she owned to be back in the quiet old Lancy house! She had been lonely there sometimes, but never like this!

But she wasn't! She was here, being introduced to her Land of Heart's Desire. And, suddenly, Phyllis flung up her head. She could not go back—not now; but she could go on!

“You haven't introduced the girls yet, Joy,” she reminded her cousin.

Joyce stared. “Why—so I haven't,” she said. “Well, this is Baby. You met her this morning. And this one loving the ball is Lucy Thornton. Lucy's our prize fudge-maker; we exhibit her whenever we can. The next one is Francesca Matilda Hermonie Lang——”

“Don't, Joy!” said Francesca Matilda Hermonie, wincing.

“At least that's what the Registrar calls her, but none of *us* ever do.”

“You'd better not!” interrupted the possessor of the name.

“We just say Francie and have done with it. Francie's going to be tennis champion

of America in a year or two. You'd better take Phyl's education in hand, Francie. It's a shame it's been so shockingly neglected. And Emmie—come on out here, Emmie, where Phyl can see you!—is the beauty of the lot, always excepting me, of course. The poets have an awful fascination for Emmie. She has a positive gift for misquoting them! There! I think you know us all now."

"Won't you include me in your pleasant little introduction, Joy?" It was the girl Phyllis had seen in Miss Anderson's office that morning. She had been in traveling dress then, but in her straight, simple blue school dress with its daintily crisped white cuffs and collar, Phyllis liked her more than ever; her heart almost ached to have this girl as a friend.

"Oh—Carol," said Joyce, "I didn't see you come in!"

Carol's eyes twinkled. "You were busy," her voice was so soft it really was odd it should make Joyce look slightly uncomfortable; "please introduce me, Joy. I should hate to be left out!"

“ Oh,” said Joyce, “ well, this is the meadow-lark of the school, Phyl. One of her ancestors came over with Captain John Smith, I think.”

“ Myles Standish, I believe,” Carol Bradford murmured, “ not that it matters. Don't feel too badly over it, Joy.”

“ Oh well, I knew he did *something!* She's a proctor, too. You'd better be careful how you behave when she's about. She's awfully stern!”

“ I suppose they call me ‘ Meadow-Lark ’ because I can't sing,” Carol explained. “ What class are you in,—Phyllis? ”

Phyllis shook her head. “ I don't seem to be in any class,” she said slowly, and held out the card Miss Anderson had given her at dismissal.

Joyce pounced on it. “ Well, I ——” she began. “ Girls! *Do* listen to this!”

Miss Anderson had instructed Phyllis Lancy to recite music and harmony alone; literature with the seniors; French with the juniors; domestic science and chemistry with the freshmen. Her other studies were to be

recited with the sophomores. Joyce had never heard of such a thing, and she said so quite frankly, having first read the card aloud.

" Do you like music and harmony so much? " Carol asked, under cover of the other's exclamations.

" I *love* them," Phyllis answered softly. Carol smiled at her.

" You'll have to sing for us both, you know, so you'd better like it! "

Joyce had slipped from her seat. " There comes Miss Jackson! Coming, Carol? If you are, you'll have to hurry. "

Phyllis instinctively moved away. She would be in the way now. But, to her surprise, Carol shook her head.

" N-no, I guess I'd better not. I twisted my wrist the day before Easter, so I think Phyllis and I will just watch and see if that little freshman can beat you as badly as she did the other day. Come on, Phyllis, what one girl can do, two can do; if Joy could sit up here, I guess we can. We're neither of us as plump as she is! "

And suddenly Phyllis found herself where

she had dreamed of being so often, beside Carol Bradford, being initiated into one more mystery of the Land of Heart's Desire—a basket-ball game, and she sighed contentedly. It might be a far more mysterious land than she had ever dreamed, but she was *there*, actually sitting beside Carol Bradford, and it did seem as if Carol was really going to be her friend!

CHAPTER VII

PHYLLIS AGREES WITH SHAKESPEARE

“WELL,” said Uncle Robert, as Phyllis slipped into her seat opposite Joyce that night, “how did school go to-day?”

“Oh, it ran fairly smoothly,” Joyce helped herself to the most golden roll before she passed them. “But I don’t know about Phyl. She spent the morning with Lady Elizabeth, and I only saw her afterward in gym. How *did* you like the Land of your Heart’s Desire, Phyl?”

Phyllis remembered the rigid examination Miss Anderson had given her; her bewilderment in studies; those awful moments when she stood before the different classes; Joyce’s introduction; and the purple talisman tucked away between two of her fattest books, and suddenly a smile as roguish as Joyce’s own flashed out.

“Why shouldn’t I like it, when it was my birthday present, and I chose it myself?”

“Checkmated,” said Jerry softly from his side of the table, and Phyllis, who had played chess with her grandfather, smiled at him shyly.

But her first fortnight in the Land of Heart's Desire was anything but a triumphal progress! It was a fortnight, in fact, in which she suffered agonies. She was a foreigner in a strange land, a land about which she knew absolutely nothing, and about which nobody troubled to teach her. With Miss Patterson, all her lessons had been impromptu, with the little cushioned window-seat in her room as a schoolroom; now she had to get used to a routine which seldom varied, no matter how often her own moods might change. She had to learn to wander from class to class and respect the idiosyncrasies of her different teachers, while they were too busy to care whether she had any or not, and Miss Patterson *had* been a patient teacher. When Phyllis had been tired or confused, she said: “Put that book away, dear. We won't think about that any more just now. Let's try something else.”

But here at Hillcrest, no matter how weary or perplexed or discouraged she was, and poor Phyllis was very often that her first fortnight, she had to plod on until the dismissal bell released her. Altogether, it was not an easy fortnight, the fortnight in which Phyllis learned to agree with Shakespeare, that " there was more in heaven and in earth than she had dreamed of " ; and there were times when it seemed as if she could never learn all the laws of that mysterious world, School, when she blundered in the simplest matters, when Joyce's delicate teasing was very hard to stand, when, worst of all, the other girls continued to stand politely aloof and amused; when the Lancy courage almost failed her, and, in spite of the purple talisman, she was almost tempted to give up.

That was the day after Emily Batton had her party, the day after papers were returned from the English Literature test. Emily had succeeded in passing her favorite bugbear by the narrowest of margins. " Come on up and see me this afternoon, girls," she invited, " I'll have to do something to celebrate this truly

auspicious occasion! And Lu, I wouldn't object if you brought the rest of your fudge along—you can't have eaten it all yet! You, too," nodding carelessly in Phyllis' direction, because she happened to be standing beside Joyce.

Phyllis' heart beat uncomfortably. It was the first time she had been included. Was she going to begin her collection of friends to-day? And perhaps she might have, if the others had taken the trouble to look at her flushed cheeks and happy shining eyes before they jostled her into an obscure corner. Phyllis didn't blame them for that—the space *was* limited. Baby and Joyce and Francie were crowded on the bed; Lucy Thornton and Dara Knight were sharing the one cosy chair their hostess had, and Emmie herself had dropped to her favorite seat, the floor. Phyllis should have been grateful for her comfortable stool in her secluded corner, but she wasn't. It looked as though it would be much more fun to be as crowded as Baby was between Joyce and Francie; but the other girls evidently didn't think it would have been. They—it was a humiliating thing to have to admit, but they ap-

parently had forgotten her presence, so Phyllis clasped her hands in her lap, and, as usual, watched and listened and went unnoticed. It was the first time she had ever been in that place of her dreams, a girl's room at boarding-school, and having little else to do, her wide eyes took in all the plain furniture, slightly the worse for wear, all the sealing-wax curiosities and block-prints Dara, who was Emmie's room-mate, amused herself by inventing, and the scattered papers neither of them could find places for. It looked as if Emmie Batton had a very good time here, but then Phyllis had noticed that Emmie usually managed to have a good time wherever she was! It was a habit she had! And then Emmie rose to reach the sandwiches she had found somewhere, and Lucy's prize fudge, and almost stumbled over her.

"Oh dear me, here's Phyllis Lancy!" she cried, "sitting far from the crowd's noble strife! I forgot you were here, child! Well, do have some of Lu's fudge—oh, take two pieces! I always believe in being generous with Lu's fudge. Her fudge is warrant for

her welcome. I don't suppose we'd invite her, if it wasn't for that fudge."

"Thank you!" drawled Lucy.

"Don't bring her out here, Emmie," advised Joyce. "She likes little corners. She always aims for our alcove by the bookcases at home. I believe she'd spend the day there, if she could."

"'Reading maketh a full man,' Shakespeare said," observed Emmie inappropriately.

"*Emmie!*" It was a chorus. "Did you have *that* in your paper?"

"Why—I may have. What's the matter?"

"Bacon may have written Shakespeare, Lamb," Francie explained gently, "but I never heard that Shakespeare wrote Bacon."

"Oh, is that all?" Emmie looked relieved. "Well, I passed, anyhow!"

"I haven't heard of Miss Lyton's being sick, have you?" Dara inquired thoughtfully. "If I had, I might have thought somebody else had passed on Emmie's paper. But if Emmie passed, and she seems to have, there's hopes for anybody, even the girl who asked Ellinor what a 'chem' was, the other day!"

"That was Phyl!" giggled Joyce, as the color flamed into her cousin's cheeks.

"Oh, was it you?" Dara turned to look at the uncomfortable Phyllis. "You're the story-book girl; the one whose grandfather kept you shut up in his castle like the princess with the ogre? Honestly, don't you know a thing about anything?"

"No, she honestly doesn't," Joyce answered for her. "I don't know whether there's any hope for her or not, Dara! There are so *many* things she doesn't know! She doesn't know any more about basket-ball and things like that than if she was in the kindergarten! Grandfather doesn't believe in them! How did you happen to have your hair bobbed, Phyl? Did you have to tease awfully hard?"

"No," said Phyllis soberly.

"Lancy maids have courage, too," the poem had said, and the Lancy courage is a fortunate thing to have, sometimes. The next day, Phyllis, gathering up her materials in the domestic science room, was passed by two girls on their way to the door. They nodded casually, and Phyllis had just time to nod back

in a frightened way before they were gone, and their voices floating back to her:

“ Did you ever see such a little icicle? She was up in Emmie’s room yesterday ——”

“ Icicle!” Phyllis had no need to hear any more. She stood quite still, her egg-beater still in her hand, all her despair in her wide grey eyes. Miss Clay, coming in, found her still standing there.

“ You may go, Miss Lancy; the classes have been dismissed, you know.”

Phyllis nodded silently and fled out into the hall towards the cloak-room. “ Icicle!” That was what Herbert Richardon had called her, before he really knew her; after that he said she was an iceberg. Her fingers, as they fastened her cape, were cold enough to belong to an icicle! Would she always be an icicle? Would she never be able to be a *girl*? She *had* tried! She *had*!

CHAPTER VIII

THE INTERFERENCE OF JERRY

IT was May, by this time, and Hillcrest Avenue was strewn with maple-blossoms as Phyllis walked despondently down it. It wasn't a good day to be despondent. The wind, which should have been from the sunshiny south, was blowing from the east, and the sky, which ought to have been blue, was covered with cold-looking clouds. To add to the misery of the day, it began to rain, not a hard, merry little rain, but a small dejected drizzle that was almost as miserable as Phyllis was, as she walked alone down the Avenue. There were other girls who dashed past Phyllis with gay little shrieks, but Phyllis was as far from joining them as she had been when she sat in the window-seat of Lancy House, wistfully watching the girls from the school on the corner. Phyllis was discouraged. It seemed that a girl who had been at school

almost a month, and who had the advantage of living with a cousin who was perfectly at home there, should have stopped being an icicle! Phyllis had fought off the homesickness and loneliness that had attacked her, but to-day it was different. To-day, Despair had joined them; and Despair is a bad enemy to have. Phyllis was tired and hurt and discouraged. She wanted to give up, but she couldn't! She could fairly see the scorn in her grandfather's piercing blue eyes if she did, and hear it in his voice as he would say: "So you *failed*? Failed to go through with your venture?" And she knew she would hate herself for backing down. Backing down at fourteen! She wouldn't! She would *make* those girls like her, if it took her the entire year to do it! She stood still at the curb and clenched her slender fingers until they hurt. But—sometimes—people *did* lose, didn't they, no matter how hard they fought? Perhaps she was going to be "Phyllis the Friendless" all her life!

"O-o-oh!" said Phyllis with a long, shuddering breath.

A car came around the corner and stopped at the curb.

" Are you in a hurry to get home, Phyl? Or would you like a little ride first? You'll be warm enough, I think." Jerry opened the door. " Get in."

Phyllis got in. She didn't understand it—Jerry had none of his grandfather's commanding air, but when he said " Get in," you found yourself getting in! Even Joyce obeyed him meekly.

" That's nice," said Jerry Lancy comfortably, closing the door. " It's better than walking in this drizzle. Do you like riding in the rain, Phyl? Lots of people don't, but I do, especially when my mind gets in a muddle—or perhaps your mind never gets in a muddle? "

Jerry was carefully turning a corner just then.

" Oh, it does! " Phyllis cried fervently, " it's there now! "

" U-um? " said her cousin. (Phyllis did not know how very delusive Jerry's " U-um? " could be, but Jerry knew it was not for nothing

that Phyllis looked as if she were standing at bay when he had turned the corner of Hillcrest Avenue!)

“Yes!” said Phyllis with a little catch in her breath. She put her hand on the door. She was suddenly awfully tired, and she had a terrible temptation to tell her cousin about the “muddle” she was in, but Phyllis was not a girl who could confide easily, even to such a friendly person as Jerry was, so they rode on in silence. Then Phyllis began cautiously: “Jerry, may I ask you a question? Jerry—is an—icicle any use?”

“Certainly is,” said Jerry Lancy, “it’s pretty.”

“But that isn’t what I mean!” cried Phyllis. “Isn’t it good for anything except just to be—*pretty*?”

“Certainly is,” affirmed the cautious Jerry, “it can melt.”

“O-oh!” said Phyllis softly, “I never thought of that!”

“And then, if it’s a sensible icicle,” continued her cousin, skilfully swinging around another curve, “it can water something—a

pansy bed, for instance. Well, here I am, Phyl. I don't expect to be long."

Phyllis wouldn't have cared if he had spent the whole afternoon making that particular call. The rain, grown noisy now, pattered down on the little roof above her head, and made a happy little accompaniment to the tune her heart was singing: " An icicle can melt! An—icicle—can—melt! An icicle can *melt!* " And then, if it were a sensible icicle, it could water a pansy bed. A pansy bed! Phyllis stopped suddenly, as the damp little wind blew against her cheek. Pansies were called " heartsease," weren't they? And Jerry had said an icicle could water a pansy bed! So that was what icicles were for, was it?

Jerry was gone longer than he had thought he would be, but Phyllis didn't care. She smiled at him when he took his seat again, but when Phyllis was very happy she didn't want to talk, so it was Jerry who picked up the conversation just where he had left it:

" Or your icicle might water a larger plant," he remarked, as if nothing had happened in between, " like a fleur-de-lis."

Phyllis jumped, but Jerry wasn't looking at her. "I'm an awful meddler, Phyl—lots of people have told me so; I forced a talisman on you, and now I'm going to supply you with a battle-cry: 'I will study and prepare, and my time will come.'"

"'I will study and prepare, and my time will come!'" Phyllis said it over softly, and with wide eyes. "I—like that. It does sound like a battle-cry!"

"It is. And his time did come. Abraham Lincoln's my favorite hero, that's why I like it, I suppose. That's our Tennis Club over there. Are you going to learn, Phyl?"

Phyllis flushed. "I was," she admitted, "but ——"

"But you haven't a racquet? Well, I'll get you one; I'll see if I can find mine, and the garage door is a pretty good thing to practise against. There's no danger of breaking its nose, the way Joy did mine when I was teaching her to play!"

Phyllis giggled as he let her out. She ran through the rain to the house, and her eyes were shining.



I will study and prepare, and my time will come.

She was singing a gay little song as she skipped up-stairs.

Joyce was in the upper hall. She leaned over the railing to gaze at her cousin in wide-eyed astonishment. "You never told me you could sing like *that!*" she said reproachfully.

Phyllis laughed. With her pink cheeks and damp little curls, she looked anything but an icicle!

"Didn't I?" she said sweetly. "Well, you never asked me, Joy," and, leaving Joyce to stare after her, she disappeared into the green room and closed the door. Joyce heard a little laugh, but she could not see Phyllis, after she had hung the cape away, sit down at the little desk and draw a comfortably large-sized pad towards her. Phyllis had an idea. Once or twice she dimpled as she wrote, and when she finished, she surveyed the sheet she had covered with her small, very clear handwriting with satisfaction.

"I don't think I've left anything out," she told the other Phyllis as she searched her

drawer for an envelope, and if Joyce had seen her cousin's "Campaign Outline," she would have agreed with her. Phyllis had written:

"I hereby organize and issue this Charter to the Society for Improving Phyllis Lancy. This Society is to direct all the improvements listed below and any other that shall be deemed necessary, and to call attention to any neglect on her part to further them. She is to be required to submit reports of progress, and submit herself to the admonition of the Society, and she shall diligently seek to

Become a sensible Icicle;

Learn to play tennis;

Study basket-ball;

Learn how to be a friend;

Study slang if I—I mean she,

has to get a *dictionary* of the language to do it! And the Society hereby adopts as her campaign slogan 'I Will Study and Prepare, and My Time Will Come!'

Signed and sealed this 12th day of May,
 "PHYLLIS STANHOPE LANCY."

She did seal it, with a heavy circle of the sealing-wax Miss Patterson had once given her. Then she carefully slipped it into an empty pigeonhole, where she would see it when she put her school papers away at night and took them out again in the morning.

And the sight of the long envelope did remind her of the "Campaign," as she gathered her books together the next morning. It sent a happy thrill over her to repeat the "Slogan" with which it ended: "I Will Study and Prepare, and My Time Will Come!"

Phyllis was feeling particularly joyous anyway that morning as she walked up Hillcrest Avenue with Joyce. It was an almost perfect May day, and Phyllis thought she had never seen anything more lovely than Madam Halstead's fragrant orchards lining the Avenue.

Just as they entered the corridor, Dara appeared on the scene. She beckoned impatiently. "Hurry up, Joy. Emmie wants us to plan for the Soph supper, and we've got just about four minutes! Just like her to wait until three days before the date!"

“All right,” Joyce assented. “Coming, Phyl? You’ll have to attend all the class suppers, you’re so mixed up!”

“Perhaps ——” Phyllis began.

“Oh, yes, the ic—her Lancyness can come if she wants to.”

It was no time for the organizer of the Society for Improving Phyllis Lancy to falter. She should have answered: “Of course I do!” but she did falter, and what she said was:

“No, thank you. I’ll go on.”

The room where Miss Mary Markes and Algebra presided was deserted except for a single girl who was putting great golden tulips on Miss Markes’ desk. She looked up and smiled, but Phyllis was in no frame of mind for smiling back. She should have gone with Joy and Dara. Why had she been such an idiot?

She began arranging her papers and books in her desk. They had an embarrassing habit of tumbling out into her lap when she least wanted them there. The girls in her classes looked forward to seeing them spill. Phyllis ruefully remembered the verse in

The Bonfire which had come out three days ago:

“ There’s a girl with the Sophs named Phyl,
Whose books can be depended on to spill,
And upset a lull
In a period dull,
All thanks be to you, dearest Phyl! ”

“ Excuse me. You don’t seem to get the knack of it. Suppose I show you? May I? ”

Carol had turned from Miss Markes’ desk and she was smiling at Phyllis in a more friendly way than any girl had ever smiled at her before, and Phyllis, meeting her straightforward gaze, remembered the day on the gymnasium locker, and that Carol hadn’t been one of the girls who condescendingly acted as if she belonged in the kindergarten.

Poor, stubborn, pride-bound Phyllis Lancy! She had never wanted to do anything as much as she wanted to say to Carol “ Yes! Please show me! I don’t seem to know how to do anything! ” And then she opened her lips and heard herself saying:

“ No, thank you. I can do it myself. ”

Carol looked at her, a long, straight look, and then suddenly she moved across the aisle to Phyllis' desk.

“Get up,” she said.

Without a look for the owner of the desk, Carol slipped into the vacated seat and began to arrange the books and papers with a deftness which Phyllis, standing humbly by, envied with all her heart. And yet it looked so simple the way Carol was doing it! Carol was a dear, but as for Phyllis Lancy, well, Herbert Richardon had been right. She wasn't a girl; she was only an iceberg. What had possessed her to treat Carol in that horrible way?

And then Carol stood up. “There,” she said, “that's the way we do it here. You just didn't understand the trick. I hope you won't have any more trouble.”

“Carol! Oh—Carol, please forgive me!”

“Oh, never mind now, Phyllis, please; the girls are coming.” Carol smiled again, but she turned away. But as for trouble—Phyllis knew what it was that day. All day she remembered her haughty refusal of Carol's help,

whenever she took a book from her desk, whenever Carol rose to recite. Carol, the girl she wanted for a friend. And, as usual, she had acted just like a *mule!* Carol would never be her friend now, and she hadn't been worthy of her. She *deserved* losing her!

But knowing you deserve a thing, doesn't make it easier to bear. Phyllis spent a very miserable day, the Lancy heart very, very low.

What *was* the matter with her? What *was* it? What had possessed her that morning? And she had lost Carol's friendship, the friendship of the girl she loved!

CHAPTER IX

JERRY PRESCRIBES A TONIC

“ You certainly did get yourself into a mess to-day!” observed Joyce candidly, as they walked down the Avenue. “ What possessed you, Phyl Lancy? I wouldn’t have made a good Roman, I know *that*, but I don’t believe I ever managed to give such an awful Latin recitation as you did this morning! And you know perfectly well Thackeray didn’t write *Last Days of Pompeii!* Oh, I know what you said! Betty’s sister told her. And let me tell you one thing: you won’t find it a joke if Miss Lyton takes it into her head to drop you from senior Lit. Will she, Baby?”

Baby, who had had occasion to know Miss Lyton’s ability along that line, grinned. “ Well, it isn’t at all funny getting back, I can tell you that!”

“ What happened to you, anyway?” de-

manded Joyce, who was nothing if not blessed with persistence.

" Why—I—I don't believe anything ——"

" Oh, you go to olly-doddle! You—Baby, is that small cyclone Kits? Well, Kits, when did you get home? "

" Morning," Kits panted, coming to a standstill on the Lancy walk. Her short gold curls tumbled all over her head, and her eyes were as blue as the sky. Altogether, the combination reminded Phyllis of one of the princesses in the great book of fairy tales her grandfather had once given her.

" Will you come and get Comfie? " Kits was inquiring, an anxious little note in her voice.

" Comfie? Where is he? Don't tell me you and he are in another scrape? "

" He's up in the cherwy-twee. We comed over to see Jerwy's garden, but Comfie wunned! Tommy's digging up Jerwy's garden, and he threw a stone at Comfie and barked just like a dog! And Comfie wunned. And now he wants to get down! "

" Oh, if that's all, why he's all right," said

Joyce comfortably. "I thought perhaps you'd dropped him down the well again."

"Cats were made to go up and down trees just as you go up and down stairs," Baby added reasonably, as she and Joyce moved up the walk.

"I'll go with you, Kits," Phyllis offered; "where is he?"

Comfie was perched precariously at the extreme end of a very slender limb of the cherry-tree at the edge of the garden. Phyllis looked at him doubtfully. The tree was too slender for her to climb, but the branch was much too high for her to reach.

"Let me —— If Jerry's home ——"

"Jerwy doesn't like Comfie very much," Kits informed her. "I'll tell you, Phylwis: you lift me up that twee and then I'll push that bwanch down and you can get Comfie!"

Phyllis eyed her dubiously. "Can you climb?"

"'Course I can climb!" responded Kits indignantly, "you lift me up that twee and see, Phylwis! Jerwy lets me lots!"

The child was surprisingly light, but Phyl-

lis held her breath. It seemed to her the branch was beginning to bend pretty perilously. She ought to have gotten a ladder, but she wasn't used to rescuing kittens, and she hadn't had the least idea how to go to work. Suppose that branch broke —— But she jumped and caught the end. Comfie was just out of her reach, and he backed a few inches nearer Kits and clung stubbornly to the branch he had been so anxious to leave two seconds before, and humped his back at his rescuer. Phyllis took a last desperate grip just as Kits, up in the tree, slid farther forward and tried to reach him from her end. Just what happened after that Phyllis could never quite remember, but, all at once, Kits and Comfie and Phyllis Lancy were all sliding to the ground in one heap. For a minute, none of them had breath enough to do anything. Then Kits scrambled to her feet and giggled.

“Wasn't that fun?” she inquired of Phyllis as she reached for Comfie, “just like a nelevator!”

Phyllis shook the dirt and leaves out of her eyes, and gasped.

“Well—I—I hope Comfie isn’t hurt?”

The gold curls shook. “No, he isn’t, it’s just his nerves, you see.”

“Oh!” said Phyllis weakly. Were all babies like that, so funny and dear and wise that it made you want to take them up and love them *hard*? Phyllis had never known a baby before, and even Comfie—Mr. Lancy despised cats, and Miss Patterson hadn’t liked dogs in the least. The only pets Phyllis had ever had were her two goldfish, and goldfish do not put their heads in your hand and look up at you as if they loved you, and purr the way Comfie was doing to Kits!

“Do you suppose it would hurt his nerves if I rubbed his little painted nose?”

Comfie did not appear to mind.

“He likes you,” said Kits in the tone of one conferring a great compliment, “he likes you, Phylwis.”

It was silly, but suddenly Phyllis had to swallow something in her throat. “I’m—I’m so glad! But who told you my name was Phyllis?”

“Jerwy. He said you were lonely, and I

must come see you. And I'm Kits. My whole big name is Kaserine Elsbef Saunders, but they coundn't say *that* evey day, so they say 'Kits.' And Comfie's name is 'Comfort Kit,' but he doesn't know it. Jerwy named him."

"That's too bad," laughed Phyllis, "too bad he doesn't know his 'big' name, I mean, but Comfie is a pretty nice one, I think. Where do you live, honey?"

"Over there," Kits pointed to the large house, directly opposite the Lancy home, which had been closed since Phyllis had been in Parkview. "We've been 'way. We just got back. Isn't it nice and big? It hasn't got a gar-den like Jerwy's, though," she added regretfully. "I like Jerwy's gar-den. Jerwy put a sfwing in it for me, and Billy and I play in it. Those twees are just wight when you play In-di-an. Comfie's a bear then, but Jerwy doesn't like him to be in his gar-den so vewy much. He ate a hydwanga-twee once. Jerwy didn't like him at all then."

"Ate a *hydranga*, child?" Phyllis stared at the remarkable kitten. "Are you sure?"

The curls bobbed. "Yes! That one! Jerwy

put a bandwage on it, and it got well. Jerwy knows a lot of fings!”

A clear sweet whistle floated over into the garden. Phyllis thought it was a bluebird, but Kits knew better.

“That’s Muddie! I guess she wants me to help her now.” She tucked Comfie competently under her arm, head first. “Good-bye, Phylwis.” And then she made the remark which made Phyllis her abject slave forever. “I like you best-er than Joy.”

It was not funny to Phyllis. The garden whirled around her. And suddenly she found herself gathering both the Comfort Kits into her arms and holding them very tightly. Kits didn’t seem to object, but, after a moment, she gently disentangled herself.

“Comfie doesn’t like to be sqweezed, ’cept when I do it,” she explained.

“Wise Comfie!” laughed Phyllis.

Her eyes were very soft as she watched Kits disappear into the house opposite. No baby had ever put her soft little arms about her neck before. Phyllis was suddenly very, very glad she had come to Parkview.

Joyce and Baby were in the kitchen making Joyce's favorite sea-foam candy. Joyce was very particular about her sea-foam. It was the one time when she didn't talk, Jerry said, and she had just reached the critical stage when Phyllis made her appearance. At sight of her cousin, Joyce nearly dropped the very sticky spoon she held poised over the pan. "Phyllis Lancy! What have you been doing to yourself?"

Phyllis laughed. "The—the Comfort Kits slid out of the cherry-tree," she explained, "that's all."

Baby began to laugh, but Joyce still looked puzzled. "*The* Comfort Kits? Comfie's singular—very singular, according to Kits, but he isn't plural!"

"There's Kits," Phyllis pointed out.

"Oh. O-h!" Joyce turned quickly back to her neglected sea-foam. "Why didn't you remind me, Baby?" She did deft things to the pan before she set it on the table and began to beat. "Kits isn't such a comfort! She's forever getting into scrapes! Used to run away all the time, and once, at Sallie Martin's

birthday-party, Kits got so excited when they were playing hide-and-seek that she turned the key in the door and then couldn't turn it back again, and Mrs. Martin had to get her out of the window. It was an up-stairs one, too, of course. Nobody but Kits would have thought of doing such a thing. Remember it, Baby?"

Baby nodded. "And she and Billy smashed Mr. Carpenter's hot-bed glass this winter. Kits said they were playing 'Firemens.' It was her idea, of course. No, I wouldn't call her a comfort, Phyl."

"Jerry calls her the neighborhood tonic," added Joyce. "Well, how did you like her, Phyl?"

"I *loved* her."

Joyce nodded sagely. "Thought you would. Kits is a spoiled child, though. All only children are, I've noticed."

Phyllis wisely let this pass, though she saw the mischief-imps in Baby's eyes. She sat down at the opposite side of the table. "Is it almost done, Joy? I heard Francie and Emmie talking about your sea-foam yesterday."

"Um—I don't—know," Joyce always sounded important when she was making her own special sea-foam. "By the way, did you notice her hair? What color is it?"

"I think," Phyllis hesitated a little, "I think it's something like a bed of goldenrod with the late afternoon sun shining on it."

Joyce put down her spoon to stare at her cousin in blank amazement. "Bed of goldenrod—with—the late—afternoon sun shining on it!" she repeated. "You must be a poet, Phyl!"

But later, when Joyce had gone with Baby to the Parkview Library, and Phyllis was in her favorite fireplace corner, she began to wonder about several things. Jerry called Kits a tonic, and Kits had said Jerry had told her about Phyllis.

She did not have to wonder long. Jerry himself came in to look over the afternoon mail the postman had just brought.

"Been out to the garden to-day?" he inquired casually.

There was only one thing to do when Jerry Lancy looked at you with that half-quizzi-

cal light in his blue eyes, and Phyllis did it. She looked at him until an answering light danced into her own. "Yes," she said. "Everything was doing beautifully; and— Doctor Lancy ——"

"Yes?"

"I like your tonics very much, Doctor Lancy," said the quiet voice from the chimney-seat.

CHAPTER X

FIRE MAIDEN

“WHERE are all those cunning little pads you had, Phyl?” Joyce demanded that evening. “They were just the things for algebra—ugh!—homework.”

“For your evening duel with that subject, don’t you mean?” her brother inquired gently. Joyce turned her back on him.

“They’re in my desk up-stairs, Joy,” Phyllis answered. “I’ll get you one.”

“I’ll come, too!” announced her cousin, gathering up her books. “It’ll be quieter up there!”

She accepted the pad and retired to perch on the foot of Phyllis’ bed, where, after several minutes of wiggling, she opened her algebra with a long sigh and picked up her pencil. Phyllis, in the cosy chair, picked up hers, also. But, although Phyllis frowned over several

problems, they were not algebraical ones. The "Campaign Outline" envelope had tumbled out of its pigeonhole when she reached in for Joyce's pad. Phyllis was remembering the contents of that long and slender envelope. Her Campaign had certainly had a slightly inauspicious beginning, but then, Phyllis reasoned philosophically, you couldn't expect to win every skirmish.

Oh, it was so awfully different from what she had dreamed, back in the old Lancy house! Oh, the girls were nice, *all* of them, even Dara Knight who had first called her an Icicle and then "Her Lancyness!" She liked the funny things they said, and the surprising ways they had of entertaining each other, and the clever ways they knew to make things out of nothing at all, even though sometimes, when she was with them, she felt very small and ignorant and insignificant and, as if, as Joy had said, she really did belong in the kindergarten! And Phyllis couldn't help wishing they would like her a tiny bit, in return. She stifled a sigh. She had been at Hillcrest almost a month, and still seemed an outsider.

More than one morning while she was dressing, she had gathered her courage together to try and tell Joy how strange and eager and friend-hungry she was, and how much she wanted to learn to talk and act like the rest of Hillcrest girls, and then at sight of her cousin's teasing eyes, her courage evaporated.

When girls in books were new and embarrassed and shy at school, all they had to do was to mend somebody's glove, or paint a chair for the president of the senior class, or save a basket-ball game from failure at the last minute, to be liked forever afterward! But Phyllis *wasn't* in a book, and things didn't seem to work that way with her. When she had tried to help Ellinor Sherwin that morning, her offer had been refused.

Phyllis had passed Ellinor and another girl in the corridor. Ellinor was a sophomore, and, next to Joy and Carol, Phyllis thought her the nicest girl she had ever seen. She had caught her saying: "Wish I had time to run down to the library and see if that scamp Francie has returned that book on Indian Art!"

Phyllis had hesitated, and then turned back.

“Ellinor—Ellinor, I—I heard about the book. I’m going past the library now. Sha’n’t I ask Miss Kent about it, and reserve it for you?”

“Oh, no, thank you, Phyllis,” Ellinor answered indifferently. “I’ll probably find a minute to go myself. I’d much rather you didn’t bother.”

“I wish you had let her!” Sally’s regretful voice came back to Phyllis. “Think of the Icicle’s offering!”

But—the Icicle sat very straight in the cosy green chair, a light of battle in her eyes, the Lancy chin raised to that firm little angle. Jerry had said icicles could melt!

“Joy!”

“U-um?” Joyce was scowling at her page.

“Do you belong to the Girl Scouts or the Camp Fire Girls or anything like that?”

“Why—what——” Joyce was not used to having sudden questions fired at her. It was usually Joyce who did the firing!

“Do you?”

“Why—yes, of course I do! There’s a Camp Fire at school; I thought I told you about it.”

"What do you have to do to join?"

"Why—you have to know the President, and your Governor, and learn the law of the fire, and a few things like that. Why? Do you want to join?"

"Yes, I might. Do you suppose Miss Jackson would have any objection if I watched basket-ball practice?"

"Why ——" Joyce said "why" for the fourth time. It was the only thing she could think of to say. Phyllis was taking her rôle. "I don't suppose so. You could ask her. Why? Do you want to play?"

Phyllis nodded.

The next afternoon Phyllis went home alone. Joyce and Baby had stayed to play tennis with Francie and Dara, and it wasn't especially interesting to simply stand by and watch them! She would have asked them to try and teach her, but, although she opened her mouth to do it at least three times, she couldn't get the words out, not with Dara listening. What there was about Dara she never could decide, but whenever she looked at her, Phyllis had the uncomfortable feeling of being about

the size of an ant! No, she couldn't ask them to teach her, not before Dara!

“I'll go down to the brook,” she thought, wandering away from the tennis-courts. Hillcrest's brook was still as lovely as it had been when the other Phyllis had studied beside it, as it bubbled out of two little springs, and went laughing past a clump of willow-trees. But Phyllis didn't get all the way down through the sloping meadow to-day, because, as she stood beside the orchard-gate, she saw another girl crossing the little bridge, and the other girl was Carol. Phyllis still had a very sore spot in her heart over Carol. She had had a very bad ten minutes one day trying to apologize for her behavior of the other morning. Carol had listened very sweetly, although Phyllis discovered afterward that she had had just half an hour to reach the train she was to take to the city with a teacher, and, at the end, she had smiled and held out her hand.

“Don't say anything more about it, Phyllis, and don't think about it.”

But Phyllis, wistfully watching her turn back up-stairs—and she had found that Carol

had the tower room that had been her mother's—still had the little ache in her heart. And, although Carol smiled at her and spoke, it wasn't—well, it wasn't the same Carol who had perched beside her on the gymnasium locker on her first day at Hillcrest. And Joyce must have seen something, for, one day, she asked: " Haven't squabbled with Carol, have you? "

" Oh—*no!* "

" Well, I wouldn't advise you to. She's a darling, but if Lady Elizabeth offered a prize for temper and pride, Carol'd get it. Ellinor had a little scrap with her last year, and, for two whole terms, Carol never knew Ellinor was in the school."

And Carol was the girl she had been dreaming about, even before she came to Hillcrest! And she loved her so!

Phyllis stood irresolutely by the little rail gate, then she turned back and went on down Hillcrest Avenue, bitterly ashamed for having been a coward twice that afternoon. Kits and Comfie and Billy Robbins were playing " Indian " under the trees in " Jeremiah's

Pride.” Aunt Margaret was out. Phyllis didn’t want to read, and she didn’t want to write letters—although she owed one to Miss Patterson. Finally she took up the racquet Jerry had given her, and a ball, and went out to play a game with the garage-door.

Mrs. Saunders found her playing it when she called for the Comfort Kits.

“Is it an interesting game?”

Phyllis jumped. “Why—oh—I suppose you think it’s awfully funny I don’t play, up at Hillcrest,” the soft color flamed into her cheeks, “but you see there were four of them this afternoon, and they can all play splendidly, and I—I don’t know anything about it. It’s a shame to ask them to stop and teach me.”

Mrs. Saunders nodded, her eyes understanding.

“Of course it would be. But there’s no one to play with *me*, and I love tennis! I wish I could play it in winter! Would you mind coming over and playing with me? It would be fun to teach you!”

Phyllis’ anxious eyes searched hers.

" Really? "

" Really! You can come five times a week, if you want to. I never can get enough! "

Phyllis laughed excitedly. " Oh, I'll come! "

That next week was a busy one for Phyllis. She was studying tennis as hard as she studied French or algebra—and liked it much better, even though the tennis made her sore and stiff at first; and she was learning the things Miss Nita Farendale, Guardian of Hillcrest's Camp Fire Group, had said were necessary to know before the next meeting of the Camp Fire.

But, on the afternoon before the meeting, she walked home very soberly. There had been a collision in the domestic science class. Phyllis had been too preoccupied with her soup to notice Edna Ray's blind rush. Edna had picked up a pot of potatoes without a holder, and had run into Phyllis " head-on," little Doran Meade observed afterward. Edna's screams brought Miss Clay and a dozen girls to her rescue, but it never occurred to any of them that the steaming soup might have splashed over the hand that stirred it. And Phyllis

had simply set her teeth and said nothing, but, by the time she reached home, there was enough fire in her hand to have cooked Edna's potatoes without any other help!

"What makes you so funny?" asked Joyce. "Are you scared about to-night? You needn't be; this isn't a secret society."

"No," said Phyllis.

"Then—you passed all your tests, didn't you?"

"No," said Phyllis again, simply because Joy seemed to expect her to say something.

"You *didn't*? Which one was it?"

"What? Oh—I just don't feel like talking, Joy."

"Well, of all the cool cucumbers I ever saw ——!" exploded Joyce.

Aunt Margaret smiled at them as she opened the door. "We're going to have chocolate pie with whipped cream in honor of Phyllis' joining—why, Phyllis-child, what is it?" Aunt Margaret had given Phyllis' hand a loving squeeze, to which the burns didn't take at all kindly. Phyllis was doing her best with a miserably-wet handkerchief when Jerry ap-

peared on the scene. Jerry took one look at the handkerchief and produced a spotless, comfortably-large one of his own and offered it to her. "How did you get such a pretty thing?"

Phyllis told him.

"Why didn't Miss Jackson attend to it?"

"I—I didn't tell anybody."

"And there are people who say girls can't keep a secret! Don't you know you ought to share interesting things, Phyl? I don't know whether you deserve a Carnegie medal or a spanking for keeping this to yourself! So there were too many fingers in the pie?"

Phyllis shook her head. "No, too many cooks spilled the broth."

"They seem to have done the job thoroughly," Jerry commented. "Well, it's just the kind of night to have a nice, cosy evening at home. It almost feels like snow!"

Phyllis sat up straight. "I'm going to school to-night to join the Camp Fire Girls."

Jerry smiled gently. It was lucky Phyllis had never been his patient before, or she might have been daunted by that smile.

“ You’re sure you want to go to-night? ”

“ I said I’d be there,” said Phyllis, as if that settled the question.

But, at quarter of eight, Phyllis wouldn’t have cared if the Hillcrest Camp Fire Girls had never met again, and when she stood in the now familiar hall with Joy and a few other day-pupils, her throat throbbing as much as her hand did, she wished she had yielded to the temptation to stay home. Dara, coming downstairs in her ceremonial gown, looked at her with a slightly amused look in her black eyes. “ Well, Miss Phyl Lancy, are you going to slip into our merry little circle to-night? And are you scared? ”

Dara saw the indescribable sudden lift of Phyllis’ chin, the lift she had nicknamed “ the Lancy Tilt.” “ No,” said Phyllis.

“ Lucky Phyl! ” Dara laughed. “ Oh, here’s Betty! You’re the other novitiate, aren’t you, Bettikins? Scared? ”

Betty, whom Phyllis knew as the mischief-maker of the sophomore class, and who had looked anything but frightened the minute before, immediately drew her mouth into the

most dismal droop, coaxed a fleeting look of fright into her eyes, and responded in the most melancholy of voices: " Oh, I am—indeed, indeed I am! Wh-what a-are you going to do with me, D-D-Dara? "

Dara put her arm through the shivering " novitiate's " and giggled. " Going to punish you for all your sins. Come along. "

Phyllis went also, but she went with lagging feet. Why did she always have to say the wrong thing? Was Joy right? Had she begun too late? It did seem as if she'd never learn to behave as other girls did!

But once within the little room set aside for the Camp Fire Girls, she began to forget—she liked the sight of these soft-footed, long-robed girls gathering about Miss Nita, and she felt a lump—but it was a happy one—in her throat as she watched the lighting of the three candles and listened to the repeating of the candle songs. To the others, it might be old, but Phyllis thought it was the most beautiful thing she had ever seen. And, as she stood listening to the girls' voices repeating the fire-chant after Carol had lighted the bundle of wood in

the tiny fireplace, she wondered if it would ever sound old to her.

“ Burn, fire, burn,
Flicker, flicker, flame,
Whose hand above this blaze is lifted
Shall be with magic touch engifted
To warm the hearts of lonely mortals ——”

Phyllis caught her breath. “ Shall be with magic touch engifted!”

“ Whoso shall stand by this hearthstone
Flame fanned
Shall never, never stand alone.
Whose house is dark and bare and cold,
Whose house is cold,
This is his own.
Flicker, flicker, flame,
Burn, fire, burn.”

It was then that Phyllis lighted a candle for herself, the candle of a great desire that she might possess the magic touch to “ warm the hearts of lonely mortals.” It wasn't for herself now, but surely there must be other people who were as lonely and diffident and proud as she was herself! If only she could find them,

and then have the "magic touch" to warm their hearts when she did! Phyllis held out her hands to the fire in the half-darkness, and vowed that, when she did find them, they should have all the love and sympathy and understanding and help Phyllis Lancy had to give.

"Well, did you like it?" Joyce asked as they snuggled together in the car on their way home. (Uncle Rob had come after them.)

"Yes!" said Phyllis softly. *Like* it?

"You'll have to choose a name, now," Joyce pursued, "something you'd like to be, you know."

Phyllis smiled into the darkness.

"Whose hand above this blaze is lifted
Shall be with magic touch engifted
To warm the hearts of lonely mortals ——"

"I—I have chosen," she said a little shyly.

"You *have*?" Joy sat up. "Why, it took *me* more than a month! I had an awful time! What is it?"

"Fire Maiden."

"Fire Maiden," Joyce repeated, "that's—"

not—bad, but why did you pick on that, Phyl?”

“Whose hand above this blaze is lifted ——”

Phyllis laughed. “Oh, I like it, and, besides, don't you think it's rather appropriate just now?”

CHAPTER XI

HILLCREST HAS A SURPRISE

“IF,” announced Joyce pedantically, tumbling her books down on the little porch table, “if *I* were the weather-man, I’d make it a Medes and Persians rule *not* to send hot weather during Examination Week! Sit down, Baby, I’ll go see if Mumsie’s got anything nice enough to make us forget those horrid old kings!”

“I wish she *was* the weather-man!” Baby sighed. Baby didn’t mind Examination Week or hot weather, if they came separately. It was the combination which disturbed her. “I think it was horrid of summer to swoop down on us this week! Oh, Phyl, was ‘Bonnie Prince Charlie’ Charles the Second, do you think?”

“I—don’t think—so. Why?”

“Well, I think I put him down that way in

my history exam. this afternoon, that's all. If he wasn't, I'll find out when it comes back."

"I'm awfully afraid I mixed my Williams of Orange!" said Phyllis regretfully, "there were so many of them, and they all married Marys!"

"Oh, you're different," was Baby's careless rejoinder, "you really like those awful creatures! Oh, hello, here's Kits! Well, have you a nice cool spot around anywhere?"

Kits was quite unconcerned with the heat. Her little muslin dress was thin, her straight little legs bare. She didn't bother to answer Baby's question, but she wanted something herself.

"Don't you want to come swfing, Phyllis?" she invited. "It's perfectly lovely by the swfing!"

Baby groaned, but then, Kits hadn't chosen to slip her cool little hand into Baby's and smile at her as engagingly as she had at Phyllis. If she had, perhaps Baby would have found herself crossing the hot lawn to the swing, even though she had declared a minute before that she was going to sit still for a week.

Kits' smile could be very engaging, if the occasion required it.

And when Phyllis was in the swing under the cherry-tree at the edge of "Jeremiah's Pride," the heat was forgotten.

The swaying poppies, the lovely roses, the stately lilies didn't object in the least to the surprise summer had given Parkview. Phyllis wondered if "Jeremiah's Pride" could possibly grow more beautiful than it was now, with the deep blue sky above it and the butterflies fluttering about. And then she suddenly decided she would feel that way about it in the middle of winter! The garden seemed to be made that way.

Kits was waiting by the swing. "Now, Phylwis!"

"Ready? Hold tight! Go!"

There was always something in the quick rush through the air that filled Phyllis with exultation. Higher, higher, the long swoop downward, then up again, up and up and up, Kits' shrill screams of delight blending with the wind in her ears, on and on, the garden advancing—receding.

“ Sing—Phylwis—please—sing the one the wind told you the ovver day! ”

“ Swing—high! Swing—low!
 Away—we—go!
 First—fast! Then—slow!
 Over the green grass sea,
 Under—the—friendly—tree,
 Swing—we! ”

It did seem almost as if the wind—or the swing—or the garden had sung that song to her the other day! And the music, too, if it was really music, for Phyllis had never made a song before, although her grandfather had insisted she study harmony as well as singing. But the other day when she and Kits had been swinging, and the sky had been so blue, and Kits' golden head so close to hers, and the swing so much like a magic ship —— Lower now, slower, more slow, coming to a panting, breathless stop at the edge of the hot beautiful garden with the silence broken only by the sounds of the locusts.

“ Let's—let's do it right over again! ” cried Kits.

" Please wait—wait till I've got breath—enough!" Phyllis panted.

" Yes, now you're hotter than you were before," said Joyce discouragingly. " Didn't you know we were here?" as Phyllis jumped. " Baby wanted a rose, so —— Flying's all very well, I suppose, but when you stop—and how you can swing like that and sing at the same time—where'd you get that ' green grass sea ' thing anyhow?"

" The wind told it to her the ovver day!" Kits cried proudly. " Don't you just love it, Joy?"

" The wind told ——" Joyce began, while the color flamed into her cousin's cheeks. Then she made a low curtsey. " Phyl, I *told* you you must be a poet! But—Baby, how do you treat poets? I never had one in the family before, and I don't know how to act!"

" She knows anover one!" Kits informed them,

" The wind blowef them, each white-cloud
boat ——"

Phyllis gave a vigorous push with her slip-

pered toe. "Hold fast, Kits!" She took her hand off the rope long enough to wave it to the other two girls, and then bent her energies on giving Kits the longest and highest swing that insatiable young lady had ever had.

When they finally let the swing sway idly on a gently-moving rope the sun was lower, sending long, dark shadows across the garden, and shining deep into the peonies' hearts. Phyllis envied the peonies. They looked so cool, and sweet: the soft, exquisite pink ones, with their tiny, white, curling centers, and the great velvety red ones, and the fragrant white ones, as they stood between the fleurs-de-lis and the big and little rose-bushes; and the hollyhocks looked as if they were tall old towers with a fair princess looking down from each window at the pansy velvet carpet.

"I like Jerwy's pansies," announced Kits suddenly; "they's got little faces."

"Why!" cried Phyllis, surprised at the child's fancy, "I know a song—but I found this one in a book,—please be sure and remember *that*, Kits!—that says that! Listen!"

Phyllis' voice rose clear and soft and sweet

on the quiet garden air. Even Madame Felori had never heard her sing as she sang the simple verses now.

“ Dear little faces,
Sober or gay,
Speak to my loved one far away,
Speak to my loved one far away,
Bid her think of me.”

Baby was gone when Phyllis returned to the house, and Aunt Margaret was laying the little wicker table out on the secluded porch. “ It’s hot inside,” she explained to Phyllis, “ and I love an excuse to eat out here! Joy, would you mind getting the green bowl from the bookcase and cutting some flowers for it? ”

“ Jerry anywhere around? ” Joyce inquired cautiously. “ Ever since that tulip affair—all right, I’ll go.”

Phyllis watched her cousin as she deftly arranged the lilies-of-the-valley and the sweet peas, snipping a too-long stem here and an obstreperous leaf there. Joyce was handling the flowers as Phyllis had seen her grandfather handling her crayons when she was little. He

said that several of the Lancys had been promising artists, and he had tried to teach Phyllis' fingers to follow their example, but Phyllis' fingers had been disappointingly clumsy. But Joy's might not be! Joy might be able to make a paint brush behave as it ought! Phyllis didn't know why she had never noticed it before, but somehow they looked as if they could. And she remembered that Joy had done the green room!

"Joy," she said suddenly, "do you ever paint?"

Joyce almost looked a little startled.

"Well, I believe I did paint a chair once, when I was little. Jerry was painting the roof of a hut the boys had, and he forgot to put the pail and brush away. The family didn't appreciate the work of art, though. They didn't preserve it. Oh, yes, I did the things in your room."

Phyllis laughed. "No, I mean, really paint: pictures."

"Why ——" but Phyllis thought her cheeks were pink, "most of our pictures are painted already."

Once Phyllis' suspicions were aroused, they were not so easily allayed. She remembered the papers Joyce had so unceremoniously snatched up from the library table when Phyllis had accidentally moved some books a few days before, and she remembered the little water-color pictures of Hillcrest hanging in Aunt Margaret's room, and there was something else —— "But you're in Miss Marstead's art class, aren't you?"

"Oh, yes. Lady Elizabeth makes you take either that or music, and drawing isn't as noisy as music is."

Phyllis tried to ignore this shot. "Won't you show me some of your pictures?"

"Oh, yes. I've got heaps of snapshots somewhere around that you haven't seen."

Phyllis had a struggle with herself and laughter. Asking Joyce questions was like firing a toy gun at Hillcrest's stone boundary wall!

"Week of Torture nearly over?" Jerry asked as he slipped into his seat.

"Yes. My head's a merry-go-round, I think, and I'm perfectly sure I said Peter the

Great was King of Patagonia, and that the cube root was something that belonged to the ancient Romans. But it's over now, and to-morrow Miss Nita's going to take the girls who are lucky enough to belong to her Camp Fire for a hike up High Hill. Is it going to be any cooler, Weather Prophet?"

"I think it is. I think we'll have a storm either to-night or to-morrow."

"Oh *no!*" Joyce wailed, clasping the sugar-bowl tightly to her. "Oh no! That would *spoil* it. *Please* don't say it's going to rain until to-morrow night, Jerry!"

"Anything to oblige. 'It isn't going to rain until to-morrow night.' Don't spill *all* the sugar, Joy. I'd like a teaspoonful."

"It *mustn't* rain!" Joyce chattered over the dishes. "It—it *mustn't!* High Hill is the awfulest thing to climb anyway, and if it rains—we've worked hard enough to deserve a celebration!"

Phyllis agreed with her. Cuddled in a corner of the gently-swinging porch hammock, when Joyce had gone down-town to match a spool of silk her mother needed, Phyllis

thought over the past week. It wasn't exactly what you could call an easy one. Baby was right. Summer *had* " swooped " down upon Parkview that year, bringing with it dry, burning days, not followed by cooling nights, but nights of intense, almost suffocating heat. Phyllis leaned her head wearily against the hammock-side. She *was* tired. Summer never was a favorite season with Phyllis, but she had never before known the joys of wondering if you had passed an examination you had taken, when your mind was in a wild muddle from a furious headache. Phyllis had nearly reached the merry-go-round stage herself. But, this afternoon,—Phyllis laughed softly at the memory.

The girls—there were plenty of them at Hillcrest, but Phyllis always thought of Joyce and Emmie and Baby and Francie and Dara as " the girls "—had gathered gratefully, when classes and examinations were over, under what Emmie paraphrased as " the spreading willow-tree " beside the brook, to express their opinions of the weather, Lady Elizabeth, and examinations.

“ I don’t see,” complained Emmie, “ why exams. can’t be held in the fall! ”

“ Autumn, Emmie dear.”

“ Harvest season, child.”

“ The crown of the year, Miss Batton, but never, *never* ‘ Fall! ’ ”

Emmie preserved her dignity. “ You sound like Miss Lyton,” she said, “ and ‘ quotation confesses inferiority,’ she says so herself.”

Dara looked troubled. “ Girls,” she asked solemnly, “ do you suppose it’s the heat? Emmie’s actually got a quotation right! ”

“ Given it correctly,” Emmie suggested meditatively.

“ It might be,” agreed Francie, “ it might be responsible for anything. I can’t think what else would make Dara look so worried, or Phyl Lancy chew a pencil nearly in two.”

“ That’s stage-fright,” Joyce had contributed. “ She’s scared she’ll fail in things. It would be awful, too; she’s got the Lancy Honor to uphold, you know.”

“ You needn’t worry,” Baby advised Phyllis, “ it doesn’t hurt, really.”

“ Phyl hasn’t had your experience in flunk-

ing, Baby," Dara said pleasantly; " it must take a little practice to flunk gracefully."

" I wish you hadn't said that!" groaned Francie. " I was trying to forget it! I've got to go and do it. Anybody coming along to help me?"

" What? Flunk?"

" No, child, I can do it easier alone."

" Do you really need help to do that, Francie?"

Francie glared at them. " You're not being funny. I mean, will any of you come over to the tennis-court and help me practise for that Hillcrest-Steadman game?"

Joyce sank back into the tree; Baby leaned her head against it; Dara made herself more comfortable in the grass.

" Don't all offer at once, please."

" We won't, honey."

Francie surveyed them as coldly as the weather permitted. " Would you like me to win that game?"

" Certainly! We want *you* to win it, of course!"

" I'll play—if you'll have me,—Francie."

Dara said "Ouch!" as she bumped her head in her efforts to see the hesitating Phyllis who had risen to the emergency. She said afterward it was worth the bump to see Francie's face.

"Why—Phyl—you needn't bother. It doesn't matter."

"Of course, I know I can't really *play*, not like you and Dara, but I do know a little about it, and if you really want to practise ——"

Francie caught the signal in Dara's eyes. "Well, at least you're not a slacker."

Phyllis' knees trembled suddenly, as she selected her racquet and took her place opposite Francie. Francie was Hillcrest's champion, and she—oh, she had been silly to offer! But—Francie was waiting. Phyllis' head moved ever so slightly. Her wrist gave the peculiar turn Mrs. Saunders had taught her. Francie leaped. The ball danced back towards Phyllis. Phyllis, to her disgust, missed it. Perhaps that was because, just then, out of the corner of her eye, she saw three figures stealthily crossing the campus. At any rate, although Francie won the set, Phyllis gave her

a few surprises. Francie might be quick, but Phyllis had a steady wrist and some puzzling strokes, and the three spectators discovered she wasn't afraid to run.

"Who taught you, Phyl?" Francie demanded as they dropped wearily under the willow-tree's shade at last. "Oh! This being a school champion isn't any fun! Want to try it, Phyl?"

Phyllis laughed. She was tired, but her eyes were happy. "I'll leave that to you for a year or two," she said.

"But I thought Joy said you couldn't play at all!"

"Mrs. Saunders taught me. I—I didn't like to ask you to bother."

"Mrs. Saunders!"

"Mrs. Saunders! Phyllis Lancy, you lucky thing, do you know she was the champion of this State for two years? No wonder you play so well! My dear Miss Lancy, I'll play with you again!"

And Phyllis, half-asleep in the Lancy hammock, smiled hazily. "I mustn't forget. It's too late to do it to-night, but I'll do it to-

morrow.” Which didn’t refer to playing tennis with Francie Lang.

Phyllis was at her desk the next morning when Joyce popped her head in the door. “What’s the matter?” she demanded. “You jumped. I saw you! You’d better hurry. Miss Nita wants us at school at ten, you know, and the sandwiches aren’t finished.”

“I’ll be down,” Phyllis promised, “but I want to finish a letter first.”

She looked down at the sheet of paper her hand had been covering. If Joyce had seen *that* address, what would she have said?

“Chairman of the Campaign for Improving
Phyllis Lancy,
Dear Madam ——”

Phyllis giggled. “It would have been interesting,” she said, as she took up her pen.

“Dear Madam:

“I beg to submit the following report to you, as Chairman of the Campaign for Improving Phyllis Lancy. She has learned tennis.

“P. S. L.”

Having written the final flourish of the "L," she deposited the "letter" in a businesslike envelope at the bottom of her drawer. Joyce's comments might be interesting, but ——

CHAPTER XII

“ THY THUNDER SHOWERS! ”

THE thermometer showed no inclination to drop, but Jerry's storm was nowhere in sight. The sky was a soft blue, right down to what Joyce called “ its edges,” and even Miss Farendale looked up at it contentedly.

“ It's hot, of course, but the road is mostly shady, and it's always lovely up on High Hill,” she confided to Phyllis. “ Here's your stock. Oh, you'll need it when we come to the hill! ”

Phyllis obediently took the long, slender, sturdy “ stock ” and set off in company with Emmie and Lucy. The sun *was* hot, but the grumbles Phyllis heard were cheerful ones. It was hard to believe that she, Phyllis Lancy, who had sat in her sheltered room wistfully wondering about other girls and what they did, was actually one of these khaki-middied and knickered girls, with their knapsacks of

lunch on their backs, their guiding "alpenstocks" in their hands, swinging along High Hill road with such an even, untiring gait! It *didn't* seem possible!

The road that had been broad at first narrowed, and had sharp turnings here and there. It was bordered by tall swaying grasses and, sometimes, Phyllis caught sight of an unusual bird which seemed to be singing either a welcome to the strangers invading his territory, or a signal of warning to his friends. High Hill itself began to rise very gradually, almost invitingly, at first, but Phyllis discovered that, if it was an invitation, High Hill changed its mind rather suddenly. High Hill might be only a hill, but it wasn't easy to climb! The path lay over stony places, by twisted paths, past bushes that caught at your clothes and hair, sometimes down, sometimes up, always bewildering, as if High Hill were saying: "You may be going to climb me, but you sha'n't say *I* gave you any encouragement! Do you want to go back?"

Phyllis did not want to go back, but she was slightly bewildered. She stood still to tie

the lace of her shoe and pick the wild black-berry-vine out of her hair, and watched the rest go scrambling over the wall of boughs and bushes sent across the path by the fiercest of the winter's storms.

She didn't blame Emmie and Lucy for not missing her when she dropped behind—they had all they could do to take care of themselves, and the rest had been too busy to notice her absence.

“Stuck?”

The voice was so sudden that it almost made Phyllis lose a precarious balance. “Oh!” she said faintly.

“Scare you? I'm sorry,” Dara apologized. “Miss Nita sent me back as a sort of guardian for your Lancyness, since you don't know all the pretty little ways High Hill has. Are you stuck over there?”

Now Phyllis had been very nearly ready to confess herself—well, stalled—a minute before, but the second Dara asked the question something within her refused to be stalled, although she had a sickening sensation when she looked either up or down!

" Here, this is the way. You're all right."

Phyllis stood still. Then she laughed. She admitted to herself it sounded a trifle queer, but it *was* a laugh, and she shook her head at Dara's proffered hand.

" No, thank you, Dara. It's fun! If I'm going to learn all High Hill's ' pretty little ways,' I can't begin any sooner! Did the rest of you have guides? Well, I'm one of you! If Miss Nita said so, you'll have to watch me, but I'll try not to get into mischief!"

" If you fall into one of these bushes, you'll think you've gotten into mischief!"

" Well, then I'll get out again!" Phyllis giggled. It really was funny, she was so scared about doing a thing the others hadn't minded at all. Perhaps it would have been wise to have accepted Dara's help—Phyllis set her teeth. No, sir! She was going to see this thing *through*, and she was going to do it *alone*! She stepped from her comparatively safe footing, down, down, down. Then she scrambled up. Up and down, down and up, past the barricade of boughs, where you had to test each stepping-place

carefully, over rocky places, where you turned corners with breath-taking abruptness, under arches so low you had to bend your head, Phyllis climbed, conscious of Dara's own sure feet beside her and Dara's cool eyes upon her. They didn't talk—nobody considers High Hill a place for conversation, but Phyllis knew Dara had seen how very frightened she had been at first, and tried desperately to be unconcerned over the matter. Once she did fall, and meekly submitted to Dara's helping hand. But oh, she had never even dreamed there was a place in the whole world that was so utterly lovely. The wonderful trees, lifting their arms high above her head, the sweet-smelling pine needles under her feet, the lovely flowers here and there, the rocks—— It made her feel for a few minutes as if she could just fling out her arms and love everybody in the world.

It seemed to her finally, however, that they had spent fully half a day following the others' trail, but it really was less than an hour before she and Dara caught up to them in a little clearing, making preparations for a camp luncheon, the fragrance of which turned the

already hungry Phyllis into something very ravenous.

"Are *you* really Phyllis Lancy?" asked Baby from a comfortable stone. "You don't look like her! You look —— Joy! Come here and tell us what Phyl looks like! You're good at description."

Phyllis sank to the ground, too tired to care what her looks were, but Joyce was obliging.

"You look as though you'd been making mud-pies with Kits," she said concisely.

To any one who knew Kits and her mud-pies, the description was adequate.

"Phyl is in a position to sing an ode to High Hill," observed Dara, strolling up. "' I love thy rocks and rills, Thy woods ——'"

"I am not!" contradicted Phyllis. "I haven't breath enough to sing one line, but—your High Hill is worth it!"

"And this isn't the top!" Carol turned from the contents of her knapsack to call. "It's the most gorgeous place I know! You can actually see over into three States from there! Wait until you get there this afternoon! It's a perfectly awful climb, but ——"

Phyllis was perfectly content to wait. She would have been quite satisfied to do that one thing all day, but having knelt to wash her face and hands at a cold little brook, and eaten, she rose when the rest did, and accepted Dara's guidance. She had caught a glimpse of herself in the brook, and wondered if, had they seen her, Miss Patterson or her grandfather would have recognized her! She grinned. She certainly didn't look like the Phyllis Lancy they knew!

That last mile *was* the hardest. Stones turned under Phyllis' feet, she missed protecting boughs, or they swept across her face; more than once, if it hadn't been for Dara's quick hand, she would have fallen, but when she did finally stand at the broad summit, with its two tall sentinel pines and carpet of mosses, and the little "Mountain House" just showing through the trees, she knew Carol had been right. High Hill repaid with interest those who had the courage to know its beauty! And it did deserve an Ode, but oh, she couldn't write it!

"And Mountain House is over there," Dara

interrupted her thoughts. "It's got a mirror, or it did have when I was up here before. You might be interested in it, Phyl."

"How did it happen to be built up here?" Phyllis, her dreams dispelled, was curious.

"Mr. McKensie had it built for Hillcrest girls. He thought it would teach us to climb." Dara grinned. "It did. And it's quite complete. It even has a medicine-chest and a work-basket. Don't you want to see it?"

Phyllis laughed out. "Especially the work-basket and the mirror? I want to see it all!"

It took longer to render first aid to Phyllis' clothes than she had thought it would, and, before they were finished, Baby was standing in the door. "Hear anything?"

There was an odd little note in her voice.

"Look at the sky!"

The sky did look odd. Great, heavy, low clouds seemed to be surging over it. The clouds were almost blue, a strange, ugly blue, mixed with grey and tinged with purple, with a queer orange light through them. There was a low, half-whistling sound, but it didn't exactly

sound like wind. It didn't sound, in fact, like *anything*.

“Miss Nita says there's going to be a storm.”

“No!” Dara was trying to sound sarcastic. “I am surprised! Does she really think so? It doesn't look ——” she broke off to gasp as a line of flame shot through the clouds, “look it. But if she says so, it really must be so. She knows!”

Dara knew, too. The whistling sound was plainer now, and the clouds nearer. The others were hurrying towards the little Mountain House, and they looked anything but joyful!

“It's because we've never seen them from High Hill before,” Miss Nita was explaining. “Nice Mr. McKensie, to build us Mountain House! Otherwise, we'd be like the ‘poor Babes in the Woods!’ Squeeze in, girls!”

“It—it wasn't fair of it to be so—so s-s-sudden!” chattered Joyce as a menacing roll of thunder broke over their heads. “It—it might have been g-gentlemanly enough to give us s-s-some warning! *Ow!*” She seized

the nearest thing to her, which happened to be Francie's knees. The combination of a brilliant flash of lightning and Joyce's sudden grasp upset Francie's nerves. She screamed.

" Oh, come, come!" Miss Nita spoke soothingly, " you're not hurt, Francie, nor Joy either. We'll laugh over this in an hour."

" I—I wish that hour was *now!*" wailed Baby. " I—I don't think I like High Hill in storms!"

" I *know* I don't!" Joyce gasped from between Francie's knees. " Oh-oh! *Listen!*"

" We're listening," Dara assured her grimly.

" It—it *was* a surprise," Carol was holding her hands tightly together, and the soft hint of laughter was missing from her voice.

" There were too many trees in the way for us to see it coming," Miss Nita explained. " People in Parkview must have seen it half an hour before we did."

" I wish *I* had seen it from there!" mumbled Joyce. " I—I wish I were there *now!*"

" Oh, well, you may be, in a few minutes," Dara offered consolingly. " I wouldn't be surprised if we blew down."

It was Baby who shrieked this time. “Be still, girls!” Miss Nita had to shout above the storm. “We’re all right. Think how many storms Mountain House has seen! Why, we’re having an adventure! To-morrow we’ll be proud of ourselves! Can’t we—can’t we do something to make us forget it? Can’t we sing?”

Phyllis wondered how any one could make a song heard above the angry roar of the thunder that followed upon the quick flares of orange lightning, or the steadily rising gale which swept the blinding rain against the little windows in such savage, gusts. She could never remember a storm like this, and even a little thunder-shower could terrify her! Just now her hands were clenched so hard together that they hurt. Sing? With Joyce huddled on the floor with her head in Francie’s lap; with Baby perched on the little old-fashioned bureau, her hand clutching Miss Nita’s shoulder; with Carol’s eyes wide in her white face; and Dara trying to check a scream as something went tearing and crashing through the air?

"We're *struck!*" went up a wail. "Oh, Miss Nita! We're *struck!*"

"A tree!" Miss Nita lifted her voice to answer, "only a tree!" She laughed. "Only yesterday Dara was wishing for a chance to be a heroine! Come, girls, do something! Sing! Sing hard! Let's begin with 'Hail, Columbia!' That's quite a loud one!"

She began it, and, after a second, Phyllis heard her own voice, queer and wavering, take it up. She was still frightened—her knuckles were growing white and her breath gave out in unexpected places, but Miss Nita had asked them to sing, and singing was one thing Phyllis could do well, even though hill-climbing wasn't. Phyllis didn't like to think of that downward trail!

One by one, the other girls followed her example. Afterward, they couldn't remember everything they had sung there in the half-dark, but suddenly Dara missed Phyllis' clear voice, and turned towards her questioningly. "What's the matter?"

"I was wondering——" Phyllis chuckled. "Miss Nita! I've got a new song! Listen!"

It wasn't a remarkable song, but with the stormy accompaniment it was effective and astonishing in its results.

“ Oh, beau-ti-ful for thun-der showers,
For fierce tor-rents of rain,
For am-ber wave of light-ning,
For thun-der-ing re-frain!
Oh, High Hill dear! Oh, High Hill dear!
I love thy rock-y bowers,
Each rock and rill that make me spill,
But most thy thun-der showers!”

“ Phyl Lancy!”

“ Did you make that up *yourself*? ”

“ That's *cute*!”

“ Let's sing it! How does it go? ‘ Oh, beautiful for thunder showers ’—you're right! —‘ For amber wave ——’ ”

“ That's wrong. The rain comes next. Sing it again, Phyl.”

So Phyllis sang it again and then again. The girls joined her the third time, and Phyllis had the strange sensation of hearing Hill-crest's girls sing and shout a song of hers until they were almost too hoarse to do much more than hum it.

“ Oh, beautiful for thunder showers,
For fierce torrents of rain,
For amber wave of lightning ——”

“ It isn't,” Miss Nita broke in suddenly;
“ it's beautiful for clearing skies just now.
Come out and see.”

There was a stampede for the door.
“ *O-ouch!* ” exclaimed Joyce, gingerly withdrawing a hastily implanted foot, “ it's w-wet! ”

“ Never mind the w-wet! ” Dara pushed past her.

The storm had passed. The threatening thunder-clouds were smoothed out into a grey veil lined with darker grey at one side of the sky, and out towards the west spread a clear sky of no especial color, only a clear brightness which filled the heavens and touched the wet grass and rocks with a wonderful light.

“ I'd—I'd like to paint that,” Carol said softly.

“ Why don't you? ” asked Francie. “ ‘ After the Storm ’ or ‘ Storm Clouds on High Hill ’ or ——”

Carol shook her head. “ It’s a Glory that has no name, but I wish—I was wise enough to do it just the same! ”

If ascending High Hill was a test to require skill, descending, even three hours after the storm, was an adventure! There were other trees down, now, lying, Joyce complained, “ like an Octopus ” across the twisting paths; boughs and bushes shook their full share of rain on the unlucky passer-by; stones were slippery. More than once Phyllis was glad of Dara’s sure footing and strong hands.

“ Is climbing—mountains—a Camp Fire test? ” she panted ruefully. “ If it is, I don’t believe I’ll ever pass it! ”

“ You’ve passed one test to-day, ” said Dara shortly, guiding her around a tree disobliging enough to stand squarely in the center of the trail, “ what more do you want? ”

“ Did I? ”

Dara threw her an almost disgusted look.

“ Oh, beautiful for thunder showers,
For fierce torrents of rain —— ”

chanted Baby behind them.

" I love thy rocky bowers,
Each rock and rill that make me spill ——"

Francie took it up.

And Lady Elizabeth, who had been anxious enough to drive to the foot of High Hill, heard her pupils come crashing through the wet branches singing:

" Oh, beautiful for thunder showers,
For fierce tor-rents of rain,
For am-ber wave of light-ning,
For thun-der-ing re-frain!
Oh, High Hill dear! Oh, High Hill dear!
I love thy rock-y bowers,
Each rock and rill that make me spill,
But most thy thun-der showers!"

CHAPTER XIII

AFTER VACATION

PHYLLIS spent most of the summer with her grandfather. She expected to be glad to be freed from the "girls'" half-tantalizing company, and was surprised to find that she missed them; and wondered more and more what they were doing, and eagerly read and re-read Joy's few-and-far-between letters—another person might not have called the scraps of notes Joyce sent "letters." Carol was staying on at Hillcrest during July. Some one in her family had scarlet fever. And Kits and Comfie had been in mischief as usual, a really disgraceful piece of work this time. She was on the Lancy porch now, waiting for a swing. Well, she wasn't going to get it!

That particular mail had brought two envelopes from Joyce. Phyllis stared at the second one in surprise before she opened it. Then she understood:

"DEAR FILIS:" said the straggling little writing,

"How are you? I want you to come and swing me! Have a good time. Comfie feels better. Do you love me? I love you.

"KITS."

If any one had happened to see that letter afterward, they would have found a tiny blister in the middle of it. It was very odd, but Phyllis was *homesick!* Homesick for the place where she had been so miserable! But even then she was surprised to find how very good it was to see Aunt Margaret again when, in late August, she came to do some shopping and take Phyllis back to Parkview. Phyllis had been restless that morning, and then she heard Aunt Margaret's voice in the hall. The next minute, astonished Mr. Lancy beheld a slender figure flying down the stairs and interrupting his half-finished greetings:

"Aunt Margaret! *Aunt Margaret!* Are you really here? Oh, I'm so glad to see you! I didn't know you were coming until day-after-to-morrow! Aunt Margaret——"

“*Phyllis!*” Mr. Lancy’s voice was decidedly surprised, but Aunt Margaret only laughed and held Phyllis closer.

“We’ve missed each other, haven’t we? Are you really glad to see me?”

“*Glad?*” Phyllis’ vocabulary failed her. Aunt Margaret said she had missed her!

Phyllis hadn’t thought, the winter before, that shopping-trips could be nicer than the ones she had taken with Miss Patterson, but she hadn’t known the joys of accompanying Aunt Margaret then! Aunt Margaret made a game of it, stopping to look at shiny buckles and silvery ribbons and dainty collars, and books. And Phyllis was discovering that you didn’t have to buy things to enjoy them!

“We’ll go up and look at dresses for Joy, now,” Aunt Margaret confided as they turned towards the elevator. “We’ll get her two, I think. I’ll choose one, and you’ll choose one—you’ve got pretty good taste, I’ve noticed, and you know what Joy likes. I’ve got a picture in my mind of the one *I’m* going to get; I don’t know what it’s like”—Aunt Margaret laughed at herself, “but I’ll know it when I

see it, and you'll have to watch out, or she'll like mine better!"

Aunt Margaret did know. It was only a little dress, soft blue, combined with dull gold and rose, but Phyllis had to acknowledge that she would have to choose carefully if she wanted her dress worn at all! And there were so many dresses! Phyllis was nearly in despair when she caught sight of *the* dress. It was the green of Phyllis' room at home—already Phyllis was beginning to think of Park-view as "home," and it was such a simple little dress that, unless you had been looking for it especially, it might easily have hidden itself among gayer dresses. Aunt Margaret's eyes twinkled.

"You've got ahead of me, Phyllis! Joy adores green: it's I who like blue! Now there's one more thing I want to get to-day, if you're not tired. Something with all the rainbow colors in it."

Phyllis suddenly remembered the day she had watched Joyce arrange the flowers when she saw the "something with all the rainbow colors in it." Aunt Margaret stood by the

students' color-boxes a long time. Phyllis caught her breath. Those black boxes were wonderful things. They made Phyllis feel certain she could paint, although she knew perfectly well that she couldn't! They reminded her of the days when she was a little girl and had been allowed to look at her grandfather's big black box with its rows of little tubes and many brushes. She could still remember how wonderful and mysterious that box had been, and even these were very tempting.

“Is it for Joy? Does she really paint?”

Aunt Margaret nodded. “Yes. Did she tell you? It's the one thing she doesn't like to talk about usually, but Miss Marstead told me in June that, if she could be persuaded to work a little harder—and there's to be a Student's Exhibition at Hillcrest this winter. I'm hoping—that's why I want to get a good box. It mustn't be too elaborate, but it mustn't be too small, either.” She laughed again. “I want it to be just right! Do you suppose this one is just right?”

“You haven't told me a single thing about

Joy or Kits or any of the girls!" Phyllis complained, when they were settled in the Lancy car with their packages.

Aunt Margaret laughed. "I? Why, that's Joy's business! What would she say if I told you all the news? No, you must wait until you get to Parkview for it!"

Phyllis gave a little impatient bounce. Aunt Margaret could be just as provoking as Joy or Jerry, sometimes!

But even after that, she was wholly surprised to find that the wheels of the train that finally carried her to Parkview were singing: "You're going home! You're going—home! You're—going—ho-o-me!"

And when she actually saw Joyce on the Parkview platform, she realized that she had been homesick for her cousin's teasing tongue!

It was she who made the advances this time. She ran down the platform to meet Uncle Rob and Joy. "Hullo! I'm so glad to be back!—Oh, where is Aunt Margaret? I—I forgot her!"

"She's not lost!" Uncle Rob's eyes

twinkled as he took Aunt Margaret's packages. "Come along, children."

Phyllis snuggled down into the comfortable little car. It wasn't as handsome as her grandfather's impressive automobile, but somehow Phyllis had never wanted to snuggle down in that! But even the shabby little places looked comfortable here!

"How is Kits? It was lovely of you to have her write that letter, Joy! But what *was* the thing you said was 'really disgraceful'?"

"It was! We went down to Golden Sands for two weeks, you know,—the Saunders and Mumsie and I, and one morning Kits got soaked. It was dreadfully hot, so Mrs. Saunders put her sweater around Kits and let her stay—I was making a sand-castle. Well, the tide turns awfully quick down there, and all of a sudden there came a wave—you never saw anything like it in your life! You ought to have seen people run! And when we turned to look back, there was Kits surveying the ocean as serenely as if she'd been properly dressed, with her sweater—which was all she'd had, going along with the wave! Oh, Kits has

been busy this summer! She walked through the fresh tarvia on the road with her bare feet, because she thought it looked cool, and she hadn't been home from Golden Sands more than a week when she and that precious Comfie got into a fight! You remember Bobby Armstrong and his dog? Well, he and Ted Ross were teasing Comfie with Prince, and Kits came flying! You ought to have seen her! She doubled up her fists and hit! And accidentally she got a black eye, and Comfie had a hole chewed in his neck!" Joyce shuddered. "Ugh! They certainly were sights! Mr. Saunders said he would shoot him ——"

"Which him?" inquired Phyllis. "Billy, or Prince, or ——"

"Comfie, of course! You could have heard Kits howl for a block. 'No, no, no! Daddy shouldn't shoot him! Jerwy would fix him!' And she marches him over to Jerry. And you know Comfie, Phyl. He always acts like a flash of lightning whenever he sees Jerry anyhow ——"

Phyllis giggled as Joyce paused for breath. "It must have been funny!"

“Funny! If you still have the idea that Kits and Comfie are a pair of Comfort Kits, I wish you’d been there trying to catch that cat! He was the most disreputable thing I ever saw, and Kits wasn’t much better. She was crying and her eye was getting all yellowy and purple. We had a lovely time, but Carol caught him finally and Jerry had a sweet patient. His neck’s still bandaged. You’ll see him.”

True to Joyce’s prophecy, Phyllis saw the wounded Comfie within an hour. She had scarcely slipped from her traveling dress into something cooler when she heard soft feet on the stairs, and Kits, her eye faded to a becoming green, with her fellow-sufferer in her arms, appeared.

“Is you back?” she asked from the doorway.

Phyllis turned. “Oh, hullo, Kits! Yes, I’m back. Glad to see me?” She held out her arms and Kits accepted the invitation with only one reservation: “Be careful of Comfie’s neck, Phylwis!”

Phyllis hugged the Comfort Kits with due caution. “What happened to you?”

" Fight," said Kits in her soft little voice.

Phyllis choked. " But, Kits," she remonstrated, " ladies aren't supposed to fight, and you shouldn't bring Comfie up to do it either! "

" Didn't," Kits had the calm air of being right. " 'Twas Billy taught Pwince. I don't like Pwince! "

" I don't either," agreed Phyllis, remembering the un-royal looking " Prince." " But wasn't it nice you could get such a good doctor as Jerry! "

That reminded Kits of something. " Has you seen Jerwy's garden yet? " she asked anxiously.

" No," laughed Phyllis, " not yet; I've just got back, you know. "

That fact made no difference to Kits. " You must come now," she insisted, " right away now, Phylwis! "

If Phyllis had known what " Jeremiah's Pride " was like in late August, she would never have thought of unpacking. Even before they had crossed the stretch of green lawn with its long shadows from the maple-trees,

Phyllis knew why Uncle Rob had christened it "Jeremiah's Pride," and why people stopped to look at it. She had thought it lovely in spring with its daffodils and tulips and fleurs-de-lis, and when the peonies and roses and lilies began to bloom she thought it was perfect. It hadn't been, but Phyllis couldn't know that. How could she guess Jerry's roses would be as lovely and delicate as when she had left them in June? Or how perfect the bells on the tall, slender, many-colored gladiolas would seem, or the gorgeous cannalilies blooming above their stiff stems, and green and auburn-brown leaves, separated from fragile blue larkspur and her hollyhock princesses and feathery coxcomb by a hedge of Mexican fire plant just beginning to be touched with its autumn fire, and back of that, row after row of exquisite asters—purple asters, lavender, pink, rose, white, shaded. How could Phyllis guess that Jerry's garden—*any* garden, would be so lovely it would make your throat hurt as Phyllis' was hurting now? Phyllis caught her breath and tried to laugh. It seemed silly, wanting to cry—over a garden! Phyllis had

seen gardens before, beautiful ones, with cool little fountains, and shady summer-houses and dainty statues, and they had never made her want to cry, and there were none of these things in Jerry Lancy's garden, but—"Jeremiah's Pride" was *different!* It was *different!* Perhaps it was because Jerry loved each separate flower, and they loved him—was that silly, too, to think plants and flowers could love people? Phyllis' head went up with that curious little lift. She wanted to be silly, then, and anyway, "a garden *is* a lovesome spot!"

"It is pwetty, isn't it?" Kits asked.

"*Pretty!*" Phyllis winked back the tears. "Oh—*Kits!*"

"Are you really glad to get back?" Joyce inquired the next morning. She was sitting in the crossed-legged fashion Jerry disapproved of, watching her cousin move from trunk to closet, with side trips to the windows overlooking "Jeremiah's Pride."

"Glad?" Phyllis straightened from a dive into the trunk's depths where her books were stored, "why, of course I'm glad! Why shouldn't I be?"

“U-um,” said Joyce thoughtfully, “I don’t know, I’m sure.”

But Phyllis, carrying her Literature Avenue friends over to the little alcove bookshelves in the window, dimpled to herself.

“It was lovely of Uncle Rob to build these shelves and this seat here for me this summer!” She knelt on the window-seat to place the books. “I love window-seats!”

“Yes, you told Mumsie you did. But have you really found the Land of your Heart’s Desire, Phyl?”

Phyllis flushed. “Not quite,” she confessed, “but I’m going to some day.”

“And are you going to try to make the basket-ball team?”

Phyllis put *Ivanhoe* in his place very slowly. Had Joy seen ——

“Why?” she asked.

“Oh—Carol asked me one day. She said you’d been watching us so carefully this spring, and she thought maybe you could do it—if you really wanted to. She thought you’d make a pretty good center. She’s the captain, this year.”

Phyllis breathed easier. "Well—I'd thought about trying.

"Did you see a lot of Carol this summer?" she continued.

"Oh, yes. She spent most of July with us. Hillcrest is about as cheerful in summer as a prison. We had a picnic or two, and once or twice we tried to climb High Hill, and we paint—— Well, we did lots of things together." Joyce grew a trifle indefinite at this point. "Oh, by the way, we're going to play tennis this afternoon, and Francie wants you to come."

If Hillcrest was not a "Land of Heart's Desire" to Phyllis, it at least wasn't the battlefield it had been. She understood the steady routine which kept the school running smoothly better now; the quiet rooms with the late summer sunshine filling their windows didn't weary her as they had done at first; and very gradually she was beginning to learn Hillcrest's language, the language that had seemed so heart-breakingly mysterious in the spring. And if Phyllis found Hillcrest more inviting, Hillcrest was coming to the conclu-

sion that Phyllis Lancy might not be as bad as she had seemed at first. Mrs. Saunders had taught her a pretty good game of tennis; she went to the try-out for the basket-ball team and won a minor position; and she could sing. Most of all, she could sing! It could not be said that she was popular, or a "leader of the school," but Hillcrest—that part of Hillcrest which knew her, and most of it did, since, as Emmie said, she "was a girl without a class," looked at her with interest. There might be some use for a girl who could paraphrase "America the Beautiful" on the top of High Hill in a thunder-storm! And Phyllis looked back more confidently, and smiled, still shyly, but more frankly, and went on her way, her head still high, but lifted with a gesture of happiness, and not defiance this time.

"I really believe I'm past the thorny path, Motherdy," she confided to the other Phyllis. The picture-Phyllis smiled down at her. Perhaps she knew the thorny path was still to come.

CHAPTER XIV

“ THORNY PATH ”

PHYLLIS met “ the Thorny Path ” early in October. Not that Hillcrest was introduced to her as the “ Thorny Path.” Dara Knight was responsible for that. Hillcrest first heard of her when a warm and miserable southeast storm was making the air misty and sending the gaily-colored leaves fluttering dejectedly down to a wet earth. It was not the sort of day at all on which to hear bad news, but —— it descended upon the juniors at the end of their history recitation, which wasn't strange, since it concerned Miss Nita. Every Hillcrest girl who could possibly do it elected to take history. It wasn't that they were all so fond of history, it was Miss Nita—no girl in her classes ever stopped to think of her as “ Miss Farendale,” and Hillcrest said that if you saw Miss Nita away from her desk, you wouldn't have known that she *was* a teacher!

“ I don't know it even then, sometimes,” Francie had added.

Miss Nita was very pretty and also very little. Some visitors had once taken her for a pupil, and several giggling freshmen had made the mistake of whispering to each other it was going to be “ easy ” to have fun with her. It wasn't. It seemed to be quite the other way. Hillcrest didn't understand it, even Lady Elizabeth didn't understand it, but even the most rebellious girls obeyed Miss Nita implicitly, and it was queer, for Miss Nita didn't act in the least like a teacher. If you made a mistake, she laughed at you quite frankly; if you had a poorly prepared recitation, she could make you feel somewhere near the size of an ant; but if you really failed in an examination, she could be comfortingly sympathetic. She didn't lose interest in you after you left her classroom either, and when, that dreary wet afternoon, Miss Nita closed her book and made her announcement, the juniors could have given a wail of protest if they hadn't known Miss Nita well enough to know it wouldn't do them a particle of good.

" We've had a wet lesson for a wet day," Miss Nita's voice was whimsical, but there was something about it that made the juniors suddenly look up. " And I'm like the courtiers of Henry First; I've got something on my mind I don't want to tell you, but here it is: I'm going away. I don't want to go. I don't like the word ' Good-bye ' a bit, and I do like *you*, but my sister is ill, and I am going away with her, so I'm afraid this is the last week I'll be able to be at Hillcrest. And I've got a favor to ask of you: you've been a lovely class to me; will you please promise to be a nice one to my successor, and try to like her, please? "

When Miss Nita smiled at you and said " Please," you felt as if you had to promise her whatever she asked. What could the juniors do but what the freshmen and seniors had done already, and give their promise?

But somehow the rain had a drearier splash against the windows, and basket-ball practice wasn't exactly energetic. After next week Miss Nita wouldn't be there to say, " That was a good game you played yesterday, Carol," or, " Well, Baby, I'm certainly glad Hillcrest

didn't have to depend entirely on your efforts to win that game to-day!”

“History without Miss Nita!” Baby kicked off her shoes and let them lie just where they fell, one on top of the other. “Think of—of it!”

“I don't want to, thank you!” snapped Joyce, jerking at her middy-ribbon.

“She's the only person I've ever known who could make me like history,” mourned Carol, “but when she begins talking about those endless old wars, they're really tragedies; you almost think you remember them yourself. Remember the day she demonstrated the coronation of Mary, Queen of Scots, Joy? You were Mary of Lorraine.”

Joyce nodded dismally. “Of course, there was a time when the history classes didn't have Miss Nita, but that was back in the dark ages——”

“Joyce *Lancy!*” It was an indignant chorus. “She isn't as old as all that!”

Joyce was too miserable to make a retort. She ploughed savagely through the very middle of a puddle on her way home, splashing

the unlucky Phyllis so generously that she was moved to protest. "Joy-ce! You needn't—ow!—sprinkle me so!"

Joyce kept doggedly on her silent way, and, when Joyce was silent, she was very miserable indeed!

"And we've promised to like her successor," Dara reminded the girls as they stood on the school steps watching the car, which was carrying Miss Nita out of Hillcrest's sight, disappear around a curve.

"Yes," said Francie mournfully, "I—I wish we hadn't, somehow."

"Wonder what she'll be like?" Lucy Thornton mused.

"Like? *Like?*" flashed Dara. "Well, I can tell you what she *won't* be like! She w-won't be anything like Miss N-Nita! Oh, come on inside! It's cold out here!"

"Yes, I do think you'd better go in," Francie was solicitous, "you do seem to have a cold in your head, Dara."

Afterward all of Hillcrest agreed that Lady Elizabeth hadn't been quite fair. She might have given them *some* warning at least,

but they were wholly unprepared for Miss Nita's successor. They hadn't expected her to be anything like Miss Nita, of course, but ——

“ Wouldn't you have thought Lady Elizabeth could have used Miss Nita as a *pattern*? ” Joyce asked pathetically a week later.

Baby shook her head. “ I don't believe there is another Miss Nita.”

“ I don't mean another *Miss Nita!* ” Joyce's voice was impatient. “ There must have been *something* between Miss Nita and ——”

“ The Thorny Path,” said Dara gently.

Joyce sat up on the couch. Baby stopped overturning Francie's neatly-stacked magazines. Francie herself let the nightgown she was embroidering drop to her lap, though she still held the needle raised to take another stitch.

“ What's the matter? You look like a tableau for Sleeping Beauty. She is, isn't she?— The Thorny Path to Learning? ”

“ Thorny Path! Dara! How did you think of it? ”

“ She certainly is! ” agreed Baby fervently. “ Oh, Dara, you'll be famous for that! ”

The junior class had waited politely in its recitation-room at the usual hour. And when the door opened and they saw the substitute teacher—even the seniors confessed afterward to a panic at their first sight of Miss Hawthorn. As for the juniors, *they* were indignant. Did Lady Elizabeth really suppose this tall, cold-eyed, stern-faced, iron-footed teacher could take Miss Nita's place? And they had promised to *like* her! *Like* her? It couldn't be done!

"Young ladies," Lady Elizabeth had spoken in her most duchess-like voice, "this is Miss Hawthorn, who will complete this term in Miss Farendale's place. Miss Hawthorn, Hillcrest's junior class. I trust you will find no difficulties."

Before they had finished reciting the trials of Henry Second, the juniors knew Lady Elizabeth's hopes were vain. There would be difficulties, both for Miss Hawthorn and her classes. Miss Nita's smile had been comradely; but Miss Hawthorn's wasn't. Miss Nita's voice had had a sound of laughter; Miss Hawthorn's was like a steel knife. Miss Nita

had a way of coaxing the right answers from a girl; Miss Hawthorn turned the most interesting incident into History with a capital H.

Phyllis was shocked to find herself using Dara's name for her, but it was the only one that seemed to fit, and she always seemed to have a sudden wave of anger when she saw her sitting in Miss Nita's place. And they had promised to *like* her! Phyllis looked wistfully up out of the high window. The cold pale blue of the sky with the grey branches moving across it reminded her of Miss Hawthorn's eyes. She shivered. Miss Nita's eyes had been blue, too, but ——

“ Miss Lancy! Miss *Phyllis* Lancy! ”

Phyllis jumped. “ Yes, Miss Hawthorn? ”

“ Are you following this recitation? ”

Phyllis nodded. “ Yes, Miss Hawthorn. ”

“ It did not appear so. However, if you are one of the few gifted people who can follow a recitation with your attention fixed on the oak-tree outside the window, you may take up the recitation where Miss Batton left it, and, no matter how poorly prepared you are, it would be difficult for you to succeed in making a

worse blotch of to-day's lesson than Miss Batton did."

By pure luck Phyllis hit upon the right passage, but evidently Phyllis Lancy's and Miss Hawthorn's opinions on the character of Richard the First didn't agree. Miss Hawthorn frowned.

"Most interesting, I am sure. May I ask what your grounds are for your opinions?"

"Miss Nita said ——"

Miss Hawthorn had heard the name "Miss Nita" before in the past three weeks. She thought it was a ridiculous one. She said so. She said several other things.

"Miss Nita! 'Miss Nita!' 'Miss Nita!' 'Miss Nita!' *I* only had the pleasure of meeting the charming lady once, but *I* can remember her name was Miss Farendale. It is not surprising my history classes are the deplorable things they are, when my predecessor had so small an amount of respect for herself that she allowed you to call her by her first name! *No* teacher who has a nickname can have either respect for herself or control over her classes!"

A sudden sound startled the juniors and astounded Miss Hawthorn. If it had been Baby or Joyce or Lucy—but from Phyllis Lancy—a giggle from *Phyllis Lancy* at that particular moment —— As a matter of fact, Phyllis had been growing terribly angry and then at the thought that the history classes had only been “deplorable” since Miss Hawthorn’s arrival, and the memory of Dara’s voice saying so gently, “The Thorny Path” made something inside her break loose.

The silence which fell after that giggle was not a comfortable one. And then:

“ You laughed, I believe, Miss Lancy? Will you not tell us the source of amusement? Perhaps we are capable of appreciating it!”

“ I—I was remembering the nickname of one teacher I knew!” Phyllis met the angry gaze quite steadily, although her voice shook a little.

“ Indeed! What was the nickname, may I ask?”

The juniors held their breath. If it had been Dara or Joy, they could have been depended upon—but Phyllis ——

Phyllis lifted her chin. "I don't think it would be fair to either the teacher or the school to tell you that, Miss Hawthorn."

The juniors breathed again.

"Phyl saved us that time!" Dara observed, as she and Carol accompanied the others down Hillcrest Avenue. Having been very good indeed for the past week, Dara and Carol had earned permission to go down to Parkview to do some shopping. "But girls—do you suppose we could make Thorny Path leave? Before the end of the term? If we don't, Lady Elizabeth will surely engage her for the rest of her life! It—it—well, it seems as if we ought to, not only for our own sakes, but for the sake of all the classes who come after us."

"You sound like boarding-school stories!" scoffed Carol disparagingly, "where all the powerful girls outlaw the poor suffering heroine!"

"Well, it's done!" Dara defended. "In England they send them to Coventry, and Thorny Path isn't a poor suffering heroine ——"

Baby choked, but Carol was not dismayed. “ Maybe they do, but this isn’t England. If we tried to send Thorny Path to Coventry, *we’d* get sent home! ”

“ And I don’t want to be expelled just now! ” added Joyce uncomfortably, “ there’s the Student’s Exhibition coming on —— ” she stopped embarrassedly. “ Don’t try to make a conspirator of me, Dara, please! ”

“ But the worst of it is, ” Baby scowled at the dancing blue river, “ that we *promised* Miss Nita to *like* her and be *nice* to her! ”

“ We promised to *try* to like her, ” corrected Dara, “ and nobody could be —— Oh, perhaps I could! ” The mischief-imps danced into her black eyes. “ Yes, I think I could! Oh, you just watch me! I’m going to be *very* nice to her! ”

“ How? ” Joyce and Baby sounded skeptical.

“ I am, that’s all. You watch me. ”

“ We will! ” they promised. They knew from experience that Dara might have her own ways about being nice!

CHAPTER XV

KITS USES STRATEGY

“ I BELIEVE I’ll see Lady Elizabeth about joining Miss Marstead’s water-color class, and submitting a picture for the Madam Halstead Prize,” Emmie looked thoughtfully at the half-closed studio door on her return from gym.

Lucy giggled and Francie slowly shook her head. “ I’d like to have you try, Emmie,” she said regretfully, “ but you might take the Prize away from Blanche or Carol, and Blanche is really anxious about it.”

Emmie sighed. “ All right, but Carol and Mary and Joy all got excused from the last fifteen minutes of English History to-day because they’re getting ready for that Exhibition! Think of missing Thorny Path’s last tirade! ”

“ But they missed seeing Dara be ‘ nice ’ to her, too! ” Baby chuckled at the recollection. “ Oh, Dara, you’re awful! ”

“I’m being nice to her!” Dara insisted. “You’re the people who upset things. She likes me best of any one in her classes!”

Baby choked. “I should think she would! Oh, hello, Miss Joanna Sargeant! So you’ve really decided to enter the Contest, too?”

Joyce spent a preoccupied minute in arranging her books in a more comfortable position. “Have I?” she asked innocently. “Who said so, Baby?”

“*You* did, you old pretender, and you know it perfectly well! You said you didn’t want to be expelled with the Student Exhibition coming on, and then you blushed. You do blush beautifully, Joy. What’s your picture going to be?”

“It isn’t—yet,” said Joyce calmly.

“Joyce Lancy!” Baby looked at her reproachfully. “I’m positive you’re going to enter something for that Madam Halstead Prize thing!”

“Well?” Joyce’s tone was mildly inquiring.

“‘Well,’ that’s just what we want to know! You are, aren’t you? Mary says you paint beautifully; she doesn’t see how you do it.”

" Oh, yes, she does; quite often; she sits next to me most of the time."

Phyllis giggled. Baby's face was too funny. She knew from experience just how aggravating her cousin could be on the Madam Halstead Prize subject! Nobody would have thought of noisy, impish Joy as being shy, and yet Phyllis was beginning to have a suspicion that she *was* shy about her ambition to paint. It was the one thing Joy wouldn't talk of, at least, and in spite of all her coaxing, she had never seen many of Joy's sketches. As for the Prize Exhibition, Joyce had nearly given her family nervous prostration with her gentle refusals to enter it!

" I can't paint things the way they should be painted," she said. " Why insult a Greek vase by making it look like a tea-kettle? "

Miss Marstead scolded, Uncle Rob almost commanded, even Jerry had been moved to reason with her. Joyce merely smiled. Of all the stubborn Lancys, Joy could be the most provoking when she wanted to be!

It was Kits who had come to the rescue. The girls found her energetically dragging au-

tumn leaves along the walk with her small rake, one afternoon.

“ Oh, hello, Kits!” Joyce was in an amiable mood. “ What are you doing with your small self to-day?”

“ I’m getting all the leave-fwaries to-gever,” Kits responded promptly. “ I like the leave-fwaries—but they don’t stay still!”

“ That’s because they’re so happy,” Phyllis said softly, but Joyce did not hear her. She was too much interested in Kits. “ Leave-fairies, child! What do you mean?”

“ The Au-tumn Pwincess makes them,” Kits explained, looking like an autumn princess herself with her gold head above her brown sweater, and the red-handled rake clasped in her hand, “ Phylwis told me. The people didn’t want the Au-tumn Pwincess to come! They thought she’d be cold an’ horwid an’ scare all the birds an’ fwowers away. But she isn’t! They’re not scared of her one bit! They like her! She’s pwetty! But *you* can’t see her, ’cause she’s got an all grey-y veil to cover up her face, an’ her dwess is blue—just like the sky, an’ she unties the leaves from the twees

an' gives them party-dwesses an' lets them dance with her, an' she tells the birds 'tis time to go far 'way from Winter's snow, and she whisphers to the fwowers to go to sleep."

"Have you really got breath left?" Joyce inquired. "It sounds—like—like a picture. If I could do that for the exhibition ——"

"But you can't!" Kits interrupted with wide eyes. "You can't paint it, Joy!"

Joyce was startled into an astonished stare. "I can't?"

Kits shook her gold head positively. "No! You said so! You said you couldn't paint a picture of Comfie and Peter Hoehandle, 'cause you didn't know the right way to make pictures!"

"Oh," said Joyce in a very small voice.

She didn't say anything more, and Phyllis, after a hasty look in her direction, didn't either. Phyllis had learned when to hold her tongue, but she wasn't worrying about her cousin's part in the Exhibition any longer! The Lancys had reason to thank Kits for her strategy!

Miss Marstead had no more excuse for say-

ing grimly: "If you could really decide to *work*——" Joyce spent every moment she was allowed in the studio. And Phyllis, who held her breath for fear her temperamental cousin would change her mind once again, listened in awe to Carol's almost terrifyingly frank criticism:

"Madam Halstead will know what my picture is *supposed* to be, at least!" laughed Carol. "Yours looks a trifle mysterious to me!"

"I want it mysterious," Joyce was imperturbable. "Get permission to come down with us, Carol. Mother made a jar of cookies this morning, and while you're down there, you'll have a chance to see what a garden really looks like in November. Your straw-stacks would make lovely scarecrows! Now when the judges see my picture, they'll say: 'Isn't Miss Lancy's a charming subject? And so well treated? Not like some of the others—so plainly the work of amateurs——'"

"'But really, don't you think Miss Bradford's "Winter Robe" deserves the Prize?'" finished Carol. "Cheer up, Joy, perhaps

something will happen to my 'Robe.' I'd never have the courage to do it over again."

But Joyce didn't change her mind. She was even the last to leave the studio the Friday before the Exhibition opened. Phyllis, who had patiently waited for her, replaced the books she had been reading on the shelves of the school library, and slipped out into the broad hall to meet her. "Is it all finished?"

Joyce, her eyes shining excitedly, nodded. "Everything's finished," she said, "every single, solitary thing, Phyl Lancy! Where's Baby?"

"She's gone. You're awfully late, Joy. Mary met me an hour ago, and she told me you and Carol were still working. And then Carol came into the library."

"Yes," admitted Joyce, "she went before I did." She gave a joyous little skip. "Wait until you see Carol's picture! Madam Halstead will give it the Prize ——"

"Nothing did happen to it, then?" Phyllis was only remembering Carol's laughing speech, but Joyce almost stood still. "Hap-hap-pened to it? What would happen to it?"

“ I don’t know,” Phyllis admitted. “ Carol told you to cheer up, you know.”

A dimple crept out at the corner of Joyce’s mouth. “ Yes, but it’s safe! And she’ll get the Prize—I *hope* she will anyhow. But Blanche is just a natural-born getter!”

But Carol didn’t get it.

The Student’s Exhibition opened Monday night. There *were* several other pictures, of course, a few in oils, more from the water-color class, and others from the pencil-drawing department. But Phyllis was only anxious about two of them. She made her way to “ No. 23, ‘ Coming of Autumn,’ Joyce Lancy,” and drew a sharp breath. Joyce had done it! Oh, Joyce had done it! Brown and gold leaves danced in the air and fell over the hazy blue of the shadowy Autumn Princess’ dress as she bent to “ whisper ” to a flower. The grey-smoke veil hid her face, but you could see things weren’t afraid of her, for the asters and goldenrod almost looked as if they were nestling against her. Joyce probably would never be a famous artist, but somehow she could paint surprisingly well.

"Come on and see Carol's!" Joyce was demanding. "Hers is wonderful! Oh, there's Jerry! He didn't think—wait a minute!" She darted after her tall brother. "Carol's—down—there," she panted in a satisfied tone when they reached Phyllis. "Now!"

The catalogue called it "Winter Robe," but nobody who had ever seen it could mistake "Jeremiah's Pride," though the flowers slept under the first snow, and only the pyramids of straw showed where the rose-trees and bushes were, and little hills of leaves covered the peonies and other plants, but Phyllis had been right: "Jeremiah's Pride" *was* lovely even with the snow clouds above it and the light fingers of the storm on the feathery Eulalia grass.

"Don't you like it, Jerry?" Joyce was asking impatiently. "Why don't you *say* something?"

Jerry shook his head. "I'm not used to such surprises. Thank you, Miss Carol Bradford; you've done what I have always wanted to do—and couldn't."

Carol, who had been looking intently at her



BUT SHE DIDN'T SOUND GLAD.—Page 203.

“Winter Robe,” turned to him with eyes that were very, very still.

“Thank you, Doctor Lancy, I’m glad if you like it.” But she didn’t sound glad. She sounded pitifully tired and discouraged.

“Well, of all the things!” gasped Joyce, looking after her as she disappeared through the crowd. “What’s the matter with her?”

“Tired,” said Jerry briefly. “She must have worked hard over this.”

“It—it *is* good, isn’t it?” Joyce asked eagerly.

“It certainly is.”

“Don’t—don’t you think the judges will—will like it enough to give it the Prize?” Joy’s voice was a little unsteady.

“I haven’t seen the rest of the Exhibition yet,” Jerry looked at his sister sharply. “Go home early, Joy. You’re tired yourself.”

“I’m not!” denied Joyce, though her cheeks were flushed nearly the color of the crimson Hillcrest banners decorating the walls. “It’s that awful doctor-instinct in you.”

Nevertheless, she was still sleeping when

Phyllis was nearly ready for school the next morning, and she started on the uphill climb somewhat wearily.

"I *am* glad it's over," she confessed to Phyllis. "A Competition is an awful thing! But I'm glad I entered. It will be something to be thankful about Thursday."

But she still looked tired when classes were dismissed that afternoon. A little freshman met them almost at the door. "Miss Marstead wants to see you right away, Joy. She says it's very important."

"Wants to see *me*? About something important?" Joyce frowned. "What is it, Doris? Do you know?"

"Perhaps it's the Prize," Phyllis suggested, her hopes flaring high.

Joyce looked almost startled. "I—don't—believe so. It wasn't to be awarded until next week. You'd better not wait, Phyl."

"I won't, because I promised Aunt Margaret I'd make a cake, you know."

Aunt Margaret was at the dentist's, and Phyllis had just finished making the chocolate filling for the cake when the door opened and

closed softly, and Joyce went up the stairs. When she didn't come down, Phyllis, who had been consumed with curiosity for the past hour, followed her.

“Mother ——”

“It isn't Aunt Margaret, Joy, it's Phyl. What did Miss Mar —— Why what ——”

Joyce was standing beside her open desk, the Japanese box Phyllis had often noticed wide open, and the contents scattered about. Joyce could certainly keep a secret, though no one would have guessed it. There were more water-colors and sketches in that box than Phyllis had ever guessed her cousin had made. And most of them were of Carol,—Carol standing in the swing; Carol kneeling at the brook in Hillcrest meadow; Carol coaxing a badly-drawn squirrel to come nearer; Carol standing very straight on a solitary rock near the top of High Hill, her arms outstretched to the world below.

“I liked this one best,” Joyce sounded as if she were talking to herself. “She looked so sweet and dear and b-brave with the wind about her! And now—she thinks ——” With

a quick gesture she tore the picture from top to bottom.

"Joy! Joy dear!" Phyllis was frightened. "What's happened? What did Miss Marstead want?"

Joyce faced her, her eyes blazing, her mouth trying to be stern, but with a betraying little tremble.

"She wanted," Joyce's voice was carefully light, except for a tiny break at the end, "to tell me she knew I was—a—cheat."

CHAPTER XVI

SHIPWRECK

“Joy! She couldn’t!”

“Oh, yes, she could.” If you hadn’t been listening very carefully, you would have thought Joyce was almost cheerful about it. “She found it out yesterday. I am, you see.”

“Joy ——”

“Oh, yes, I am. You remember I stayed in the studio Friday after everybody, even Miss Marstead, had gone? Well, I spoiled Carol’s picture then. You remember what she said?”

Yes, Phyllis remembered. “Cheer up, Joy, perhaps something will happen to my ‘Robe.’ I’d never have the courage to do it over!” And she remembered how Joyce had looked on Friday afternoon when she reminded her of it. But Joyce—oh, it *couldn’t* be—Joyce—a cheat! Phyllis shivered. How could Joyce go on in that steadily-even tone?

" I spilled water on it just as I was cleaning up. I made a pretty good job of it, didn't I? "

Water! There must, there *must* be a mistake! Phyllis had seen that picture! There were no water-marks on it!

" Oh," said Joyce, " I painted it out. That was what kept me so long. That's what's the trouble. Miss Marstead saw it yesterday and asked Carol about it. It seems I don't paint snow as she does. Her picture's forfeited for the Prize now. Isn't her work. Do you suppose ' Coming of Autumn ' might get it now, Phyl? "

" Joy! " All the agony in Phyllis' heart rose in the cry. " Joy, you didn't—you *couldn't* cheat! "

" Couldn't I? Miss Marstead doesn't agree with you. Neither does Carol. "

Carol? Carol didn't believe that Joyce was *honest*? Carol thought that Joyce could—Phyllis remembered her white, quiet face in her classes to-day, and her eyes. Carol's eyes usually laughed, but to-day they made you want to look away again. Carol believed such a thing!

“ She knew how much I wanted that Prize, even when I talked so—and she saw me coming from the studio Friday—I guess I did look a little excited, didn’t I? What’s the matter, Phyl? It’s not *your* picture I’ve for-forfeited.”

“ You didn’t!” Phyllis was almost choked with anger. “ I *know* you didn’t cheat!”

“ Oh, yes, I did. I painted that corner over. I didn’t tell any one about it.”

Phyllis stamped her foot. “ I don’t care how many corners you painted over! You didn’t cheat! *Why* did you paint it over, Joyce Lancy?”

Joyce didn’t answer. Her mouth suddenly drooped.

Oh, wouldn’t Aunt Margaret ever come?

“ And if Carol believes that you—that you—you know—she isn’t worthy of your friendship!”

“ Oh, yes, she is!” Joyce blazed back. “ You sha’n’t say that, Phyl Lancy! She is! And she has a perfect right to think—I said horrible things!—and—and you don’t understand! She’s worked and worked over that

picture! It wasn't only this Prize, it was *painting!* It's something inside you, you can't talk about. And when I spilled water on that corner Friday ——"

And then the sweetest sound Phyllis had ever heard fell upon her ears. "Why, dear girls! What is it?"

It was Joyce who answered, still in that steady, unwavering, un-Joyce like voice: "Phyl's crying because it's found out I'm a cheat, Muddie. I for-forfeited Carol's picture for the Prize, you see. I painted about three inches of the left-hand corner over after everybody had left the—the studio Friday." She made a violent effort to smile, but failed.

"You *didn't* cheat!" wailed Phyllis. "You didn't! You couldn't!"

"Suppose you tell us about it, Joy." Aunt Margaret reached over and took Phyllis' clenched hands in her own, and her voice was very gentle. "Tell us about it all."

"Doris told me Miss Marstead wanted to see me," Joyce was twisting her fingers. "So I—I went. And—and Carol was there. I—Miss Marstead asked me if I knew there was

anything wrong with Carol's picture. Carol was dear. She said, 'Miss Marstead, I told you ——' But I guess I did look queer, and they both knew I was the last one in the studio Friday and—Miss Marstead said some one had tampered with Carol's picture. One corner wasn't her work. And I—had. Carol—Carol said she didn't believe me, and I—oh, I told her it wasn't much of a compliment!"

"Go on," said Aunt Margaret gently.

Joyce gulped. "Miss Marstead asked me if I realized I had forfeited Carol's picture for the Prize, and if it had occurred to me that C-C-Coming of Autumn might have a better c-chance with Carol's out of the way, and what my 'motive' had been." Joyce's eyes blazed suddenly. "I said I thought my 'motive' was pretty plain, and what did she think about my chances for the Prize now?" Joyce shivered. "And then she—said—I—had—sacrificed—the—honor—of—a—Hillcrest girl!" Joyce spoke very low. "That it had always been Hillcrest's pride to think its pupils could be trusted alone."

"Is that all, dear? What about Carol?"

Joyce smiled tiredly. "Wouldn't *you* have believed I—had done it on purpose after that?" she demanded. "If Carol had been a-alone, perhaps—I could have told her how—how—but Miss Marstead said—said so many things, and then I began—oh—I talked hatefully! I—I can't seem to stop my tongue sometimes! It's always been fun to tease people. But honestly, I thought that picture would get the Prize, and when I spilled water on it Friday—I—I was almost crazy. Miss Marstead had gone, and Carol was so tired and headachy, and—and I never thought about its being forfeited if I touched it!—I never thought any one would *see* it!"

"Why didn't you explain?" Aunt Margaret's voice was soft.

Joyce shook her head wearily. "I don't know. I tried, but it stuck in my throat, and I couldn't get it out. But—but it doesn't matter about the pic-pictures—it's just Carol—I've *lost* her! She's the f-friend-friendliest friend I've got, and I've lost her!"

Aunt Margaret shook her head. "I don't think Carol's that kind of a girl, Joy. Making

a friend-ship is like building a regular ship. It takes a long time, and you've got to try out everything you put into it very carefully, but once it's made, you can trust it to go safely over stormy seas filled with rocks, as well as over smooth ponds. That's a friend-ship, Joy, and if you and Carol had a friend-ship, things will come right somehow."

Joyce opened her lips again, tried to smile, and then suddenly she was face downward on the little couch sobbing as Phyllis had never heard any one sob before, and Aunt Margaret was kneeling beside her, gathering the shivering little figure close; and Phyllis knew she must not stay. She ran swiftly away, back to the green room and her own picture-mother. Crouched in the little window-seat, her hot cheek against the cool pane, the sobs rising in her own throat, she looked up at the other Phyllis.

"Oh, Motherdy!" she breathed. "Oh, Motherdy! Friends are terribly queer things! It hurts when you haven't got them, and it hurts worse when you have! Oh, why can't people understand each other?"

Oh, how could Carol think that Joy had cheated!

Only the lonely sounding wind answered her. Phyllis watched the brown little leaves whirling up the street. They looked cold and dismal and left out of the cheery bonfires their brothers had helped make, and the bare trees bending against the cloudy sky didn't look especially happy either. Phyllis couldn't help wondering why the Pilgrims had chosen November for Thanksgiving. There didn't seem to be anything to be particularly thankful about! Oh, why had Joyce kept silent! And then suddenly Phyllis knew. Oh, it was awful to have Lancy pride like that, but it was worse for a friend-ship to be wrecked because of it! Phyllis set her teeth. Somebody *must* do something to stop that shipwreck!

But the sight of Carol Bradford the next morning, her head high, that queer look still in her eyes, was not encouraging. Phyllis had to shake her head to rid her eyes of something wet and hot. Oh, that poor, poor floundering ship! Phyllis knew how both of them were feeling. And neither one would make an ad-

vance—there was too much Lancy and Bradford stubbornness in the way. But *some one* must clear that fog of misunderstanding away.

It was after the last recitation period of the day that Phyllis followed Carol out of Miss Hawthorn's room. They were both due at the gymnasium, but Phyllis had a suspicion Carol wasn't going. She wasn't; she was starting towards the stairs when Phyllis spoke hesitatingly. "Carol, would—would you mind if I—came up and talked with you a few minutes?"

Carol was plainly taken aback, and for a second Phyllis thought she was going to say that she did mind.

"I'm afraid I wouldn't be very good company to-day, Phyllis. I've work to do, and—I'm sorry."

"I know!" said Phyllis eagerly, "but I won't take ten minutes! Please, Carol!"

Carol hesitated, then she turned away. "All right," she said, "come on up."

Phyllis followed her silently. Phyllis didn't have the least idea what she was going

to say now Carol was giving her the chance to say something. She knew what she *wanted* to say, but wanting to say things and saying them are two very different matters!

Carol turned the key in the door. "Now," she said, facing Phyllis. It was such a different Carol from the one she had always loved that Phyllis wanted to put her head down on Carol's couch and cry and cry and cry! But she mustn't. She braced herself a little straighter and found the edge of the couch. She had to hold on to something!

"It's—it's about the—Exhibition," she plunged in, and immediately wished she had said anything else.

"Is that what you wanted to talk about?" Carol asked. "Do you really have to? I don't want to be rude, but I thought Joyce and I talked that over pretty thoroughly yesterday."

"But you didn't!" Phyllis was grasping her vanishing courage in both hands. "Joy *didn't* tell you *why* she painted ——"

"She said quite a few things."

"Yes! I know she did! But she didn't mean

them, and she *didn't* tell you *why* she painted that corner over. I know she didn't. She —— Oh, Carol, won't you try to understand?"

"I'll try."

"She never thought your picture would be forfeited because she touched it, and in cleaning up she spilled water on that corner. Was your picture anywhere near hers?" Carol nodded. "She never stopped to think anybody would see it! She painted it over because she had done the damage, and she was afraid you wouldn't have the courage to do it if you knew, and she knew how much you wanted that prize!"

"I wish she'd given me the chance," said Carol's tired-sounding voice.

Phyllis clung to the edge of the couch. "But you believe me, don't you?"

Carol was staring at her clasped hands. The little clock on her dresser said "Tick-tock! Tick-tock! Tick-tock!" very clearly before she admitted in a low voice: "I—don't—know."

"*Oh!*" said Phyllis.

"I—I want to! I want to believe Joyce

didn't—I love her! How—how do you know this, Phyllis?"

"She told Aunt Margaret and me." Phyllis' voice was discouraged. Wouldn't Carol understand after all? Was that ship—was the fog too thick? She blinked rapidly. She mustn't cry—not up here!

"Why didn't she tell—Miss Marstead—yesterday?"

Phyllis flamed. "Would *you* have told her anything after those questions?"

Carol's head shook. "But Joy-Joyce said so—so ——"

"I know she did! It—but *you* know how Joy talks, Carol!"

"Yes. But I didn't think she'd do it when—*you* wouldn't have done it, would you?"

It was Phyllis' turn to shake her head. "No, but I'd have said something else. It's the miserable old Lancy pride, Carol. It's a perfectly awful thing to have! It makes you say and do things you don't want to. That's what made Joy act the way she did yesterday. She wouldn't show how hurt she was, the Lancy pride wouldn't let her. It wouldn't let

her explain, either. It's an awfully stubborn thing! It made me say 'No, thank you, I can do it myself,' when you offered to help me with my books last spring. And I'd wanted you to show me how to 'do' things ever since the first day I was at Hillcrest! Don't you remember?"

"Yes," said Carol, and smiled. "I'm sorry I didn't understand, Phyl."

"That was the trouble with Joy," Phyllis plunged on eagerly. "She felt dreadfully, but when Miss Marstead—won't you understand, Carol?"

"I'm—beginning," said Carol. "And she *did* withdraw her picture——"

Phyllis stared. "She withdrew *her* picture?"

"Yes. Didn't she tell you?"

Phyllis shook her head. "No."

It was Carol's turn to say "Oh!" The little clock said "Tick-tock," to break the silence. Then Phyllis sprang to her feet.

"Then—if she did that—you *know* she didn't—cheat!"

"Well——"

"And the friend-ship won't be wrecked!"

"The 'friend-ship?'" Carol showed a spark of interest.

Phyllis poured out the little story, her words tumbling over each other in her happiness. "Aunt Margaret told it to us yesterday, when Joy said she'd lost you," she ended.

Carol had been looking out of the blue-and-gold curtained windows. "It sounds like your Aunt Margaret. It's raining, Phyl, have you an umbrella?"

Phyllis wasn't interested in umbrellas. "I'm afraid Joy has gone home, but won't you telephone her and tell her ——" she stopped, for Carol had slowly turned to look at her, and there was something in Carol's blue eyes that stopped her.

"Phyllis, I—can't! You'll despise me—I despise myself—but Joy-Joyce forfeited my picture! I can't—I *can't* seem to forgive her!"

Phyllis stood perfectly still.

"Oh, I hate myself!" Carol's voice broke. "But I can't! I can't! Oh, I—I wish you'd go away!"

“ I will,” Phyllis spoke quietly, “ but Carol—if—if you think you can, won’t you telephone? ”

“ Yes, if I can.”

Phyllis softly shut the door behind her. She hadn’t gotten an umbrella; she hadn’t even said good-bye; but what did umbrellas or good-byes matter at such a time!

Phyllis slipped down the stairs and into the empty little Hillcrest chapel which was always open. She had done all she could for that friend-ship except one thing. She lifted her face.

“ Please, please,” she said aloud, “ oh, dear God, please help that ship through the fog! *Please* don’t let it be wrecked! ”

CHAPTER XVII

THE PRIZE WINNERS

BUT Carol came to class the next day still with that high-held head and the queer "silent" look in her eyes, and Joyce left Hillcrest that afternoon with the even, monotonous note in her voice. Phyllis wanted to shake her! And then she wanted to shake Carol! Why did they let pride and disappointment and misunderstanding come between them? And then she wanted to hug them both. They couldn't help it!

"I wish Madam Halstead had kept her hateful old Prize home!" snapped Phyllis to herself when they reached the Lancy library. "And—I wish I knew what to do!"

Joyce had gone to the piano and was making mournful chords. When Joyce, who was far from being a musician, sought the piano, things were serious! Phyllis' mood was dismal enough, but she didn't stop her cousin. She

retreated to her own special corner with a book, which, although she didn't notice it, was upside down. It didn't matter. Phyllis didn't feel in the least like reading. Oh, why didn't Carol *do* something? Why didn't she telephone? Was that ship going to be wrecked after all?

Carol, at that particular moment, was doing something which would have astonished everybody connected with Hillcrest. Carol was climbing High Hill. Climbing High Hill was not an easy task at any time, and even Miss Jackson, the gymnasium instructor, whose chief pleasure in life, Joyce had complained as a freshman, was tiring out Hillcrest girls, wouldn't have recommended it as the most pleasant form of winter exercise to be found.

But Carol had not told Miss Anderson she intended climbing High Hill; and she hadn't intended it. She had asked for permission to visit Joyce Lancy for two hours, and she explained quite frankly why she wanted to go. And she had truthfully meant to go when she left Hillcrest, but somehow she couldn't! She felt her steps faltering more and more

as she went up the hill. It seemed to her she simply *couldn't* forgive Joyce for forfeiting her picture. She didn't want to go to Joy, she didn't want to telephone her, she didn't want to tell her she knew now what had happened that day in the studio, and that everything was all right. It *wasn't* all right! She had been robbed of her chance for the Prize. And yet she loved Joy! Why did that make it so much harder? Why, even now, out on Hillcrest Avenue, where the wind blew about her, and the sun shone down, did her heart persist in staying so stubbornly shut? She couldn't go on to Joyce and say the things she ought to say! What was inside her that wouldn't let her? She could paint other pictures! But—suddenly she stood still at the turn of the road. She *couldn't* go on to Joyce. Her feet wouldn't carry her. And everything, the wind singing through the pines, the leaves rustling at her feet, the automobile wheels humming along the road, was singing: "*Why? Why? Why?*"

Carol put her hand to her throat. It ached unbearably.

“I want—I want to forget it all!” she cried. “Every bit of it!” And lifted her eyes to High Hill. She knew she ought not to go. It was late afternoon, and she must be back at Hillcrest within her two hours. And climbing High Hill was difficult work. But Carol wanted to do something difficult! She flung up her head and began the even, untiring pace Miss Nita had taught the girls of her Camp Fire. If only Miss Nita had been at Hillcrest—Carol caught herself up sharply. Thinking about Miss Nita wasn’t safe either.

High Hill offered an obliging number of difficulties, difficulties that left Carol panting as she stubbornly followed the twisting trail. The thick friendly leaves were gone, the brittle twigs cracked and broke beneath her feet, sending her to her knees. The rough branches, cold and wet with rain, caught at her clothing and bruised her hands. Carol set her teeth. She would not go back now, but as for forgetting—it seemed to her she was doing more remembering than ever. She and Joyce had taken that trail more than once that past July, and it was lonely work going over it now with-

out hearing Joyce's laughing, panting voice with its whimsical fancies at her elbow:

"Now here's the Octopus! I'll negotiate him first! If you hear me call ——" And then her breathless signal: "I've survived him! Your turn!"

The Octopus was much harder to "negotiate" alone, but Carol did it. There was the tiny fireplace she and Joyce had built to demonstrate their skill in woodcraft. Carol hurried on. *Why* did everything have to remind her of Joy? She passed the broad stone Joyce had nicknamed the "model's throne" after they had both posed on it. Carol swallowed something that hurt. She came suddenly to the little clearing from where you could look down upon Hillcrest and Parkview. It wasn't the summit of High Hill, by any means, but even from here things looked very small, even the stately Hillcrest tower every loyal Hillcrest girl was proud of. It didn't seem anything to be proud of from here. Nothing did. And it was so terribly *still!* Carol caught her breath. She had never been lonely on High Hill before, but then she had never climbed it

alone. With Miss Nita and the girls, with Joyce it had been different.

Joyce! Couldn't she forget even up here? Wouldn't she ever forget? And wouldn't she ever be able to say: "It's all over, and it's all right"? But it *wasn't* all right! Her picture—Carol shook herself. Joyce had had a picture, too! Why couldn't she remember that? And that Joy had sacrificed it also. And why couldn't she remember that friend-ship—oh, she *was* remembering it! She couldn't forget it! And Mrs. Lancy had said that the ship would be safe, because she, Carol, would understand! She hated to disappoint Mrs. Lancy, but ——

And she hated herself more for not saying anything to drive the awful look out of Joy's eyes. And—and—it did look a silly little incident from up here. But it was like a little leak—oh, why couldn't she forget that friend-ship story? She shivered in the chill wind. The sun was almost down. She must go back to Hillcrest.

Even the downward trail didn't help, although it managed to trip her more than once.

She was thoroughly ashamed of herself, but she could not—she *could not* go on to Joy!

The sun was nearly gone when she reached the road, but it was filling the west with a gold light that fell over everything, "touching earth with rest."

"The color of love!" Carol thought bitterly. "How could God send that to-night?" She wanted to turn and run away from it, but she couldn't seem to do that either. The world seemed to be waiting for something. And then a small green cloud shot suddenly over the perfect gold, and a little cry escaped Carol. Oh, it was cruel such a tiny thing should spoil that lovely sunset! Was it something like that that had happened to hers and Joy's friend-ship? But the sunset wasn't spoiled. Gradually it deepened into rose, blotting the little cloud from sight, then spread out like crimson banners—crimson, the color of battle. Carol's two hours were very nearly gone, but it was then that she did turn her back on the sunset and run down the streets.

Phyllis still sat in the corner. Joyce had left the piano and was huddled up on the

couch. And Phyllis was listening to the stately old clock in the hall count off the minutes:

“Tick-tock, not—yet, not yet, not—yet—
not—yet—not—yet! Tick-tock, not—yet—
not—yet—not—yet!”

And then the door of the hall opened and let in a low beam of golden light, and a voice was saying:

“Joy! Oh—oh—Joy! I’ve been as horrid as a girl could be, but will you try—to forgive me—and forget?”

“*Carol!*” Unbelieving joy flashed into Joyce’s voice. “Carol! Is—is it really you?”

“Yes. Oh, Joy, I’ve been horrible! I ——”

“I—I think you’ll have to do some of the forgiving. I was pretty hateful myself. You know I was. And I did—forfeit ——”

“Stop it!” Carol’s hand stopped the words. “What do I care about a picture?”

“But how—how did you know ——” marveled Joyce.

Phyllis remained very still in her deep chair in the shadowy corner, but Carol laughed softly.

“Phyllis told me.”

"*Phyl!*" Joyce whirled towards the corner.
"Phyl!"

Phyllis had always been dreaming what it would be like to have friends, but she had never guessed she would want to cry because Joyce on one side was saying: "You're a brick, Phyl! No—you're a whole lighthouse of them, for you certainly saved that ship!" and Carol on the other: "Phyllis—oh, you—you darling!"

"But I got the Prize after all!" Joyce triumphed, "for I've got your friendship again!"

"We both won the Prize," Carol said swiftly, "for we've got each other!"

And, outside, the battle-banners in the sky had turned entirely into the color for victory, before they faded into night!

CHAPTER XVIII

THE BUSINESS OF AN ICICLE

“ Oh, some may sing October’s glow,
Of June and sunshine-time,
But let *me* have the ice and snow
Of February mine! ”

caroled Phyllis, flying down the Lancy stairs. She stopped long enough to pat the smooth surface of her slender skis before she flew kitchenward to help Aunt Margaret bake the waffles. Who *could* help singing to-day?

“ It *is* splendiferous! ” Joyce agreed, her cheeks like poppies, after a hasty trip to consult the thermometer. “ The meadow will be gorgeous to ski in, and Edmons Hill—with this crust—can’t you *feel* that toboggan fly, Phyl? ”

Phyllis nodded, her eyes bright.

“ But you’d better enter the Amateur Skiing Event at the Carnival, I think, if you’re going to do anything. You’re really a wonder,

Phyl! You act as if you'd always lived on skis! I'd love it if you could beat Sally or Dara! They've won for the Hillcrestites two years, and it's time we Parkviewers got some chance!"

"Beat *Dara*, Joy?" Phyllis gasped. *She*, beat *Dara Knight*, Dara, who had boldly taken a jump at which even Miss Jackson had hesitated, three days before, and had come flying down the long hill like a beautiful figure of victory!

Joyce nodded calmly. "I certainly would like you very much if you did, my dear cousin. And you're going out on that meadow right after classes and *practise*. This storm was awfully obliging to come along just now. But when I heard that rain last night ——"

"Did you weep?" Jerry had appeared on the scene. "I hope you're making plenty of waffles, Phyl. Did you weep, Joy? I remember you did something of the kind last year when the rest of us were rejoicing because a promising young snow-storm had turned into rain. You weren't here, then, Phyllis. She interviewed the thermometer about every six

seconds, and in between she'd say, 'Daddy, *don't* you think the wind *will* change?' and whenever I came in that night, 'Jerry, is it still snowing?' ”

Joyce turned her back squarely on him. “Mumsie, may we stay at Hillcrest after school? Phyl has simply got to practise in that meadow, and if I'm going to steer that toboggan ——”

Aunt Margaret nodded, laughingly. “Yes, if you'll promise to stop on your way home, and ask Mrs. Harrison for that special recipe of orange cake she promised me.”

“So you're going to be busy, this afternoon, Phyl?” Jerry asked at the breakfast-table, a little later. “I was going to ask you if you'd object to being prescribed as a pill—a story-pill to Miss Kay Sherwin, but ——”

“She can't go!” Joyce answered for her. “She's got to win that Amateur Skiing Event between the Hillcrestites and the Parkviewers, and she has to *practise* this afternoon!”

Phyllis laughed gaily. Phyllis was quite willing to practise for that Skiing Event! She was very grateful to December for providing

such an unusual quantity of snow before Christmas, and to Uncle Rob for selecting such beautiful skis! She couldn't quite understand it, any more than the rest of Hillcrest did, but, after her first two or three spills, Hillcrest suddenly discovered that the shy, hesitating, embarrassed Phyllis had disappeared, and a new, poised, confident, *alive* girl stood in her place, a girl who seemed to know instinctively the proper way to ski, a girl who was very much at home on her slender runners. Phyllis had a private little theory to account for it, a theory which made her dimple sometimes. Surely an Icicle ought to be right in her element when it came to skiing or skating, oughtn't she?

The freezing rain of the night before, following the feathery all-day snow, had certainly succeeded in giving the world a fairy aspect. Every tree was clad in a shining, transparent armor, and each shrub had its share in the glistening load. Even the streets had fairy pavements instead of the prosaic stone, and the fields Phyllis and Joyce passed through, going towards Hillcrest on their skis,

looked as if some flower fairy had overheard the poor, ugly, stiff, bare weeds wishing that they might help make the world lovely for Christmas, for every one was robed in the softest gown of snow lace that could be imagined. Phyllis thought she had never seen such *white* snow in all her life, and the sky—the sky was a perfectly marvelous clear blue!

Half-way to Hillcrest, they stopped with one accord.

“*Oh-h!*” said Phyllis softly.

“I agree with you perfectly, Phyl,” Joyce tried to laugh, but her breath seemed to want to catch somewhere instead.

From a little summit they had looked down, and, suddenly, every tree had burst into color,—rose, blue, green, orange, opal. Even the telegraph-wires flamed and sparkled with them.

Joyce finally moved reluctantly. “We’ll be late if we don’t hurry.”

They didn’t say anything the rest of the way. There didn’t seem to be anything to say.

In the cloak-room, Phyllis encountered Ellinor Sherwin. “Isn’t it perfect!” she

breathed. " Are you coming to the meadow this afternoon? "

Ellinor shook her head soberly. " I can't. My little sister has been having laryngitis, a pretty bad case, and she isn't very strong yet, and I'll have to go home and entertain her, though it seems to me I'm all thought out."

But Ellinor's eyes were very wistful, Phyllis noticed sympathetically. And when she must be wanting to practise for that Carnival—Ellinor *could* ski ——

She must be aching to have that lovely, buoyant, breathless, flying sensation —— And for the sake of the " Parkview-ites " at Hillcrest, she ought not to waste this lovely afternoon.

Phyllis met her later in the school Library. " Ellinor," she said softly, " if I went and entertained Kay, you could stay and ski, and you really ought to, because we Parkviewers want you to win that Skiing Event. Won't you let me, please? "

Ellinor was shaking her head. " Thanks a lot, Phyl, but I couldn't let you do that! Why, you mustn't lose this afternoon either! "

“But I don’t matter as much as you do! Please, I really want to do it, Ellinor! And I truly love children.”

Ellinor laughed. “You’re awfully kind, Phyllis, but I really couldn’t let you do it.”

Phyllis looked away, some of the exultation given her by the morning a little dimmed. She fixed her attention firmly on the portrait of Evelyn Marie Sterns, the first Principal of Hillcrest, hanging over the fireplace. Why did the girls always object to letting her help them?

A hand reached out and touched hers. Ellinor’s steady brown eyes smiled into hers. “I honestly believe you meant what you said, Phyl ——”

Phyllis whirled. “Why, why, of course I did!”

“It seems a shame to let you, but—you’re a dear, Phyllis Lancy, and if you actually want to exchange skiing for entertaining my cranky tyrant of a sister, you have my blessings, and to-morrow I’ll teach you some of my own special ski-jumps. We Parkviewers have simply got to beat the Hillcrestites this year!

Though, I must warn you, Kay has a sweet temper! She threw her toy cook-stove at your cousin this morning. *Now*, do you want to go?"

Phyllis laughed, the shining light back in her eyes.

"Yes, I want to know what she'll do to me!"

"I'm not going to ski to-day," she told Joyce when she had the chance. "I'm going to do Ellinor a favor this afternoon, and she's going to give me a few jumping lessons to-morrow."

"Peggy—Baby—Maud——" Joyce was counting the girls she was selecting as passengers on her toboggan. "Enid—Patsy—— All right, Phyl. And, say, Phyl, would you mind stopping at Mrs. Harrison's for that recipe on your way home?—Bee, Alicia——"

Phyllis laughed; but it *was* hard to turn away from the tantalizing snowy slopes covered with gay, laughing figures and go down through the level streets to the Sherwin home; and little Kay Sherwin was as cross as a child who was a prisoner with laryngitis, while her

playmates were having a glorious time coasting beneath her windows, could be.

Kay's doll-house looked as if it had been hit by a tornado; she had undressed every one of her dolls, and their clothes lay in a heap, with her paint-box and her books and blocks in the exact middle of the floor. She glared at her visitor as Phyllis stood hesitating in the door, wondering, now that she was here, what she could say that wouldn't antagonize the small savage on the floor.

"Go 'way!" shrieked Kay. "Don't want to see you!"

Phyllis shook her head sadly. "I'm afraid you'll have to; Dr. Lancy thought you ought to have a Story-Pill, and I'm the Story-Pill."

Kay reached over for a block, but Phyllis had played with the temperamental Kits too often to be daunted by a block. When Mrs. Sherwin and Kay's grandmother looked in, an hour later, they saw a most astonishing sight. Somebody had made a little room out of the red-and-white stone blocks, and Kay was busy finishing a throne-like chair with tiny blue

ones, being very careful not to disturb the small doll in the center of it.

"Now you must know," Phyllis was saying in a very important-sounding voice, "that when the Months made the awful discovery that every single one of the family had flowers but *December*, well, there was a great to-do in their castle, I can tell you!

" 'Something must be done about it at once!' blustered March. 'I tell you, my dear brothers and sisters, something must be done immediately!'

" 'Aye! 'Tis a disgrace to the family!' exclaimed April, and straightway began to cry.

" 'To be sure, something must certainly be done!' said June, tenderly, 'think of it! Not having *any* flowers!'

"And then July jumped up. 'Come on! We'll take her to the Flower Fairy! She gave us our flowers! She's just forgotten you, December.'

" 'But I have such a lot of snow—and—ice,' began December.

" 'November has a flower!' said July firmly. 'I guess you can have one, too!'

“So they wended their way up to the Castle of the Flower Fairy.”

“Look!” whispered Mrs. Sherwin, and squeezed Grandmother’s hand.

The Months *were* wending their way up to the Flower Fairy’s castle. January was the smallest, a tiny doll in a teddy-bear suit. February held a tiny flag. July was a long-legged boy doll with a bright red skin.

“And they knelt before the Flower Fairy’s throne,” Phyllis was going on, “make them kneel, Kay!” And the watchers saw Kay gravely bend each doll forward. “And when the Flower Fairy saw them, she cried, ‘Why, dear Months, what is the matter? I gave you all flowers! You must do the rest!’

“‘But you didn’t! Oh, dearest Flower Fairy, you didn’t!’ cried all the Months together. ‘You didn’t! You forgot December!’

“And the Flower Fairy wrinkled up her forehead, and she said: ‘December? December? Which of you *is* December?’

“The Months pushed December in front of them, for she had been so frightened that she

was back of them all! 'Here she is! She has Christmas!'

"'Christmas!' said the Flower Fairy, and looked at December very hard. 'Christmas ought to have a flower, but I haven't anything pretty enough. I'll have to make one. Now go home, all of you.'

"'I told you she'd forgotten!' said July.

"And December was very happy, and then she was very frightened. Suppose—suppose the Flower Fairy should forget? But she didn't. When next Christmas came, December had a flower,—a big, soft, red flower, and, so people would always know it was a Christmas flower, the Flower Fairy made it like a star ——"

Phyllis stopped suddenly, almost as breathless as if she had just come down Edmons Hill, and her cheeks were flaming the color of the poinsettia on Kay's little white table. She had glanced up just at the end of her story to see the two listeners in the door.

"What ——" began Kay. "O—oo, Grandma! Come and see it! This is the Flower Fairy's castle, and I made it all my-

self, and here's the paint-box for her to paint the flowers—I don't want you to go, Phyl!"

Phyllis had leaped to her feet, and was reaching for her hat.

"Won't you stay and have tea with Kay?" Mrs. Sherwin hastened to ask. "We'd love to have you, and then we could tell you how much we enjoyed your story."

"I don't *want* you to go!" Kay was clamoring. "I want ——"

But Phyllis was fastening her coat.

"If I didn't go, Kay, I couldn't come back again," she explained reasonably. "Thank you, Mrs. Sherwin, but I have an errand or two I must do for Aunt Margaret now."

The sunset was flaming in the sky, and the long, intensely blue shadows were falling across the snow when Phyllis arrived at the Harrison home. Baby, still in her tobogganing things, opened the door. "Come on in, Phyl. I'll call Mother. Neil, will you please try to stop playing chess solitaire and entertain Phyl while I get Mother! Did you ever hear of such an interesting game in your life, Phyl?"

Phyllis always wished she could stop feeling shy and embarrassed when she was in the presence of Baby's invalid brother. Joyce and Ellinor and Carol weren't, but somehow, although Phyllis knew he was much better, and would probably be well within a year or two, she always had an unaccommodating lump in her throat when she saw him sitting so very quietly in his wheel-chair. And he was playing chess—"chess solitaire," when all the rest of Parkview was getting ready for its annual ice carnival!

Neil moved a knight calmly, and grinned up at Phyllis.

"You ought to be glad some one in the family has brains enough to invent a thing like chess solitaire, Baby. Only the very intelligent play chess, anyway. I'll wager Phyllis does."

"Why—I used to, with my grandfather," Phyllis admitted.

Neil gave a little whoop. "I knew it! My dear Miss Lancy, will you sit down and let me see if you can beat me?"

Baby told Joyce afterward that, after the

shock of seeing Phyllis open her mouth as if she was going to say "Oh, no, I couldn't!" and then suddenly nod and sit down opposite Neil, positively nothing could surprise her!

Half an hour later Mrs. Harrison came softly in and looked over Phyllis' shoulder. Phyllis, her cheeks very pink, had just captured Neil's queen.

"Farewell, your Majesty," Neil observed, and then, after a long minute, "still, I think we can have revenge on your captor." His fingers closed over Phyllis' knight.

"I hoped you'd do that!" Phyllis moved a pawn. "Check!"

"Of all the dumb-bell things to do!" groaned Neil.

"I'm awfully sorry to interrupt," Mrs. Harrison broke in, "but Mrs. Lancy was beginning to be worried about you, Phyllis, and she says if you want the scalloped oysters they are going to have, you'd better come home!"

Phyllis jumped to her feet guiltily. "I didn't know it was getting so late," her voice was contrite. "I wouldn't have worried Aunt Margaret."

" For a girl, you really play a very neat game," Neil drawled. " May I have the pleasure of beating you again soon? "

" Yes," Phyllis reached for her gloves, and then laughed. " But you *didn't* beat me, and you won't, if I can help it."

Baby closed the door behind her and then came back and sank down upon the floor.

" I'm glad I saw it myself! I never would have believed—poor Phyl's always acted as if you might bite her!—and she's always such a little Icicle ——"

Neil was replacing the chess-men in their box. " Icicles," he observed, " have been known to melt."

CHAPTER XIX

“ TO WARM THE HEARTS OF LONELY MORTALS ”

PHYLLIS took a cautious look down the hall. There was no one in sight.

She gave a joyous little laugh and, despite her dignity as a junior—or more of a junior than she was of anything else—she started to skip. She couldn't walk—not to-day! She had never dreamed—even now it didn't seem real! Had Hillcrest really chosen *her* as its Chairman of Christmas Music? It seemed so. Most of the girls she met that day had congratulated her, or, if there wasn't time for that, had managed to flash her a quick smile of understanding.

Phyllis hadn't known about that position until that morning in Assembly when Miss Anderson announced that “ In accordance with a custom of several years' standing, the Student Committee of the school has selected Chairmen for the various Christmas Committees. The Pageant Committee has for its

Chairman, Ellinor Sherwin; the Christmas Card Committee, Babina Harrison; Christmas Decorations and Entertainment Committee, Dara Knight; the Christmas Music Committee ——”

“That will be Blanche Penrose,” Phyllis had thought. Blanche was pretty and popular, one of the girls Phyllis had always envied because she was a born leader. And she had another recommendation. She could sing. And then the room spun around suddenly. Phyllis caught the chair ahead of her.

The name of the Christmas Music Chairman was Phyllis Lancy.

“But—but—I—don’t know how!” she protested afterward.

Joyce looked at her with affection which she managed to conceal by being scornful. “What don’t you know how to do? Sing?”

“Don’t worry, Phyl, it won’t be so bad,” Dara observed.

Phyllis wasn’t worrying. She couldn’t have worried if she had tried. Not after the Ice Carnival two days ago—it gave her an awfully funny feeling yet to think that she *had* beaten

Sally Price and even Dara in the Amateur Skiing Event!—and now—this morning——Joy had probably gone home, but Phyllis didn't care. She went skipping on light feet down the corridor. Half-way down she nearly bumped into a small girl who slipped suddenly from a near-by corner.

“ I beg your pardon! ” Phyllis would have laughed to anybody that afternoon!

“ I'm afraid I wasn't looking quite where I was going! Why—what—can I do anything for you, Dorrie? ”

The little freshman lifted wide and frightened eyes. “ Thorny—Miss Hawthorn's *crying!* ” she whispered.

“ *Crying!* ”

“ Ssh! She'll hear! Yes she is! I went back for my note-book I forgot, and her head was on her desk and she was crying ”—Doris shivered—“ terribly! I didn't dare go in! ”

Phyllis walked slowly to the half-open door of Miss Hawthorn's classroom. Doris was certainly right, and the shaking sobs sounded as if Thorny Path might have been wanting to cry for some time.

" Shall—I go tell Lady Elizabeth?" Doris whispered fearfully. Phyllis shook her head.

" Go on away," she said softly, " I'm going in."

" Go—going *in*?"

Phyllis pushed the door open very gently. " Excuse me, Miss Hawthorn, I wanted ——" she broke off with an " Oh!" that was genuine in its startled embarrassment. The expression on Thorny Path's face was not exactly friendly. " What—what is it? Are you sick?"

Miss Hawthorn looked more of a " thorny path " than Phyllis had ever seen her look. " I am not ill, Miss Lancy. What did you wish?"

" The—the reference for to-morrow's lesson."

" And your cousin could not supply it, I presume?"

Phyllis flushed guiltily, although she *had* forgotten just which poem of Scott's Miss Hawthorn had mentioned.

" I d-didn't think of that!"

" So it would appear. You juniors do not seem to have a habit of thinking. Get what you wish as quickly as possible, please."

Phyllis obediently crossed the room and searched for her own note-book. She was angry with herself for having come in. Dara was right. Nobody *could* like Thorny Path. But when she reached the door, she looked back. There was a discouraged droop to Miss Hawthorn's shoulders. Phyllis felt a pang of pity. Perhaps these last four months had been a thorny path to Thorny Path herself. And—somehow—she didn't look as if anybody had ever really loved her. It would be hard to love a Thorny Path, but—Phyllis had been an Icicle. The unbending look about Miss Hawthorn's back wasn't encouraging, but, with a hand on the knob of the door, Phyllis spoke again:

“ Are—are you *sure* there is nothing I can do, Miss Hawthorn? ”

Miss Hawthorn turned in her seat and looked Phyllis up and down. “ Perhaps you could assist me in one way, but you probably wouldn't care to.”

“ Oh, yes, I would! ” cried Phyllis rashly. “ What is it, please? ”

“ You can—if you will—tell me what is the

matter with your class during its history period."

Phyllis flushed as guiltily as if she, and not Dara Knight, were responsible for the juniors' mysterious behavior.

" I see you can. Well, do you regret your hasty offer of assistance? "

Miss Hawthorn knew Phyllis well enough to recognize " The Lancy Tilt." Phyllis was wishing miserably that she had stayed on the other side of the door in safety; Miss Hawthorn's searching eyes were uncomfortable.

" Do you know Miss Dara Knight well, Miss Lancy? "

Phyllis guessed what was coming. " I—I am a day-pupil, you know, Miss Hawthorn ——"

Thorny Path frowned. " That does not matter. You hear her recite. You have heard her recite history in this room for nearly four months, have you not? "

Phyllis nodded, stifling a giggle. Dara's recitations, since she had vowed to be " nice " to Thorny Path, were very nearly works of art!

“ And you heard her when Miss Farendale was here? ”

Phyllis nodded again. She did not feel like giggling now.

“ I will be frank with you, Miss Lancy. I liked Miss Knight, and I thought she liked me. I could not understand—I find I do not understand a good deal lately, why her classmates always appeared so amused when I called upon her to recite. Her blunders were absurd, of course, but it did not strike me as amusing to see a girl so evidently struggling over a recitation.” A dull red crept up Thorny Path’s cheeks. “ I think I said so once or twice, did I not? ”

Phyllis swallowed. “ Yes.”

“ It never occurred to me until this morning, when I suggested to Miss Anderson that Miss Knight be dropped to the sophomore class for a more thorough grounding in history, and she advised that I glance over the records, that anything might be wrong.”

She stopped at a little sound from Phyllis. Phyllis was in danger of choking. *Dara* dropped to the *sophomore* class! Carol had

warned her she had passed the limit when she had lifted questioning eyes to Miss Hawthorn's and innocently and regretfully said she " was very stupid, she knew, but would Miss Hawthorn please tell her who Henry Eighth's last two wives had been—she could only remember six? " And then had added, when Miss Hawthorn grimly remarked that that was the entire list, and most people thought it long enough, " Then why does history speak of him as Henry Eighth? "

" My discoveries were interesting. But can you tell me why a student of Miss Knight's excellent standing should choose to waste a teacher's time, talent, and patience by pretending such absurd ignorance? "

Phyllis felt as if she had somehow gotten into the inquisition.

" I—I think—perhaps—she was trying to be funny. "

" It must have been very amusing! " Miss Hawthorn's voice was sarcastic. " But all my classes have been—shall we say ' entertaining ' ?—Miss Lancy, do you know of a conspiracy among the pupils to have me resign? "

Phyllis colored hotly, but she shook her head violently. “No! Miss Hawthorn! I am sure ——”

“You might ask Miss Knight about it when you tell her I am going to resign. I am sure she will be delighted to hear that I am.”

“Oh, no, no!” cried Phyllis vehemently. “Please don’t resign just yet, Miss Hawthorn! Please don’t! You haven’t understood us very well, that’s all!”

“Why? So my classes may have further opportunities to ‘entertain’ and ‘amuse’ me?”

Miss Hawthorn certainly had the knack of saying things. Phyllis had hard work remembering the discouraged droop of her shoulders.

“Why should I stay? None of my classes like me. I confess I don’t like them. When I first taught, history was a sober and serious study, not like your ‘Miss Nita’s’ play-methods. I thought possibly I should like to teach in another school, but I’ve proved myself a failure. I shall resign as soon as possible.”

A failure! Thorny Path felt that way, too! And yet, under it all, she was a good teacher.

She mustn't go! Phyllis became serious at once, and said, earnestly:

"Please, Miss Hawthorn, don't resign—not just yet! Please wait another month. And please try to understand us. Dara didn't mean to—hurt—anybody. She was just trying—to—to—trying to ——"

"To be 'entertaining,'" said Miss Hawthorn.

Phyllis sighed. "Yes. But she didn't mean to hurt you."

"Didn't she? 'Thorny Path' is a pleasant little name, is it not? Well, I am afraid I am not the right teacher for Hillcrest."

Phyllis was amazed at the sadness in Thorny Path's voice. "I thought I should like it, but I find I do not understand things. I did not approve of Miss Farendale's methods, and I wouldn't know how to use them if I did. I am afraid I have been sarcastic at times—it is a habit of mine, and your constant mention of 'Miss Nita' made me angry. It will be best for me to go, my dear."

Perhaps it was the unconscious "my dear," perhaps it was because Phyllis had traveled



HER HAND REACHING OUT SUDDENLY FOR MISS HAWTHORN'S.
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through the Slough of Despond herself, but whatever the “ it ” was, she had a great wave of pity and understanding for Thorny Path. She leaned forward earnestly, her hand reaching out suddenly for Miss Hawthorn’s as it lay on her desk. “ It isn’t! It isn’t! You mustn’t resign! Oh, dear Miss Hawthorn, *please* wait a little longer! And—and if the girls begin to tease in class, why—why just try to tease them back! I think maybe I can make them understand! ”

Nobody had ever coaxed Miss Hawthorn to postpone leaving a school before. She couldn’t remember a single pupil looking into her face with pleading, shining grey eyes, and an eager voice saying: “ Please say you’ll wait! Just another month! ” It was a very odd sensation. It was so very odd that Thorny Path felt something inside her waver and promise.

Phyllis’ exultation lasted almost to the cloak-room. Then the chilly realization of what she had done made her heart drop back where it belonged.

Miss Hawthorn had promised to stay. Phyllis Lancy had promised to “ explain ” to

Hillcrest girls and make them " understand! " Understand! Why, they couldn't! *They* didn't know what it felt like to be an Icicle or a Thorny Path! And she had upset all Dara's nicely-engineered plans. She, who wanted the girls to like her! " If they can't understand, they're not worth having as friends," her conscience tried to assure her.

" But I want them just the same! " wailed Phyllis. " Was Dara really planning to try and make Thorny Path re—oh, why did I have to meddle with Thorny Path's affairs? "

She was pulling on her sweater when Baby came dashing into the cloak-room. " We've been looking for you from the tower to the dungeon! " she announced. " Joy left a note for you on your hat. Didn't you find it? We're all up in Dara's room. Come on! "

Up in Dara's room! Dara was the last person she wanted to see that afternoon. " I can't, Baby —— "

Baby was propelling her towards the stairs.

But the visiting hour was almost over; there couldn't be many minutes left.

CHAPTER XX

THE PROMISE OF A LANCY

THEY were all there,—Joy, Ellinor, Dara, Emmie. “Come on in, Chairman of the Christmas Music!” Dara made her a low curtsy, “this party’s in honor of all the Chairmen, and you never arrive until it’s almost too late! Where have you been?”

“Yes, and what have you been doing with yourself? You look like an owl!” Joyce echoed with unflattering frankness. “Most people think it’s an honor! Where *have* you been all this time?”

“I’ve been with Thorn—with Miss Hawthorn, and I do feel solemn.”

“With Thorny Path? You? What have you done?”

“Nothing. Nothing more than the rest of you. Laughed at Dara’s being nice to her.”

“What did she say to you, Phyl?”

Dara suddenly turned away from her little

electric stove and paid attention. "How did she find out? Is she—er ——"

"She suggested to Lady Elizabeth that she drop you to the sophomore class, and Lady Elizabeth advised her to look at the records. She's awfully disappointed in you, Dara."

Dara grinned, but she looked a trifle alarmed, at the same time. "Did she say what she was going to do about it?"

"Yes. She said she knew none of the other girls like her, and now she knew Dara—she would resign as soon as possible."

"Resign! Then we do need a celebration! Let's see, what—how ——"

Phyllis shook her head in desperation. How could she explain that Thorny Path had grown just as tired and hurt and discouraged as Miss Nita would have done under the same circumstances? —And a little more so, because Miss Nita would have understood, and poor Thorny Path didn't. What had possessed her to promise to explain, anyhow? Why did she have to interfere with Miss Hawthorn's business, anyway.

Why, she had *promised* to do it, hadn't

she, that night in the quiet Camp Fire room with only the candles and firelight, when she had chosen the name "Fire Maiden," and prayed that she would be "with magic touch engifted to warm the hearts of lonely mortals"? But she had meant—well, she *hadn't* meant a Miss Hawthorn! She had been thinking of a *girl* who—but it was Miss Hawthorn who had come her way! And she *had* promised, and the promise of a Lancy—and she had promised her grandfather to remember the Lancy Honor; and she had promised Miss Nita to try and be as nice to Miss Hawthorn, and now she had promised Miss Hawthorn!

Oh, why had she done so much promising! She didn't want to remember any of it! She wanted to turn her back on the Lancy Honor and keep it there! The girls looked blurry suddenly, and there was an uncomfortable thing, something like a burr, in her throat.

"Listen, girls, please," she begged. "I don't believe you'll like me afterward, but—I asked Thorny—Miss Hawthorn to give us another chance. She's going to stay another month."

Baby suddenly buried her head in Dara's pet cushion. Lucy paused with a piece of her favorite fudge half raised. Dara nearly let the precious chocolate cake her mother had just sent slide to the floor.

"Give us another chance! Did the appointment go to your head, child?"

Phyllis flushed miserably. "I don't know. I don't know how to explain. She was crying, and she looked so—so miserable and discouraged. I don't believe *anybody's* ever liked her! She liked Dara, and she thought Dara liked her, and then this afternoon when she found—Dara——"

"Go on about Dara." Dara had set the cake down and was curling Baby's hair about her finger.

"That's all. I guess she was discouraged already, and that—and it hurt her because we talked so much about Miss Nita—she—she doesn't know how to teach Miss Nita's way, you see ——"

"Yes, we have seen that," Dara murmured gently.

"She's awfully proud and un-get-at-able

and—everything. But really she doesn't want to be a Thorny Path! And—then I said I'd try and explain to you girls and—then—perhaps things would be all right."

Dara was frowning absorbedly over Baby's hair; Emmie carefully inspected her slippers; Joyce was surveying the dancing sunbeams on the snowy roof outside. The burr climbed higher in Phyllis' throat. "I—I wish I could make you understand! She *doesn't* want to be a Thorny Path at all!"

There was a very queer little silence in the room. "No?" said Dara. "Did she tell you so, Phyl?"

Phyllis shook her head until she could speak. "No! But I know! You see a boy called me an iceberg once, and it hurt dreadfully. I know how she feels. I didn't want to be an iceberg. I wanted to talk and laugh and do the things other girls did, and I didn't know how! Thorn—Miss Hawthorn's like that!"

"So you promised to explain to us? That was nice of you! What do you want us to do now? Have my Entertainment Committee give her a party as an apology and a Christ-

mas present—a nice historical one, everybody in costumes and things?"

Phyllis' eyes began to get their shining light again. " I think that would be lovely."

" But would Thorny—I beg your pardon, ' Miss Hawthorn,' think so?" Dara's voice was dangerously sweet. " Would she ' understand ' ? I don't care to risk it. I suppose my history will have to improve, but as for a party with Thorny Path as a guest of honor, that is too much!"

Emmie giggled.

" I'm—I'm sorry."

" We're sorry, too," Dora agreed politely, " but we've never had the advantage of feeling like an iceberg, you see. Oh, are you going? So soon? My mother's cake is ——"

" I am." The girl facing them looked very much like the " nice, cool little iceberg " Herbert Richardon had described. " Don't you think I've stayed long enough? Good afternoon."

None of the girls answered, but, as the door closed, Phyllis caught Dara's murmured " Yes, your Lancyness," and Emmie's giggle.

She had failed once more! She never did anything else! She had given her most carefully guarded secret to those girls, and it had been of no use. She hadn't made the girls understand about Thorny Path, and she hadn't made Thorny Path understand about the girls. And—why, the girls must think she had been the tale-bearer! Oh, but she had made an awful muddle of things! Why under the sun hadn't she waited for a more propitious time? But the girls wouldn't trust her now.

Oh, what was the use of trying to do anything for anybody? The best thing would have been to have let Miss Hawthorn resign. Well, she probably would after another month, and Phyllis had better resign with her. There wasn't any use in proving yourself to be one failure after another! She was simply "Phyllis the Iceberg," and she probably always would be. Yes, she would go home. That was the best place for failures. She would always have Joyce and Aunt Margaret and Uncle Rob and Jerry and Kits and Carol to remember; and it wouldn't matter to any one if she went home a failure, not at all.

CHAPTER XXI

THE CAMPAIGN ENDS

UP in the green room, with the door locked and her back safely turned to the picture-Phyllis, Phyllis wrote a letter to "The Chairman of the Committee for Improving Phyllis Lancy." It was a blistering letter—in more ways than one, and there were holes where the pen had made little jabs, and a blot after the final "Lancy." Phyllis reached out for her box of wax. Sealing it like that would make it seem more final, somehow. Phyllis wanted it final. She was afraid if it wasn't she might be tempted to break the resolutions she had made in it, and it would be silly to stay here now. She remembered a remark her grandfather had made once when, a stubborn little culprit, she had refused to ask Miss Patterson's pardon for an outbreak: "Determination to overcome mistakes is to be applauded; pigheadedness to ignore them is to be de-

spised.” And she would simply be pigheaded, if she didn’t acknowledge that coming to Park-view had been a mistake, wouldn’t she?

The box of wax caught, somewhere. She gave a desperate little pull and it tumbled out, bringing with it the long, flat business-like envelope containing her “Campaign Outline,” with Jerry’s motto written across it.

“I Will Study and Prepare, and my Time Will Come.”

Phyllis stared at it guiltily. Then she struck the match for the little candle.

“I Will Study and Prepare, and my Time Will Come.”

She moved the envelope impatiently out of the way, but the match had gone out. A ray of soft sunshine slanted across the desk and fell across the single line on the big envelope.

“I Will Study and Prepare, and my Time Will Come.”

Yes, but she had studied! She had studied and studied! She *had* tried, and her time—

was the Christmas Music Committee her "time"? Oh, but they wouldn't want her now! She was sure they wouldn't!

"Phyllis! O-oh, Phyl-lis! Phyl!"

Phyllis held her breath. She was not sure she wanted to see anybody, and Jerry had an uncomfortable habit of seeing more than you wanted him to, sometimes! She was tempted to ignore the summons, but after all it wasn't safe to try that sort of tactics with Doctor Jeremiah Lancy!

Doctor Jeremiah Lancy was standing at the foot of the stairs. "You were up there, weren't you? I thought so. I'd like to turn a patient over to you, if you don't mind."

Phyllis didn't mind when she saw the patient was Kits,—Kits, with tears still on her fair lashes, doubtfully surveying a bandaged hand.

"What happened?"

Kits answered for herself. "The kettle fell over on me."

"Kits hadn't had a burn in so long she wanted to know what they felt like again," observed Jerry, "so she got one as a birthday present."

Kits sniffed suspiciously; and Kits never sniffed over trifles. But after the office door had closed upon Jerry and they were snuggled down on the soft rug in front of the cheerful-sounding fire—Phyllis reflected it was probably the most cheerful thing in the room, Kits forgot about her damaged hand a little and began to unfold some of her birthday plans. She seemed a bit hazy over some of them, but Phyllis, cuddling the soft little body close, didn't care. The occasions when the independent Kits condescended to be cuddled were too rare to be lost! And Phyllis was in a mood for cuddling, herself! But, as for the birthday, it appeared there was certainly going to be a cake, and a party, and Phyllis was to have an invitation.

“*Phyl!* Phyllis! Where are you? *Phyl!*”

“If she stopped calling, she might find you,” Kits remarked justly, and the answering laugh in her voice made her cousin sound quite different from the Phyllis that Joyce had last heard.

“In the library, Joy!”

“Oh.” Joyce, her cheeks, under the close-

fitting green hat, rosy with the keen wind, a bunch of holly in her hands, framed against the dark curtains, was enough to give anybody a thorough Christmas thrill.

" Baby's here," was her wholly unnecessary remark, since Baby appeared beside her. " She wants to know if you'll help with the Christmas cards. I told her you would," she added graciously, " but she came to see for herself."

Phyllis stared blankly, and Baby laughed. " You haven't a very lucid (don't you like that word, Phyl?) manner of explaining, Joy! I don't suppose you do know, Phyl, but it's a tradition at Hillcrest for us to make and buy our Christmas cards and folders *at Hillcrest*. The money goes to the Children's Hospital, because that's our pet charity, and I'm Chairman of that this year. Joy and Carol are on it, to help with the picture part, and we thought maybe you'd help with the poetry side. You will, won't you? You'll be pretty busy with your own Committee, I suppose, but it won't take *you* long to scribble a verse or two or three! Why, what's the matter?"

Phyllis was struggling to hide the wave of

joy and doubts and hopes that was coming over her, and not succeeding especially well. "You're—you're sure—you want me?" she stammered incredulously.

Baby colored. Suppose Phyllis wouldn't accept this left-handed apology? "Why—of course. What's the trouble?"

"N-nothing. Yes, I'll do it, Baby! I'll be *glad* to!"

"You sound like *Pollyanna*," remarked Joyce. "I'm going down-town to get some bristol-board and things for the cards, after I've seen Mumsie. See you later, Phyl."

Phyllis watched them disappear down the street and nearly forgot the listening Kits at her side. Kits, however, was not the kind to be ignored. "They like you," she announced. "They like you lots."

Phyllis stared. "Who, child?"

"Joy an' Carol an' Baby an' ——"

"How—how do you know?"

"'Cause they told me so!" said Kits with triumph. "The ovver day, when I was waiting for you to make Peter Hoehandle a new coat, they asked me if I liked you, and I said

'Course!' And then I asked them did they like you?"

Phyllis held her tight. "And—and what did they say?"

"I'm telling you!" responded Kits, indignant at Phyllis' very evident lack of patience. "Joy said 'Sure.' And Baby said 'I'm beginning to have a 'piscion I do,' and Carol said 'Like this.' And she hugged me.—Oh, *Phyltwis!* You're all cwyng! What's the matter? Is you sick? I'll get Jerwy ——"

Phyllis caught her at the door. "I'm not a bit sick, Kits! I'm going to tell you about Santa Claus!"

Mrs. Saunders appeared before the story was finished—before the third telling was finished, that is, and she and Aunt Margaret stood obligingly silent until St. Nicholas bade the world his final "Merry—Christmas—to—all—and—to—all—a—good—night!"

"I'm glad to have caught you, Phyllis." Mrs. Saunders deftly untangled Kits, who was struggling to put her right arm into her left coat-sleeve. "Kits told you about the lovely party we're going to have, didn't she, with ice-

cream snow-men, and a present for everybody from the Christmas tree?"

"It's the first birthday I've had in a whole year," said Kits, "and I wish it would hurry up!"

"It certainly is!" agreed her mother. "Would you object to coming over that afternoon and playing hostess to ten little tots? You know them all."

Kits had seen that queer look cross Phyllis' face earlier in the afternoon, and it was not the first time Phyllis wished she had her cousin's fluent vocabulary. All she could find to say was what she had said to Baby: "But—but do you really want me?"

Mrs. Saunders calmly adjusted her daughter's hat. "I wouldn't ask you if I didn't," she said.

Aunt Margaret waved to Kits and her mother as they disappeared into the house opposite, and then she turned to Phyllis.

"There's a letter on the table for you that came with the mail just now, Phyllis."

Phyllis gazed at the typewritten, important-looking letter wonderingly, and then she slit it

carefully and drew out the sheet with its heading "Parkview Manor Free Public Library."

"MISS PHYLLIS LANCY,
PARKVIEW.

MY DEAR MISS LANCY:

I am very happy to tell you that, at the meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Parkview Manor Public Library which took place last evening, on the recommendation of Mr. A. W. Sherwin, the Board decided to offer you the opportunity to conduct a story-hour in the children's room once every two weeks. The salary we are in a position to offer is not large—\$12 a month, but if you find yourself interested in such work, it may prove good practice. Will you kindly let me know if you care to take charge of this story-hour?

Cordially yours,

ROLAND CROWELL."

Phyllis stood still, an almost frightening wave of joy clutching her heart as tightly as her fingers clutched the paper, and then suddenly she was flying up the stairs to the refuge of the green room. When she saw it now, something about it made her know she could never have left it—not the way she had

planned! If she went she would have no Joyce-painted furniture, no sunny Aunt-Margaret-made hangings, no private window-seat and book-shelves Uncle Rob had built especially for her, and there certainly would be no trifle-frayed rug with the spot where Phyllis had spilled a queer concoction the day she surreptitiously tried to learn fudge-making over the little electric stove Grandfather had sent her, and no garden lying outside her windows. The letter to the "Chairman of the Committee for Improving Phyllis Lancy" lay face downward on the floor, and the picture-Phyllis smiled down on it. Phyllis was suddenly very much ashamed of that letter.

Miss Hawthorn might continue to be sarcastic, her pupils might desire to aggravate her; very well, they could. The girls might cut her for her inopportune rush to Thorny Path's defense. They could. Miss Hawthorn might resign if she wished to, but the person named Phyllis Lancy intended fighting things out!

CHAPTER XXII

PHYLLIS HEARS OF A FAERY PRINCESSE

BUT fighting things out did prove a trifle harder than Phyllis had expected. She had not bargained on Blanche Penrose's cool refusal to act on the Music Committee, or on the tepid enthusiasm of the Committee she did finally manage to assemble. She was unhappily aware of their polite indifference to her tentative plans. She had taken them into the Camp Fire room for their meeting, and the little fire throwing dancing lights around the furnishings, and the snowflakes softly tapping on the window-panes, were doing their best to make the setting effective, but, somehow, it didn't seem to affect the Committee, and Phyllis sensed that, somewhere, her appeal was failing.

“You see, girls, I've never done anything like this before,” she explained, looking around the politely listening circle, and feeling they were all very far away from her. “I haven't

even been at Hillcrest at Christmas time before. If I'm not doing things right, you'll tell me, won't you? And *please* give me some of *your* ideas!"

"Oh, things will go all right," Mary Hedden said indifferently.

"They always have, I guess," Lucy added with a giggle. "I shouldn't worry if I were you."

"Mrs. Hilton usually helps you, if you ask," the sophomore member contributed.

Only little Doris Reade, the freshman who had adored Phyllis since the day she first heard her sing in chapel, responded. She cast the rest of the Committee a glance of scorn which they didn't mind in the least, and slipped a friendly little hand into her Chairman's. "Of course I'll help—if you'll tell me how! I'll find out what Christmas music our class likes, and who can sing. Of course we're only freshmen ——" the coolness of the atmosphere was beginning to have its effect on her, too.

"You belong to Hillcrest just as much as the rest of us," Phyllis assured her swiftly. "Don't they, girls?"

"Naturally," said Mary, with a dry little smile.

"Committee meeting over, Madam Chairman?" Carol appeared in the door of Joy's room as Phyllis slowly came up the stairs. "Come on in. We're doing folders and things. —Oh! *Don't* sit on *that!* They've taken me nearly all afternoon! Although I don't suppose they are as important as the Music is."

"Is it so very important?" Phyllis asked wistfully, obediently delaying taking a seat until Carol had removed the half-dry array of folders.

Carol shot her a swift look. "Yes, I guess it is. We've always been pretty proud of our Christmas Music."

"Somebody told me to-day the Chairman had nearly always been a senior."

"We-ll, perhaps she has. You're part senior. Who told you?"

"Somebody."

"Um! 'Somebody' usually does tell things. What's the matter, Phyl? Won't your Committee behave?"

Phyllis smiled a trifle wryly. "Oh, yes!

They do that! They 'behave' beautifully. They're terribly polite, but they don't seem to be anything else!"

"Blanche!" exploded Joyce from the corner where she was painting. She dipped her brush savagely into a patch of brilliant color. "Bother Blanche! She can't expect to get everything!"

"I wouldn't bother her," Carol advised, regarding Phyllis thoughtfully. "Nor about her, either. Don't worry about it, Phyl. It will all come right in the end."

"I can't help it!" Phyllis mourned sadly. "It won't be the kind of a thing I wanted it to be!"

"Things never are." Joyce spoke from experience.

"Joyce is a pessimist to-day," Carol interposed quickly. "She can't make Mrs. Santa Claus's portrait behave. There's no Joy in her. She's just plain Joyce!"

But, despite Carol's cheerful predictions, Hillcrest Christmas music *wasn't* what Phyllis had wanted to make it, and yet it baffled even Mrs. Hilton and Miss Anderson to say

what was wrong about it. It couldn't be called a failure, the freshmen and the juniors saw to that, but it was simply a carefully planned program, with the last pitch of enthusiasm missing.

"I hope Blanche is satisfied!" snapped Joyce, on their return from Hillcrest, Christmas Eve.

Phyllis managed to contract a severe attack of laryngitis during the Christmas vacation. Where it came from, she couldn't tell. It was misery enough to have it *there!* Phyllis wondered if it were punishment for having been tempted to leave Hillcrest! At any rate, for the first three weeks after vacation, Phyllis was forced to remain at home, and, consequently, missed being on hand when Professor Knight, Dara's father, came to Hillcrest to lecture on the Ancient History of France.

"He was good, too," Joyce told her cousin. "He didn't sound a bit like a lecture or history, but, afterward, he asked Thorny Path if Dara was a good history student."

"*Oh!*" Phyllis managed to croak.

Joyce nodded, and sat down at the foot of

her cousin's bed. "You may well say so, Cousin-dear. Dara said she never felt so awful in her life, and Thorny Path smiled—*smiled*, can you imagine it, Phyllis Lancy?—and said she was one of the most brilliant scholars she had ever taught, although, at first, she had managed to mystify her completely, and then she told him the whole story, and she made it amusing! Dara's father laughed, even though he scolded her afterward!"

"Scolded Thorny ——" Phyllis' voice sounded like a fog-horn.

"Are you really my cousin who can sing? No! Dara! But the funniest thing is that Dara can't get used to the idea that she and Thorny Path actually like each other."

"Hello!" Emmie greeted her the first day she was well enough to go back to Hillcrest. "Missed you!"

And Dara waved her hand to her across the Assembly Room.

Phyllis came out of Assembly that morning with a singing heart. Miss Anderson had made an announcement. Hillcrest was going to give an operetta in the spring. Rehearsals

would begin in a month. Those who desired rôles would report to Mrs. Hilton that afternoon. Phyllis listened excitedly. " I Will Study and Prepare, and my Time Will Come! " Was it really coming this time? She would never win a basket-ball game for Hillcrest, and there was no danger of her winning laurels in a track-meet or on the debating team, but she could sing! She *had* studied and prepared for that!

And then she caught sight of Blanche Penrose in the senior aisle. Blanche was leaning forward, too, and there was something intent in her attitude. A little chilling doubt rose to cool Phyllis' hopes. She could sing! Yes, but she was forced to admit that Blanche could sing, too, and there might be people who would prefer Blanche's high, developed voice to Phyllis' " cream-and-honey " one. And Blanche was a senior, a clever, pretty, popular senior, the President of her class, with more honors than Phyllis could remember, and Phyllis was Phyllis Lancy, a girl who belonged to no especial class, with an unsuccessful Christmas Music Committee for her record, and not much

of anything else. And then Blanche turned and looked at her. She smiled, but the smile made Phyllis more uncertain than ever. But this was a test of musical merit. If Blanche deserved a rôle more than she did, why, it was right that Blanche should have it. And there would be more than one rôle!

But when Mrs. Hilton read the libretto of "The Faery Princesse" that afternoon, Phyllis forgot the high-minded stand she had taken in Assembly. She *wanted* the rôle of this lovely "Faery Princesse" who wandered away from her court one moonlit night and found it hard to wander back again, being misguided by elf and pixie because another Faery coveted her kingdom, but, finally, finding the Prince who had magic to set all aright and being led back for her coronation.

Blanche Penrose, who could watch and listen at the same time, saw her "rival's" hands were clenched. "Rival" was Blanche's own name for her. She had made a commanding gesture when she saw Phyllis standing in the doorway of the room already rapidly filling with excited girls. Phyllis hesitated, but she had come over

to Blanche. Girls usually came when Blanche beckoned.

" Sit here. Rivals always sit together, I've heard."

" But I'm not ——"

" Not my rival? I'm afraid you are! I want a leading rôle, and the Chairman of the Christmas Music Committee ought to have a very good chance for it! "

Phyllis flushed at the word " ought! " But this was different! This was Phyllis Lancy's voice against Blanche Penrose's, not the Chairman of an unsuccessful committee against the popular senior President!

But, as the try-out proceeded, and Mrs. Hilton ran over the music, some of it lilting, some of it tender, wistful, some of it triumphant and soaring, Phyllis felt almost savage. Blanche or no Blanche, she wanted the rôle of the " Princesse! " She could sing it! She *could!*

" I Will Study and Prepare, and my Time Will Come."

But Phyllis had just recovered from laryn-

gitis; it made a difference. And Blanche, her head tilted a little back, sang sweetly, clearly, and, at the end, with a little note of triumph none of the rest had mastered. Phyllis knew then, as well as she knew two days later, when Mrs. Hilton announced the results of the try-out, who would have the precious rôle. Blanche Penrose was to be the "Princesse."

CHAPTER XXIII

“DOE YE NEXT THYNGE”

“WELL,” demanded an impatient Joyce of the slowly approaching Phyllis, “what did you get? You’re the Princesse, aren’t you?”

Phyllis shook her head. “No, that’s Blanche.”

“Oh, is it? Humph! Well, what rôle did *you* get?”

“I’m—I’m in the chorus and—Blanche’s understudy.”

“Her *what?*” Joyce stared at her cousin in blank amazement. “Carol, did I hear my ears? Phyl Lancy, what possessed you to take such a job as that?”

“‘Doe ye next thyng,’ you know,” Phyllis quoted her suddenly-adopted motto, intent on tucking her books and papers in the leather book-bag she and Joyce shared together. It wouldn’t be safe to let them see her face just then!

Joyce sounded a little aggrieved. “Well, I must say you take it coolly!”

There was an indescribable little sound, and Carol swung her around. “Understudies are necessary things, and you’re going to be a good one,” she prophesied. “Let’s go over to the pond. I learned a new figure while you were sick, and I’m so proud of it I want to show it to everybody who will watch me! Come along, Joy!”

“An understudy!” Even as she slipped into her skating shoes, Joyce was scornful. “I’m almost ashamed of you, Phyl!”

“I’d have been ashamed of her if she *hadn’t* taken it. ‘The better part of valor is discretion,’ you know, Joy.” Carol’s eyes twinkled.

Joyce sniffed. “Yes, I do now! But if *you* had quoted it *yesterday*, you’d have said that wisdom was the better part of it, just as I did!”

Carol was right; Phyllis did make a good understudy. Blanche couldn’t be “doeing ye next thynges” any more faithfully than Phyllis was. She gave her whole heart and mind

and body to the "Faery Princesse," entering into her various moods more fully than Blanche did sometimes, although her wistful-looking understudy had to admit that Blanche, with her yellow hair, silver voice, slender, small, pretty, was doing far better than she had imagined she would; that Blanche really seemed perfect for the rôle. Phyllis found herself wishing that she wasn't. She was heartily ashamed of herself the next minute.

"The idea!" she tried to scold herself. "I'm ashamed of you, Phyllis Lancy! Blanche is the best Hillcrest has, and this 'Faery Princesse' thing has got to be a success!"

"But I don't want Blanche to be our best!" The Phyllis she was trying to stifle, wailed. "I don't! You know I don't!"

Phyllis got up from her lonely seat with a determined look about her chin. It wasn't time yet for her own small part, but she must find something to take her mind away from Blanche!

"Phyllis!" Miss Kingsley, Mrs. Hilton's assistant, caught her by the shoulder. "Will

you do me a favor? Run up and see if Miss Marstead has anything we could use for Blanche's crown. We really ought to begin practising the coronation scene to-day.”

“I'll get something,” Phyllis promised.

“Oh-h!” Miss Kingsley exclaimed wearily at sight of the silver paper and cardboard Phyllis brought back, “there isn't any one to put it together! I'm needed at the piano this minute!”

“I'll do it,” Phyllis offered. The little ante-room was comparatively quiet. Most of the girls were on the stage. The school orchestra was playing the lovely “At Eventide” song of the Princesse. Something inside Phyllis began to relax. After all, she could help the “Faery Princesse” to be a success. She had learned how, now, all you had to do was to go on “doeing ye next thynges.” (Phyllis was grateful to Kits for the strenuous training for “doeing next thynges” she had given her with her demands that Phyllis provide her ever-increasing family of dolls with “nevelators” and a “real car train.”)

Blanche had taken up “At Eventide,” her

clear voice weaving in and out, rising with the tender melody to its highest peak, and Phyllis' "next thyng" castle tumbled to the ground.

It wasn't fair! It wasn't fair! Blanche was only singing as if it was a pretty bit of music, a little difficult, to be conquered by her, but, to Phyllis, who loved music with that passionate ardor only a true musician knows, it *was* the magic words "at eventide," and Phyllis was sitting quietly behind the scenes, alone, making a crown for another Princesse! Why had that laryngitis had to come just when it did? Why hadn't Mrs. Hilton understood her voice would come back? She loved that rôle of the Princesse so! Oh, it—it wasn't *fair*!

Phyllis carried a sorry frame of mind home with her from rehearsal.

"Hello," Kits remarked amiably from the window-seat, where, according to Joy's weak pun, she and Comfie were snuggled "Comfortably."

"Hello, Comfort Kits," Phyllis laughed, smoothing her copy of the "Faery Princesse" out of the tight roll into which she had twisted it on her way home.

Kits, who had listened attentively to Phyllis' practicing the last few days, and had been so charmed with the story of the "Faery Princess" that Joyce had caught her trying to coerce a very bored Comfie into being a "Pwince-boy," looked on with interest.

"I've told Billy's muvver about the Pwincess," she observed; "she's coming to hear you sing about her."

"Hear *me*, Kits?" cried Phyllis, horror-stricken. "But I'm not the Princess, childie. That's another girl! I told you about her. I'm—I'm just learning to sing about the Princess so if anything happens to her it won't spoil all the other songs!"

"All right," said Kits calmly, "I'll tell Billy's muvver something's going to happen to that ovver girl."

Joyce, who had just come in, choked.

"Oh, Kits! Please listen to Phyllis! That other girl isn't going to have anything happen to her! And she's going to be the nice Princess! You haven't told anybody else, have you?"

"Yes," said Kits quite serenely, "most esey-

body. Yes, I *do* mean eseybody. They were glad."

"I should think they would have been!" murmured Joyce. "This is what you get for giving Somebody a private matinée, Phyl!"

"But, Joy, it isn't funny!" pleaded the distressed Phyllis. "Lady Elizabeth will be furious if she hears! What shall I do?"

Joyce appeared to consider the matter gravely.

"Let's see: I think I heard Jerry say Esme Warren had the measles. Send Blanche to call on her."

"Joy! Kits, please understand, and tell everybody I am *not* going to be the Princesse!"

Kits drew a disappointed lip. "Then why do you sing about her so hard for?" she demanded tearfully.

"I want to know that myself, Kits," Joyce put in. "Really, Phyl, from the way you go at it anybody *would* think you might be planning to push Blanche out of the way and be the Princesse yourself."

"Joy!"

Joy swung one foot around lazily. Joyce



JOYCE STILL ENJOYED TEASING HER COUSIN.—Page 292.

still enjoyed teasing her cousin. “Are you?” she inquired innocently.

Phyllis gathered her music together with dignity. Phyllis was trying to forget “I Will Study and Prepare, and my Time Will Come!” She had adopted another motto now.

And she found plenty of “next thynges” to “doe” these days. If there was an absentee from rehearsal, Phyllis, who knew the operetta by heart, substituted; if there was a missing page of music, it was Phyllis who hunted for it; when Mrs. Hilton thought it was time to give the “Prince” a few lessons in the management of her sword and cloak, it was Phyllis who flew away and returned with Miss Jackson’s fencing rapier held triumphantly over her head, and a gay table-cover trailing over her arm. It was Phyllis—it was Phyllis who gradually came to know the ins and outs of the whole production, and it was Phyllis who had nothing short of an inspiration in regard to the crown problem.

Phyllis’ hastily-made contraption plainly wouldn’t do; Blanche objected violently each time it was used, but nobody offered a substitute.

" I *can't* sing that Finale with that crown sliding over my eyes," she complained plaintively. " I'm not Justice! And Amy always pokes the pins into my head when she puts it on! "

" ' Uneasy lies the head ——' "

" Take my hat," proposed the maligned Amy. " It's small, like a crown. "

It was that which gave Phyllis her inspiration. If you took the frame of a small hat and covered it with whatever you wanted to use, wouldn't it make a pretty and comfortable crown? It did.

And it was Phyllis who taught discouraged little Doris Reade her rippling " Page Song. "

" It's easy, really, Dorrie. "

" It may be," said the discouraged Dorrie dismally, " when you know how, but I can't make —— "

" Yes you can! Here, I'll show you! " Phyllis ran over the song very softly. " It just goes up and down, like —— Oh! I know how I can make you understand! When I was little and first began to have singing lessons, my teacher told me to pretend the notes were

steps for me to climb up and down. She said I had to be careful at first, but, by and by, I could run up and down them as easily as if they'd been real stairs!”

Doris giggled. “It *does* sound like steps!” she sang the song through herself. “I slipped sometimes, but I'm going to climb up and down until I can just run! You listen to me next rehearsal!”

Phyllis promised, but she didn't. Phyllis had too many other things to attend to when the next rehearsal came.

She almost decided not to go to that last rehearsal. She wouldn't be needed, and there had been no regular session that day, Miss Anderson wisely having decided to forego the usual routine.

“Going to your rehearsal, Phyl?” Jerry stood in the door. “I'm going Hillcrest way myself. Better ride along.”

Phyllis' eyes rested on a new library book. “I thought perhaps—they won't need me this afternoon?”

Jerry raised his eyebrows. “Sure? Better come.”

After living in the same house for nearly a year, it was still a mystery to Phyllis as to what Jerry did to make people do the things they didn't want to do! She found herself settling back in the low blue car, but she didn't mind particularly. She didn't mind anything today. Spring was so very near, the bluebird's whistle was so very sweet; she was beginning to like Hillcrest so very much, and Grandfather had promised she could stay there until she was ready for college. She gave a little wiggle of satisfaction.

"Are *you* going to Hillcrest, Jerry?" It suddenly occurred to her what her cousin had said. "Is anybody ill?"

Jerry shifted gears. "Miss Jackson thinks one of the girls has a broken arm."

"Oh! The poor *thing*! And to-night the first night of the operetta! She must feel dreadfully."

"I shouldn't be at all surprised!"

"Who is she, do you know?"

"I think her name is Blanche; Blanche Penrose."

Phyllis didn't remember the rest of the drive.

She thought Jerry said, “Don’t you think they may want you now?” But she wasn’t sure. If he did, she didn’t answer him. She didn’t remember anything very well until Carol met her at the pupil’s entrance and seized her by the hand without saying a word until Phyllis attempted to break into a run. Then she held her back firmly.

“You’d better walk, you know. You’ve got to sing.”

“But what *happened?* Poor Blanche! How ——”

“Tripped on that third step. Of course she would break something—*now!*”

Phyllis’ head whirled when she reached the auditorium. This wasn’t the same place where she had attended rehearsals for nearly six weeks! Girls flying about, frightened and upset; everybody talking as excitedly as they could, all at once; Miss Anderson herself coming forward.

“Miss Lancy, as you probably have heard already, Miss Penrose has met with a most unfortunate accident. As her understudy, you will take the rôle of the Princesse.”

CHAPTER XXIV

“ PHYLLIS THE ICICLE ” DISAPPEARS

THE rest of the afternoon was a nightmare to poor Phyllis, a nightmare of frightened girls scurrying about on last-minute errands, of grim-faced teachers making quick alterations in the Princesse costume and giving rapid directions, of the wailing noise of the orchestra tuning their instruments, all mingled together in a horrible chaos.

“ You know each of the Princesse’s cues? ” Miss Kingsley was asking, her voice a little muffled because of the pins in her mouth.

Phyllis was sure that, if she tried to answer, she would scream, so she merely nodded. Being intent on the hem of Phyllis’ dress, however, Miss Kingsley could not see the nod. She spoke again, sharply:

“ Are you sure you know your cues? Perhaps we’d better have the prompter —— ”

The prompter would be the last straw. And she *had* known the cues that morning.

"I am sure, Ann." To hear Mrs. Hilton speak like that about you was worth having Miss Kingsley run a needle into your knee. "I am sure about everything where the Princesse is concerned. We can depend on Phyllis."

But she was gone before Phyllis could open her lips to tell her that they couldn't; that she *didn't* know the cues; that her throat was dreadfully swollen, and her ears felt ready to burst; that her voice had deserted her, and that never before had she felt so lonely and sick and miserable.

"What is it?" Miss Kingsley looked at her anxiously. "You shivered."

"Nothing," said Phyllis. But there was! There was! It had been so easy to promise Grandfather that—but this ——— Oh, this was different! They couldn't expect her ———

But they did. Mrs. Hilton had said, so calmly and steadily when everything else was turning upside down: "I am sure about everything where the Princesse is concerned. We can depend on Phyllis."

Something began to chant in her ear.

"Lancy house a motto hast;
Lancys down the years have passed:
Lancy Honor is Steadfast!"

Nobody except Phyllis expected that rehearsal to be a success, but everybody was more depressed when it was over. The orchestra had lagged and was miserably out of tune; the prompter lost her place, much to the embarrassment of the courtiers who took that opportunity to forget their lines; and Phyllis Lancy's voice, which only the day before would have reached the farthest corner of the auditorium, failed her.

"It will be a perfectly disgusting failure!" the dispirited "Prince" sat wearily down on the nearest thing she saw—a convenient-sized box which gave forth a complaining-sounding groan.

"Mary! Get up!" pleaded Francie. "Quick! That's the box with the moon thing in it! If you smash ——"

"Perhaps I'd better!" Mary didn't stir. "Then we couldn't disgrace Hillcrest with a failure."

Phyllis sympathized with them. They had

all worked so hard, and now—at the last minute—it wouldn't have happened with Blanche. Mrs. Hilton had been right not to give her an important rôle in the first place. Oh, she was acting—and for a girl who wanted to sing——

Aunt Margaret was very kind. She let Phyllis wander from room to room, touching and rearranging things with fingers that wouldn't be still. An annoying little ache had risen up and closed Phyllis' throat. But she couldn't have cried if she had dared. And, oh, she wanted her mother so!

"So you're going to have a chance to really sing, are you?" asked Uncle Rob. "You certainly have my congratulations, Phyl. Of course, I'm sorry for the other girl, but——"

"She won't have to have stage-fright," said Phyllis briefly, toying with a spoon.

"A girl I knew told me she always pretended her audiences were made up of cabbage-heads," suggested Aunt Margaret. "Suppose you try it to-night, dear."

"Intelligent audience," murmured Jerry.

"Phyl *can't* get stage-fright," announced Joyce from the safety-zone of the opposite

side of the table. "She doesn't dare! Everybody's depending on her to save the operetta, and 'Lancy Honor is Steadfast!'"

Joyce, too! It was fortunate Mr. Jeremiah Lancy was not there, for Phyllis was goaded into treason:

"Lancys! Lancys! Lancys!" she cried with the energy Mrs. Hilton had tried in vain to rouse that afternoon. "Lancy Honor is Steadfast! I *hate* that motto! And I hate the Lancys, too! Yes, I do! I wish every single one of them was at the bottom of the sea!"

Jerry chuckled into the silence. "I'm not!" he said. "But I *am* going up to pay an evening call on Miss Blanche Penrose. Would you like to ride along, Phyl?"

Joyce promptly accepted the invitation. "Of course, we'll ride. But Phyl has to be there at seven, you know."

Phyllis was too utterly miserable even to try to keep the flash of despair out of her eyes, but Jerry shook his head gently.

"Sorry, Joy, but the car that's honored with the presence of the Faery Princesse can't take

a commoner on the same trip! All right, Phyl, I'll be ready when you are."

He was. It would have been a pleasant ride on any other night, but now even the fragrant little spring wind against her cheeks didn't cool them. Jerry looked meditatively at the moonlit road ahead of him. He was driving slowly, and Phyllis caught a shadowy glimpse of the yellow forsythia which bordered Madam Halstead's grounds, and the long, sloping stretch of newly-made lawn which ran directly to Hillcrest's stone boundary walls, and which had resembled a great mud-pie in the past few weeks since the snow had disappeared, and now was beginning to show a fine covering of green, tender grass. Phyllis couldn't see the grass now, but Jerry waved a hand in its direction.

"That the lawn Joy said was as much fun to watch as it had been to watch Kits grow hair?"

"Yes."

"And Dara said Madam would soon have to have it bobbed?"

In spite of the weight against her heart, Phyllis giggled.

The car swung around a curve. The warm little breeze was scented from having come over freshly-ploughed fields. Phyllis would always remember that ride, on moonlight nights in spring when she passed a newly turned field.

"I like that odor," Jerry commented. "It makes me think of daffodils and tulips—and fleurs-de-lis." They were at the Hillcrest entrance now, winding up the long, broad driveway, and Jerry smiled at her under the welcoming light. "Good luck go with you, Phyl."

Phyllis tried to flash him an answering smile, and succeeded in making her lips tremble ominously. She almost envied Blanche, lying quietly in the infirmary with an arm in splints. Blanche didn't have to know that success or failure rested with her, at least!

Dara, one of the pupils chosen to help in the dressing-room, detached herself from a busy group as Phyllis entered, and came forward to drop a profound curtsy.

"I have had the great honor to be appointed Mistress-of-the-Robes to your Royal High-

ness," she informed her charge, deftly steering her towards the most secluded corner of the room. "All the girls have turned their backs on me out of envy, but, to-morrow, they'll be looking at me again just because I helped Phyllis Lancy to dress."

"Dara—I—*please* don't! I'm going to fail——"

Dara shook a grieved head.

"Ah! Your Highness! It pains me to hold an opinion differing from your own,—turn around, Phyl!—but, I assure you, Your Highness has no such intention!"

"If you had been at rehearsal this afternoon——"

"Reports reached me, Your Highness. (Can't I converse beautifully with royalty, Phyl?) and I congratulate Your Highness on having the sense to retain your best ammunition for this evening. There! My most gracious Princesse, I salute you!"

Which she did, much to the detriment of a box of stage-properties which had been standing at her elbow.

"I didn't mean to do it, Miss Kingsley!"

she apologized, gazing ruefully at the damage, "but you see, your Highness," she added aside to Phyllis, "how much we are willing to sacrifice in your honor!"

"It's time Her Honor was getting up to the ante-room," announced Francie, coming up. "Mrs. Hilton says so."

"Her Highness, you mean," corrected Dara. "I'm ashamed of you, Francie! Even if you are one of her disloyal courtiers, you should know how to address your Princesse!"

"I don't know anything to-night!" said Francie curtly.

Phyllis didn't blame her, but standing in the little ante-room with the rest of the principals, Phyllis knew several things too many. Worst of all, she was going to fail the Lancy Motto, the motto the Lancys *had* passed stainless down the years. And this was not the first time the fate of an enterprise had rested with a Lancy, but it would be the first time a Lancy had failed in his trust. If only her name were Jones or—or Kelly—*anything* but Lancy! But it wasn't! It wasn't! And in another two ——

And then the door opened. It opened quietly, but, even so, the girls jumped nervously. It was only one of the ushers. She held out a perfect specimen of a hothouse fleur-de-lis.

" Dr. Lancy sent it to you, Phyl."

Phyllis couldn't even thank her. She simply held out her hand for the flower. Jerry had gotten this for her. Jerry had sent her this talisman, " purple for victory!"

Outside, in the dim auditorium, quiet succeeded the rustling. The orchestra swayed into the operetta's overture. And the listening girls in the ante-room realized suddenly that something was happening to Phyllis. She didn't look as if she knew they were there. She didn't. Phyllis, leaning forward to catch every note of that dancing, lilting strain, forgot it was only a play, forgot she was a very frightened understudy going out to disgrace the name of Lancy in another two minutes, forgot everything except that she was the Faery Princess, that the music was coaxing her to come out—calling her ——

" Now! Princesse!" whispered the prompter,

but Phyllis never heard her. She had answered the music and was slowly entering her magic woodland, and, into the waiting room, high, and clear, and sweet, and true, rose the voice of Phyllis Lancy.

"Not until it is entirely over," Mrs. Hilton had warned, so it was not until the last song had been sung to an enthusiastic audience did her fellow-actors dare crowd about her, and, regardless of their fragile costumes, take Phyllis literally to their hearts and tell her what they thought of her:

"Phyl Lancy, you're great!"

"Princesse, you were too spiffily-doodle for words!"

"You're certainly all right, Phyl-girl!"

"We'll never forget this, Princesse!"

"My child, we'll love you forever!"

An usher appeared in the door. She was excited. "Lady—Miss Anderson wants you to go back and stand on the throne, Phyl."

But Phyllis was suddenly shy. "They—they don't want *me*," she said deprecatingly. "It's the Faery Princesse ——"

" Don't want *you?* " demanded Dara.
" Listen, child! "

From out the crowded auditorium came once more the sound of jubilant voices:

" *Phyllis Lancy! Phyl-lis Lan-cy!* PHYL-LIS LAN-CY! "

" Go back! " Dara commanded with a little shove. " Don't be so silly! Go! "

So, once more, Phyllis stood, a Faery Princess, on the steps of her throne. The applause died down to an almost frightening silence, and then Phyllis saw the Principal standing on the little platform from which Mrs. Hilton had led the orchestra.

" Dear friends, " she was saying, " you were told to-night that Hillcrest had suffered a grave disappointment because Miss Penrose, whose name appears on your programs as the Faery Princess, was unable to appear. There was an understudy for the part, but understudies are usually second-bests. You can appreciate, therefore, the anxiety Hillcrest suffered to-day. But our success was safe in the hands of the understudy we had chosen. If she was disappointed not to have had a more

active part, she never showed it, but she was faithful in doing the least thing she could for the 'Faery Princesse,' and those who were working for it, and when Hillcrest called her to 'doe ye next thyng' and take Miss Penrose's place—you know she did not fail us."

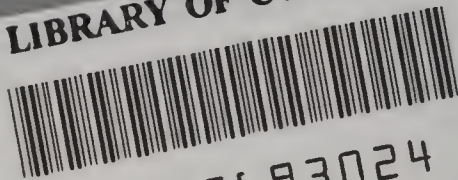
The quiet voice stopped for a moment, and then went on: "At Hillcrest we have a tribute we give to those who have won our love and admiration with some high victory, especially a victory over their own selves. I have been asked if the school may give it to Phyllis Lancy to-night—our Salute Song—and I give my permission."

The world turned black for Phyllis for a minute. The Salute Song! Why, it was the highest tribute Hillcrest had to give, and she—she didn't deserve it in the least!

But, suddenly, Hillcrest girls, the very dearest girls in all the world, were on their feet, singing, and Phyllis, her eyes wet, cheeks aflame, stood and watched "Phyllis the Icicle" disappear from her sight forever.

THE END

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