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THE GIRLS OF RIVERCLIFF SCHOOL

BOOKS FOR GIRLS

By **AMY BELL MARLOWE**

12mo. Cloth. Illustrated. Price per volume,
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THE OLDEST OF FOUR

Or Natalie's Way Out

THE GIRLS OF HILLCREST FARM

Or the Secret of the Rocks

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THE GIRLS OF RIVERCLIFF SCHOOL

Or Beth Baldwin's Resolve

GROSSET & DUNLAP

PUBLISHERS

NEW YORK



MABEL POURED FROM A WASTE-BASKET A VERITABLE
SHOWER OF SMALL PARCELS





"SHAME! SHAME!" CRIED A DOZEN VOICES.

Frontispiece (Page 150)

THE GIRLS OF
RIVERCLIFF
SCHOOL

OR

BETH BALDWIN'S RESOLVE

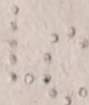
BY

AMY BELL MARLOWE

AUTHOR OF

A LITTLE MISS NOBODY, THE GIRLS OF
HILLCREST FARM, ETC.

Illustrated



NEW YORK

GROSSET & DUNLAP

PUBLISHERS

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The Girls of Rivercliff School

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THE GIRLS OF RIVERCLIFF SCHOOL

CHAPTER I

"THE GRAPES THAT HANG HIGH"

"BETH! Beth Baldwin! Oh, B. B.! Do, for pity's sake, stop! Do you expect me to chase you all over town such a hot day as this? It's cruelty to animals to make me run in this awful sun," and Mary Devine finally reached Elizabeth Baldwin's side, and clung to her school friend's arm, panting.

"Cruelty to how many animals, Mary?" asked Beth, laughing. "Are you a whole menagerie? You remind me of our Marcus when he was a little fellow. There was a 'cat concert' in our backyard one night, and Marcus put his head out of the door to see the participants.

"'Oh, Mamma!' he called, 'there's a million cats out here,' and when mamma reproved him for exaggerating, he defended himself by saying: 'Well, anyway, there's our old cat and another one!'"

Mary had regained her breath now, and giggled over Beth's little story, but was not to be side-

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tracked. She had something to tell. News was Mary Devine's over-mastering passion. To know what went on all over Hudsonvale, and to distribute her information generously, "free, gratis, for nothing," was the height of her enjoyment.

Mr. Baldwin said one evening, after Mary had been calling on Beth: "They did think some of starting a local paper here in Hudsonvale; but they heard of that Devine girl and gave it up. No need of a newspaper with her in town."

Now Mary gasped to her friend:

"Oh, Beth! I've got something to tell you. You'd never guess!"

"That's good of you, dear," Beth said, her black eyes dancing. "I hate conundrums. Tell me."

"Larry Haven has hired an office in the Hudsonvale block."

"Why, Mary! that certainly *is* news," Beth cried. "I never would have guessed that. Has he hung out his shingle?"

"He's going to," declared Mary, who knew all about it, for her father was janitor of Hudsonvale's one brick office building. "He's taken the room next to Dr. Coldfoot's, the dentist's, suite. Larry told father that the screams of the dentist's patients would not bother him, for he expected his clients would scream quite as loud when he sepa-

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rated them from their money," and Mary giggled again. "And oh, Beth! he's just as handsome!"

"Who is—Dr. Coldfoot?" asked her friend, innocently.

"Goodness no! You are well aware, Beth Baldwin, that I meant the village pride, Mr. Lawrence Haven, just returned from the law school with his sheepskin."

Beth laughed again. "I do hope he'll be successful," she said. "His father was a prominent lawyer, you know."

"Goodness! I hope he can dance," responded Mary. "There's a great dearth of good dancers among the boys here in Hudsonvale. You know, Beth, at graduation last month we girls had to dance together at our party. Oh dear! I wish we were going to have it over again! What fun!"

"Larry Haven is no longer a boy," Beth said slowly.

Mary laughed. "Of course not. He's an old man," she said saucily. "He's twenty-two."

"That is seven years our senior," said Beth, reflectively.

"Six, in my case, if you please," said Mary, smartly. "And what's six years in a boy? He could be a lawyer forty times over and I wouldn't be afraid of him."

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"You have more assurance than most, Mary," said Beth, smiling. "I don't know that I shall dare even speak to Larry now."

"Humph! you and he used to be as 'sticky' on each other as two molasses cocoanut balls—you know you used. He was the white-headed little boy who used to pull you to school on his sled," said Mary, airily.

"But that was a long time ago," said Beth, with laughter. "I haven't seen Larry since last winter's holidays—and then scarcely more than to wave my hand to him. He's grown quite away from us Hudsonvale girls and boys since his sophomore year at college."

"My! how he *did* puff himself and walk turkey his first two years at college," said the slangy Mary. "The only boy from Hudsonvale who ever went to a real, big school, I guess."

"But Larry wasn't spoiled," Beth hastened to say. "He's so sweet-tempered."

"Oh! *you* know how sweet he is if anybody does," chuckled Mary. "Well! I must turn off here. Where are you going, Beth?"

"Just across town on an errand," her friend said evasively; for it was the gossipy girl's nature to repeat to the next person she talked with anything she had learned from her previous companion, no matter how trivial.

“Not that I would mind if the whole town knew I was going to old Mrs. Crummit’s for a dozen fresh eggs,” thought Beth, with inward laughter. “But I *do* wish Mary Devine was not such a ‘Babbling Bess.’ ”

The girl’s mind, however, was filled with thoughts springing from the bit of news her school friend had told her. She and Mary had but recently graduated from the high school. And Larry Haven, the only son of the widowed Mrs. Euphemia Haven, had recently returned to his home with his diploma as a lawyer. Beth knew he had already been admitted to the county bar.

Beth’s mother and Euphemia Griswold had been bosom friends in girlhood. At first, after Euphemia Griswold had married Mr. Haven, the leading lawyer of the county and a scion of one of the oldest, if not one of the wealthiest, families in the State, she and Priscilla Baldwin, who had married a foreman in the Locomotive Works, remained very good friends.

The Haven baby carriage was often pushed along the pleasantly shaded walks of Hudsonvale side by side with the more plebian carriage containing the Baldwins’ first little one, who later had died. The two young women remained inseparable friends for some years.

Then had come the death of her first child, and

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for a long period of time after this Mrs. Baldwin mingled but little with her friends. This was followed by a long illness. But, after a few years, Beth, now the oldest of her brood, came to give the foreman's wife a new and better interest in life.

Meanwhile, her old-time chum had grown away from her. Mr. Haven had become a corporation lawyer and was fast growing rich. He and his family had always had entrance into the most exclusive society of the State. Had he not died suddenly when Larry was ten years old, he might have been a national figure in politics.

In dying, he had left Mrs. Euphemia Haven and her only child fairly well-to-do. The property had to be conserved with some shrewdness, perhaps; but the widow lived in one of the finest old houses in Hudsonvale, entertained well, and seemed to have everything her heart desired. Larry was given an excellent education; and it was understood that he was to follow in his father's footsteps, for he must earn his own living now that he was of age, his mother having full rights in the property as long as she lived.

Mrs. Haven was not a snob. Although now the acknowledged leader of such society as there was in Hudsonvale (which was really a sprawling river-town surrounding the Locomotive Works

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and coal-tar Dye Factory), she had often come to see her old friend, Mrs. Baldwin, while Larry was still small. So it was that the soft-spoken, gentle boy, with the watchful gray eyes and firm mouth, came to be a companion of Beth Baldwin's while she was little.

He took her to school on her first day; and sat beside her and held her plump little hand for an hour, too, because she was afraid. He had drawn Beth to school on his sled, as Mary Devine said. Larry was as much at home in the Baldwin house when a child as he was in his own. Perhaps more at home, for there was more gaiety in the little cottage on Bemis Street, which soon began to be crowded with young life after Beth was born.

There was Marcus, two years Beth's junior; Ella, now a flyaway child of eleven; Prissy—named after her mother—as sweet and loving as a child could be; and Fred and Ferd, the twins, six years old. They had all looked on Larry Haven as almost an elder brother.

For two years, however, as Beth had intimated to Mary Devine, Larry had not been much at the Baldwin home. Indeed, he had been in Hudsonvale but seldom. His summers had been spent in preparing for the law school, for he was very desirous to get ahead. His exceeding industry had brought results. He was a very young man, in-

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deed, to have succeeded in securing his diploma and entering upon public life as he now had.

As Beth Baldwin went her way, these thoughts weaved through her mind, And, too, she compared her own lot to that of her whilom playmate and confidant. When Beth learned that Larry was to go to college and finally enter the law school, she had expressed her intention of getting the maximum amount of education to be secured by a girl—and Larry had encouraged her to try for it.

Beth had stood well in her classes all through her high-school course. She had graduated among the first ten pupils in the class. She possessed a deep longing to continue her course. But——

“There’s about as much chance of my going to Rivercliff as there is of my getting an aeroplane and soaring in it to the Heights of Parnassus,” Beth told herself, with a little laugh and a little sigh. She was not of a melancholy disposition, and even the seriousness of her desire to learn and to achieve, in her way, as much as Larry had achieved in his, could not make her gloomy.

Mr. Baldwin earned three dollars and seventy-five cents a day as foreman of the erecting shop in the Hudsonvale Locomotive Works. The family had often “figured and refigured” that sum; but they could not make it come to more than twenty-two dollars and fifty cents a week.

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Marcus, although but thirteen, was already talking bravely about going to work. In another half year he could get his certificate and become an aid in the family's support.

“While I,” thought Beth, shaking her head, “am desirous of adding to its burdens for three years to come. But then—if I only *could*—I know I could pay them all back,” she sighed.

It was Beth's desire to take a normal and teacher's course in a very thorough boarding school up the river. Having a diploma from Rivercliff would enable her to obtain a certificate to teach in the State schools. That was her aim—to be self-supporting, as well as to obtain an education the equal of that Larry Haven had secured.

She had surreptitiously dipped into Larry's college textbooks when he was at home during his freshman and sophomore years, and she was sure that such studies were not beyond her comprehension.

“Dear me,” thought Beth, “the grapes that hang highest are always the sweetest. How am I ever going to get admission to Rivercliff School; or, once admitted, how am I to remain there the necessary three years? Dear me! if Larry——”

Just then she looked up before crossing the street and gazed directly into the calm, rather proud face of Larry's mother who, in her little

electric runabout, was just drawing in to the opposite curb.

Mrs. Euphemia Haven was tall, of good figure, with beautiful hair, beginning to be touched with gray, that her maid dressed more becomingly than was any other woman's hair in Hudsonvale. She had a good complexion, with a tinge of natural pink in the cheeks and lips. Her teeth were even and white, without the defects of gold showing the handiwork of the dentist. She dressed exquisitely, Beth thought.

Mrs. Haven drove her runabout with the assurance of a boy. She had steady nerves, a cordial laugh, a smile that was charming, and knew always how to put one at his ease. She beckoned now to Beth as the latter crossed the street, crying:

"Elizabeth! Beth! Come here, please! You are just the person I must see."

CHAPTER II

LARRY'S "COMING OUT" PARTY

MRS. EUPHEMIA HAVEN was very careful in her choice of words. Not that her diction was better or worse than most people's; but she was very exact in saying just what she meant to say.

Instead of calling to Beth Baldwin that she "wished" to see her or "needed" to see her, she said "I must." Behind that expression lay a rather sharp controversy between her son, Larry, and herself at the breakfast table that very morning. It was seldom that there was any friction at all between Mrs. Haven and her son, for she was a very indulgent mother and Larry was quite unspoiled, despite every chance in the world for his having been so affected.

She never interfered with his pleasures, seldom with his associates, and never balked his plans. He, on the other hand, never gave his mother a moment's uneasiness, for she was assured that he was a Haven and would do nothing to smirch the family name.

Mrs. Haven did not blame her son for having

been so friendly with the family on Bemis Street. She, herself, had loved Priscilla Lomis with all her rather narrow heart when they were young. That Priscilla had married a mechanic was her mistake; and Mrs. Euphemia had condoned that mistake for years. But now she had to think of her son's future. There were some past associations which she felt might better be ignored by him now that he was a man. The silly plans in her own and Priscilla Baldwin's heads when they were young married women, each with a brand new baby to think of and talk about, Mrs. Haven long since had thought best forgotten.

She feared, however, that Priscilla might have remembered. Of course, that first dear little girl baby of her old friend's had died; but here was another girl born into the family of the mechanic——

“And goodness!” thought Mrs. Haven, as Beth Baldwin crossed the street and drew near at her call, “what a perfect little beauty she is growing to be!”

Mrs. Euphemia Haven was one of those women who manage a lorgnette very well indeed. She caught it up now and looked at Beth through it—not because she really needed this aid to sight, but to cover a sudden slight confusion that she felt.

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"Mercy, Beth! how really pretty you have grown!" was her first audible comment. "And what a big girl! The other day you were only a little thing and Larry was playing nurse-girl to you. I expect he remembers you now as the little black-eyed tot he used to be so devoted to."

"I presume so, Mrs. Haven," replied Beth, composedly.

"Why, you must be through school," went on Mrs. Haven. "Are you working or do you help your mother?"

"It is work helping in a family of eight, Mrs. Haven," laughed Beth. "I have finished high school. But I hope to go to a more advanced school in the fall."

"That will be rather difficult, will it not?" suggested Mrs. Haven, with raised eyebrows.

Beth knew that it was an intimation that Mrs. Haven fully understood the Baldwin's financial circumstances. It was not said unkindly; yet, somehow, Beth felt that it was antagonistic. Her pretty head came up and she looked rather proudly into the fine eyes of Larry's mother.

"Yes; it will be very difficult," she admitted. "But I mean to get a better education if I have to earn the money myself to pay my way through school."

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Haven, smiling. "What

a very determined girl! But—in your case, my dear—is an advanced education really worth while?”

“I think it is,” and this time Beth flushed. She recognized the critical note in her questioner’s voice, and she knew what it meant. “Don’t you think it was worth while for Larry to go to college?”

“Oh!” ejaculated the startled lady. “He—he is a boy.”

“And *I* am a girl,” Beth laughed. “But I think I have just as much ambition as any boy.”

The lady laughed too, and said:

“That brings me to the reason I had for hailing you, my dear. Now that Larry is home for good I want to give him a nice party. The young folk of Hudsonvale, I am afraid, have almost forgotten him. And, too, he is ambitious to take his father’s place in the community as a lawyer. We must introduce him to the older generation likewise. So, when we were talking it over this morning, he remembered you and told me to be sure to invite ‘that little Baldwin girl.’ Why!” and Larry’s mother laughed easily, as though she did not know she had conveyed a sting, “he will scarcely know you, you have grown so.”

“How kind of him to remember me,” Beth said sweetly.

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"Oh, Larry has always looked upon you as a little sister, I fancy—having been denied any of his own. Now, you will come, of course? Next Tuesday evening. There will be dancing."

Mrs. Haven had managed to make Beth feel that she was being patronized; but the girl was too sensible to take offence. She believed Larry had really said that he wanted her at his party, and she would not disappoint her old playfellow.

"I will surely come, Mrs. Haven. Thank you," she said, as the lady's car started.

As Beth told her mother when she arrived home with the eggs, she had nothing but her graduation dress to wear to Larry's "coming out" party, as Beth laughingly designated it, and that frock had been made with the view to its being her "best-Sunday-go-to-meeting" attire for two years to come. A new dress was an event in the Baldwin household.

"It's not just the thing for an evening party, Mamma," she said cheerfully. "But we'll make it do."

"I really would like to have you look your best when you go to Euphemia Haven's," Mrs. Baldwin answered.

"Of course! I shall scrub my face real clean and comb all the tangles out of my hair, Mother mine," laughed Beth. "Why strive to amaze Mrs.

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Haven with my fine appearance more than anybody else?"

"Why? Oh well! I want her to see what a very nice girl you are."

"Thank you, Mamma! She has already told me I am pretty," and Beth made a little face at the thought of Mrs. Euphemia Haven's patronizing way.

Nevertheless, Beth had a desire to look her best if she attended the "coming out" party. But she wished to astonish another person rather than the rather haughty Mrs. Euphemia Haven.

That dress had to be thought about—and there were only four days before the date of the party. Beth was glad she had worn it only on graduation day. It would not be familiar to anybody but her classmates; and she fancied that if any of them were at Larry's party they would be likely to appear in their graduation dresses, too. For Hudsonvale was not a very fashionable place.

The frock in question was of a good quality of cream-colored poplin—then a very popular fabric. It had been made high in the neck, for low-cut frocks for day wear were not approved in Hudsonvale. Evening wear was different. Decolleté was expected of any one who was invited to an evening party.

For a girl of her age Beth Baldwin's taste was

admirable. Yet, because of her complexion, she could "carry off" oddities in style and colorings that scarcely any other girl in the village would have dared attempt.

She was handy, too, with her needle, and she decided to make some changes and adapt her dress for evening wear. She removed the long sleeves, and her mother gave her the lace out of her own wedding gown—so long laid away in camphor—with which she fashioned a soft, full, puff-like sleeve which reached only half way to her elbow. After removing the collar and the vest of the frock, she filled in over the shoulders and across the bust with some of the same pretty lace. Between the lace and the material of the dress she put beading, and in this she ran narrow cherry-colored ribbon. She put a rosette on each shoulder, a large one with streamers over her heart, other ribbons with very tiny rosettes to tie the puff-like sleeves, and made ready a sash of broad ribbon of the same hue.

The effect might be a trifle bizarre; but it was very becoming, indeed, to Beth, and when she put on the frock Monday evening and "tried it out" on the family, they thought her charming.

"Some class to you," said the slangy Marcus. "Cricky! you're the niftiest looking girl in the town—isn't she, Pop?"

"She's what her mother was over again," said Mr. Baldwin, proudly, lowering his paper to "peck" at his pretty daughter's cheek.

"Oh, Mamma! I don't see why you didn't have *me* a dark and delirious beauty," groaned Ella, "instead of a washed-out, flaxen-haired, inconsequential looking little *dowdy!* I hate to go anywhere with our Beth; she makes me look like *just nothing.*"

The family laughed at the flyaway's plaint, and Ella added:

"Anyway, I hope Beth will get married long before I get any beaux. I know I couldn't keep 'em a minute if they came here and saw Beth."

"Mercy, Ella!" gasped her mother. "What are you talking about—a child of eleven?"

Mr. Baldwin laughed heartily. He usually did at his flaxen-haired daughter's nonsense. But Ella added:

"I don't care, Mamma. It should be against the law for one sister to be so much prettier than the others. Poor little Prissy and me—why, we haven't any chance at all!"

"'Handsome is as handsome does,' daughter," quoted Mrs. Baldwin, contemplating her eldest child with her head on one side.

"Oh, yes! that's what Mr. Monkey said to the poor little Hippopotamus baby. He found little



SHE SNAPPED THE BEAUTIFULLY CARVED NECKLACE
AROUND BETH'S THROAT.

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Hippo crying beside a still pool," said the vivacious Ella, "and asked him what the matter was.

" 'Oh, nuffin,' said the Hippo, 'only I never saw myself in a mirror before!'

"And, of course, Mr. Monkey said just what you did now, Mamma. But poor little Hippo knew that he couldn't act handsome enough in a thousand years to overcome the handicap of the awful looks Nature had given him."

Through the laughter of Mr. Baldwin and Marcus, Ferd, the blond twin, spoke up stoutly:

"I don't care if they *do* call me 'Blondy.' I wouldn't be black, like Fred."

"I'm certainly glad I'm a bruin, like our Beth," said his twin, loftily.

" 'Bruin! ' "

"A bear that boy certainly is!"

"Goodness, Frederick," said Ella, amid the laughter of the family. "You mean brunette."

Fred did not take laughter kindly. "I know what I mean," he growled. "I'm glad my complexion is like Beth's."

"Goodness, it isn't!" cried the flyaway sister, suddenly. "You haven't washed your face since supper, Frederick Baldwin! Come out to the kitchen sink with me this very minute!"

Mrs. Baldwin had left the room while this conversation was in progress. Now she returned

with a little square box that the children seldom saw. It was usually locked away in the safe in the bedroom occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Baldwin.

"Oh, Mamma!" gasped Beth, suspecting what was coming.

"Hello, Mother!" said Mr. Baldwin, with twinkling eye. "Getting out the 'family jewels?'"

"Oh, Mamma!" shrieked Ella, racing in from the kitchen, dragging Fred with one hand and waving the washcloth in the other like a very limp banner. "*Not Great-grandmother Lomis' corals?*"

Beth flushed and paled, her eyes shining like stars as she watched her mother unlock the little box with the key that always hung about her neck under her gown. Great-grandmother Lomis' corals was the one heirloom that had been handed down to Mrs. Baldwin's generation. They were as precious in the eyes of her daughters as the Queen of Sheba's pearls.

"You're never going to let me wear *those* to Larry's 'coming out' party?" Beth finally gasped.

Her mother's face was serious. "You are the eldest, my dear. The corals will be yours some day—yours to do with just what you please. Great-grandmother Lomis declared in her will that the corals should always be given to the eldest daughter, and from her to *her* eldest daughter.

This is an entail that the male heirs have nothing to do with," and she laughed.

"They may be sold or otherwise disposed of for the benefit of the eldest daughter of each generation. If Beth wants to wear them to Euphemia's—— There!"

She snapped the thin, beautifully carved, blood-red necklace around Beth's throat. The deeper hue of the corals contrasted beautifully with the brighter ribbons, and against the dark loveliness of Beth's skin the necklace had never shone to better advantage.

There was a pin, too; and Mrs. Baldwin swiftly snipped off the big rosette at Beth's bosom and caught the filmy lace together there with the beautiful pin instead.

The corals set off the girl's beauty wonderfully. There was an alluring, Eastern quality to it that now, enhanced by the old-fashioned jewelry, made Beth seem more mature than she really was.

Yet she was only a simple, sweet child, after all. She possessed a better figure than most girls of her age, and had a demure, self-possessed manner that might have led strangers to think her older than she was. In mind and heart, however, though thoughtful to a degree, Beth was a child.

"That's mighty scrumptious—that's what *I* call it," declared Marcus.

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Perhaps Mr. Baldwin thought so too; for the next evening, when Beth was ready to start for the Haven house, a taxicab stopped at the door.

"Papa Baldwin! What extravagance!" exclaimed his wife.

"It's not considered quite the thing, I believe," he said drily, "for a young lady to walk to a party wearing three or four hundred dollars' worth of jewelry."

Not until then did Mrs. Baldwin wonder if she were doing wrong to allow Beth to wear the family heirloom. But it was too late to say no. Beth kissed her hand to the watching family from the taxicab—the man shut the door, and in a moment the machine rolled away from the little cottage on Bemis Street.

CHAPTER III

GREAT-GRANDMOTHER LOMIS' CORALS

BETH BALDWIN felt that this was really her first "grown up" party. She knew that few of the girls who had graduated with her from high school had been invited to the Haven house on this evening; and few of the younger guests would be brought to the door, she was likewise sure, in any vehicle. There were but four taxicabs in the town.

Beth knew that to the very nicest parties in town most people went afoot, carrying their dancing slippers under their arms. But now the girl was set down before the Haven door, under an awning and on a well-worn strip of carpet, both of which led up to the wide-open and brilliantly lighted doorway of the mansion.

The Haven place was a fine old house; there was none better for the purpose of entertaining in town. Almost the whole of the lower floor could be used for dancing. The broad stairway, bordered by potted plants, offered plenty of "nestling corners" for tired dancers; palms hid the rear of the reception hall where the musicians were sta-

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tioned. Already, when Beth timidly entered, the lights, the moving couples, the tinkle of music, the murmur of voices, were quite confusing.

She saw Mrs. Euphemia Haven's stately figure just within the drawing-room doorway. A few couples swung in time to the music across the hall in the huge dining-room, from which all the furniture had been taken. There were people going up and down the stairway whom she had never even seen before. She had not stopped to think until now that, after all, Larry Haven lived in a world quite apart from the Baldwins.

Her mother's very good cravanette hid Beth's frock from throat to slippers. She wore no head-covering save the waves of her pretty black hair. For Beth was one of those fortunate girls who possess soft looking, wavy hair, adaptable to any style of hair-dressing.

She was directed to the dressing rooms above, and mounted the stairs. There a maid showed her to one of the large bedrooms, now set apart for the women to use as a dressing room.

Five minutes later Beth descended the stairway. She saw at its foot a group of people looking up at her. Mrs. Haven was not one of them. Indeed, Beth thought she knew none of the group—at least, none of the women.

She imagined that they were whispering about

her. The suspicion heightened the color in her cheeks; but she could not afford to be panic-stricken now. Beyond this group—wavering a little in her sight because Beth saw her through a mist—she knew Mrs. Haven stood.

She stepped from the lower tread of the stairway, and—— Who was this who met her, both hands outstretched, lips smiling, gray eyes dancing? Such a tall young man, strikingly handsome, Beth thought, in his evening clothes, his shock of straw-colored hair brushed back from his brow, giving him a remarkably wide-awake appearance.

“Larry!” she said, almost in a whisper, giving him her hands.

“You howling little beauty!” he responded, in a tone equally confidential. “Mother did not prepare me for *this* change. Goodness, Beth! you’ve grown up!”

“No, no. But *you* have,” she said, flutteringly.

He laughed. Then he tucked Beth’s plump little hand under his arm and led her into the drawing-room.

“Mater,” he said, for she chanced to be alone at the moment, “I introduce you to the ‘belle of the ball.’ What do you know about our little ‘Saint Elizabeth?’ Hasn’t she grown up?”

“Mercy, child!” murmured Mrs. Haven, and the lorgnette came into play to rescue her from ab-

solute confusion. "I told you, Larry, how really pretty she had grown. In a few years, Beth, you will set the young men's hearts aflame. Introduce her to some of the others—do, Larry. So she will not feel lonesome," and the lady patted Beth's arm with her lorgnette.

"And your Great-grandmother Lomis' corals. I always envied your mother those beauties," said the matron. "But I had no idea Priscilla had kept them all these years."

"Why," gasped Beth, finally stung to self-defense, "they are heirlooms!"

"Oh—yes—of course," Mrs. Haven said. "But it isn't every one who can afford to keep heirlooms, you know."

Beth felt the sting in every word Larry's mother uttered. She knew Mrs. Haven was antagonistic to her. Why?

"Do introduce her to some of the young folk, Larry," his mother said impatiently.

"Not till I've danced once with her myself, Mater," said the young man, laughing. "I can see plainly that if I don't take my chance to do so right now, I'm likely to have none. Our little Beth is going to cut a wide swath to-night."

"Mercy!" murmured his mother. "What are these children coming to?"

"You must not treat me as though I were grown

up, Larry," Beth said, laughing, as the orchestra struck up again.

"Know this?" he asked quickly.

"Oh, yes," said Beth, glad she had learned some of the new steps.

"Then come on—and tell me all about yourself while we dance," Larry rejoined.

"Oh no! *You* are the interesting subject just now. Think! a full-fledged lawyer," she told him.

"Yes—'full-fledged,' indeed," he agreed. "And likely to get well plucked the first time I appear in court."

"Does the thought of your first case scare you?" she asked roguishly.

"No. The fear that there won't be a first case is what is troubling me. They tell me fledgling lawyers sometimes starve to death and are swept up with the dust in their offices and thrown out."

"I'll have Mary Devine watch over you. Her father is janitor of the block, you know. If you are seen to become emaciated, we will try to smuggle you in some food," laughed Beth.

"I don't know how long I shall be at it," the young man said, with more seriousness; "but I mean if possible to make the name of Haven known—and respected—as it used to be among the 'legal lights.'"

"Oh, I hope so, Larry!" she declared, with

warmth. "We all at our house will 'boost' for you."

"And all the kids are well?" he asked, looking down at her with frank admiration.

"Lovely. And fast growing up. You should see Ella! She is going to be a regular ash-blonde."

"I never did fancy light-complexioned people," said Larry, laughing at her. "You suit me, Beth."

"Thank you kindly, sir, she said," returned Beth, courtesying. "But remember, please, that my mother considers me a child."

"Pooh! pooh! and a couple of fudges! You are a stunner, Beth."

"I am a school girl; you must not turn my head with compliments."

"Got through the high, Elizabeth?" he asked. "Yes."

"And going in for the higher ed, of course?"

"Just as sure—as sure!" she said firmly. "I don't know just how, yet; but I mean to go to Rivercliff in the autumn."

"Whew! That's some school. I met some girls at college who had been there. Co-eds, you know."

"Nice girls?"

"Awfully nice," he declared. "They took two years at Rivercliff after high and then came to college. "But the full course up there would put

you ahead a whole lot, Beth. These girls I speak of were preparing for particular lines of work. If a girl wanted to be a teacher——”

“That is my goal, Larry,” Beth interrupted, so earnestly that she missed her step. “I *must* be a teacher. You know—papa isn’t rich. We have to scrimp a good deal. If I could teach I could help a lot.”

“Sure you could,” he agreed, with answering enthusiasm. “And, besides, a girl doesn’t get anywhere at all now if she hasn’t a pretty good education. You know how it is—a fellow likes to talk to a girl that can discuss the same things he can, and discuss them intelligently. Why, Beth,” and he laughed, “our great-grandmothers, who only knew how to sew and knit and bake and be domestic, would never get a chance to marry nowadays.”

“What nonsense you talk,” said Beth, dimpling. “Papa says that the nearest way to a man’s heart is through his stomach. I fancy that not *all* young men of our generation are dyspeptic and have to live on predigested health foods.”

“That is all right,” Larry said seriously. “But a fellow can hire a cook. He wants a wife who can be his mental companion.”

“Good-ness me!” drawled Beth. “Hear the boy! When are you going to get married, Larry Haven? How soon?”

"Just as soon as I find the right girl," he returned, laughing at her.

"Do you expect her to starve to death in your law offices, too?" she demanded, quizzically.

The question brought him to a stop. He gazed down at her for a moment. "Got me there, Elizabeth—got me there," he admitted. "I didn't think of that. She will have to be supported—the future Mrs. Haven—won't she?"

"And a cook hired for her, too," Beth responded wickedly. "By the time you are able to do that, Larry Haven, on your income as an attorney, I shall be principal of a young ladies' seminary at five thousand a year."

He laughed delightedly. She was just as bright as he remembered her to have been when she was little.

He handed her over to Major Whipple after this dance. The major, although a bachelor of over fifty, still possessed a discriminating eye for beauty. And he could dance well, too. Beth was enjoying herself. Larry did not let her sit idle a single dance. And the boys, young men, middle-aged men, were all ready to be partners with her.

Larry said to his mother: "What did I tell you, Mater? Beth is the belle of the evening."

"You will turn that child's head, Larry. I warn you," his mother said seriously.

"Well! she talks a whole lot more sensibly than most of the young women I have talked with this evening," he declared.

"Ah! she is wiser than I thought," murmured Mrs. Haven. "And I *would* like to own those corals of her Great-grandmother Lomis."

CHAPTER IV

THE SACRIFICE

"BUT why did she try to make me appear so young?" Beth asked her mother, as they sat side by side busily sewing the afternoon following Larry's party. "Really, I felt hurt. I cannot understand Mrs. Haven."

Mrs. Baldwin looked at her eldest daughter thoughtfully—as though, however, her mind were a great way off.

"Why did she, Mother?" repeated Beth.

"I can understand Euphemia," said Mrs. Baldwin, quietly. "You must not mind her, my dear."

"But I cannot see why she wants me to seem childish, even if you do, Mother mine," the girl said, somewhat impatiently.

"I fear one meaning is, that Euphemia feels that Larry would better remember you only as his playfellow when he, too, was a child," Mrs. Baldwin said. "He is a man now, you know, and must have a man's feelings as he has a man's duties to perform."

"Why, what nonsense, Mother!" exclaimed the

girl, throwing back her head and laughing delightedly. "He is only a great, big boy—that's all Larry Haven is."

Mrs. Baldwin shook her head, gravely. "You do not understand the difference between fifteen and twenty-two," she said.

"Yes, Ma'am, I do," the girl responded smartly. "I know my arithmetic. It's seven years—just seven years, Mother mine."

"That is not the real difference, Beth," her mother pursued. "The difference is not to be measured by time——"

"No! One would think it were eternity to hear you," laughed Beth.

Her mother laughed too; yet she was more serious than Beth could see any occasion for.

"There is a freshness and a boyishness about young men—and some men when they become older—that make them seem less mature than quite young girls," Mrs. Baldwin said, finding it a little difficult to impress her daughter with the change in her whilom playmate.

"Larry Haven has stepped over the line from boyhood to manhood, whether you realize it or not, Beth. There is a vast difference now between you two. You look forward to study and the acquirement of text-book knowledge——"

"Oh! how much!" murmured Beth.

"While he looks back upon his school course. The difference between knowledge wished for, and knowledge attained, is vast. It isn't measured by mere time, as I said before. It is a difference in the attitude of one's mind toward most things in the world. However much Larry may seem just the same as he used to be, he is not the same. He is a man grown, and you are only a girl."

"Oh, Mamma! That is a sharp one," said Beth, laughing placidly. "I really can't see that being fifteen instead of twenty-two makes much difference between Larry and me. I can still make him say just the thing I want him to say—I always could. And I can still get the best of him in an argument."

Mrs. Baldwin had to laugh, although it was not a very cheerful laugh. "Your being able to argue did not come from your studies in school, child, that is sure. You have always been good at that. You would argue now that you and Larry were equal."

"Oh! I realize our inequality, Mamma," Beth said sadly. "It's the difference in our education, not our ages, that troubles me. He may be only a boy, but he's got something in his head that I haven't. And oh, Mamma! I want it so!"

"My dear girl!"

"I know. It is wicked, but I must say it. I

told Larry last night that I meant to go to Rivercliff this September. And I mean to! It seems to me that I would sacrifice almost anything for the chance to go there. I *must* go!"

"My dear!"

"Yes. It sounds dreadful, doesn't it? I just get desperate when I think of how badly I want to learn. And if I don't become a teacher, what is to become of me? Am I to go into the dye factory to earn my living? Dear Mother! I must earn my living somehow. The children are getting bigger, and need more and more. They must be educated, too. If I could get my teacher's certificate in three years I could help you all."

"I know—I know, child," said her mother. "You would help us if you could."

"Now I've made you cry! I'm so sorry! Do forgive me! But it isn't that I would help the family if I *could*. It is that I *must*! Don't you see it, Mamma? Papa is getting no younger. Already Marcus talks of going to work. Am I better than my brother? The family needs my help as much as it needs his. And I should be able to do more than he."

"But, my dear——" cried Mrs. Baldwin, surprised by the girl's earnestness. She began to doubt if her daughter was quite as childish as she had supposed.

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"At least," went on Beth, ignoring her mother's half-spoken protest, "you must let me go to work this summer to see if I can earn enough, somehow, to pay for my first half, if no more, at Rivercliff."

"And what after that, daughter?" asked Mrs. Baldwin.

"I don't know. I am reckless—or inspired!" and Beth laughed shakingly. "A way may be opened. I'll take a chance."

"Where can you get work for the summer?" her mother asked gravely.

"Well—I would go into the factory for a short time——"

"Oh, no! what would Larry say? You cannot do that," her mother cried, with an energy that quite surprised Beth.

"Indeed!" sniffed the girl. "I guess you mean, what would Larry's mother say? I am not beholden to Mrs. Haven."

"No," said Mrs. Baldwin, seriously. "But you would not wish to offend Larry's mother."

Beth showed herself puzzled. "Why, not deliberately," she said. "Of course not. Nor Larry either. But why worry about them more than our other friends? Lots of folks who know us, and in no better circumstances than we are, either, will turn up their noses at me if I go to work in the dye factory. But you know how it is,

Mamma. A position in a store or an office is awfully hard to find in Hudsonvale. You wouldn't want me to go to a summer hotel to be a waitress or a chambermaid?"

"Mercy me, Beth! What are you thinking of?" almost screamed Mrs. Baldwin.

"I'm thinking of making money to pay for my schooling at Rivercliff," laughed her daughter. "I've read of lots of girls who earn their tuition fees by doing those things."

"But you!"

"Who am I?" asked Beth. "Better than other girls? You've taught me to sweep, to dust, to make beds, and to be tidy."

"Oh, yes," Mrs. Baldwin hastened to say. "Every girl should learn the domestic duties."

Beth began to giggle at that. "Larry says not. He's going to hire a cook when he gets married. He forgets that the cook may leave suddenly. I believe they have a way of doing that."

"For goodness' sake!" gasped her mother. "What didn't you and Larry talk about last night?"

"Why—lots of things. We didn't have much time to really talk. We'll wait till he comes here to see us to have a really old-fashioned confab together," Beth said laughing. "But he's a funny boy!"

"I tell you he is a boy no longer," Mrs. Baldwin said, a little worried.

"Oh, wait till you see him. He's just the same old sixpence of a Larry. You'll see, Mamma. But he is handsome in his dress suit. Doesn't look at all like an undertaker."

Mrs. Baldwin, shaking her head, rejoined:

"For you to go to work at any domestic service is out of the question. And your father would never hear to your working in the factory."

"What shall I do then, Mamma? Peddle? Be an agent? Go from house to house and try to make people buy what they don't want and don't need and really would be better off without?" and Beth laughed gaily. "Or shall I go right out with a mask and a club and become a highway robber?"

Her mother had to laugh again at this suggestion. Really, Beth was practical in her ideas. "Much more so than most girls of her age," thought the troubled mother, with a sigh.

She could not but be impressed with the earnestness of Beth's desire for an education. She had already had quite as much schooling as Mrs. Baldwin—and Mrs. Euphemia Haven—had been given when they were girls.

"But the world is different now," sighed the foreman's wife. "And more is expected of girls. If Euphemia——"

She did not finish her speech—there were some things she could not admit even to herself. But the next afternoon she dressed herself and went out. “Calling,” she told the curious girls. But she refused to say on whom she was to call.

After a sleepless night Mrs. Baldwin had made up her mind that Beth should have her desire if it were possible. By a sacrifice that she could not bring herself to tell even Mr. Baldwin about, she would raise sufficient money to pay for Beth’s first year at Rivercliff. She was quite sure Euphemia Haven would buy her Grandmother Lomis’ corals. For years she had wanted them. And Euphemia would give four hundred dollars for them.

“It is Beth’s sacrifice, not mine,” the mother thought, wiping her eyes before she mounted the walk to the Haven mansion. “And it is to benefit Beth. I am sure the child would rather have a year at school than the jewelry.”

She rang the bell and was admitted by the butler.

CHAPTER V

THE "WATER WAGTAIL"

"I OBTAINED the money from a friend. Payment of the loan need not be considered until your education at Rivercliff is finished, Beth. This sum will carry you through your first year in comfort. Meanwhile, as you say yourself, a way may be opened for you to continue your course there. 'Sufficient unto the day.' Ask no questions."

Thus said Mrs. Baldwin, in family assembled, when the outcry was made regarding the suddenly and mysteriously acquired funds with which Beth was to storm the heights of Rivercliff School.

Mr. Baldwin looked at his wife oddly, but he asked no question—then or at any subsequent time. When Mrs. Baldwin was as firm as she looked now, the others dared not be inquisitive.

But as delighted as Beth was at the sudden opening of her prospects, she felt that a sacrifice of some kind had been made. She feared her mother and father had done some hard thing for which they might be troubled all through her school years. She had no suspicion of the truth—not for a moment.

"But I will learn from other girls at school how to earn money to pay my way. And I'll pay mamma back, too," Beth thought, with but faint appreciation, after all, of how huge a sum four hundred dollars is, and how long it would take to earn and save it in any way open to a girl of fifteen.

Of course, the whole of it did not have to go for tuition and board. There would be a small sum for what Ella called her older sister's "trousseau," and for pocket-money and incidentals. Rivercliff was a more expensive school than one or two others Beth had thought of and she wished she could gain the advantages she craved in some other institution.

However, a girl with a diploma from Rivercliff had a distinct advantage over applicants from other schools with the State Board of Education. And for good reason. Rivercliff was more than a preparatory school in the usual acceptation of the term. A girl who faithfully took the courses laid down by Miss Hammersly, the principal, was well fitted for most places in life.

The summer was not spent idly by Beth. She had not merely resolved to obtain an education at her parents' expense. She was ready and willing to do all in her power to help bring the much desired thing to pass.

She obtained the opportunity of posing on several occasions for an illustrator for the magazines, who came each summer to a rustic studio she had built near Hudsonvale. Beth had done this work before, and the artist paid her fifty cents an hour. It was not an easily won fifty cents by any means. Retaining the poses as was desired strained the muscles and tired the mind more than most other work Beth had ever done.

She could crochet, too; but the payment she received for a baby's bootees "a fly would starve to death on," Ella declared—and with some apparent truth. However, Beth kept busy and happy. That is, she told herself she was quite, quite happy. But there was one thing that troubled her mind in secret. Larry Haven had never come to the little cottage on Bemis Street to see her.

From Mary Devine Beth heard much about Larry. He had established himself in the office next to Dr. Coldfoot, and——

"Such scrumptious furniture, Beth, you never *did* see. They say his mother made him a present of it all—furnished his office right up to the minute. And he's got a very splendid sign," added Mary, with enthusiasm.

Beth had seen the sign.

"And he comes downtown as brisk as a drug clerk every morning," giggled Mary, "and shuts

himself into that office—oh, dreadfully busy, he is!"

"I hope he will be," said Beth, laughing.

Nobody said anything to her about Larry's not coming to the house. The children were all busy, and had become so used to his absence that they did not note its continuance after Larry returned from the law school.

That her old playmate was busy might be an excuse for his seldom calling; but there was absolutely no excuse, that Beth could imagine, for his never coming to see them. After the first fortnight following his party, Beth ceased to mention Larry in the family's hearing. She was a girl who could hide her deeper feelings if she so chose; and she chose now to lead her mother to believe that thought of Larry never troubled her mind.

However, it did. More than once tears wet her pillow at night while she lay and wondered why Larry had forsaken her. She did not believe it could be the seven years' difference in their ages.

"I don't care if he does think me a little girl," she told herself; "he might, at least, be polite."

But, in truth, she laid the defection of Larry Haven to his mother. The why of this was no more clear to her girlish mind than Larry's neglect; but she had felt Mrs. Haven's antagonism so

deeply that she could not fail to take it into consideration now.

Beth was one of those loyal souls who seldom make friends save after due consideration, and who cling to their friendships, once made, through fair weather and foul. She felt about Larry just as she would have felt about an older brother. He was just as necessary to her complete happiness as Marcus was.

After their intimate talk at the party, Beth felt that her mind and Larry's were a good deal in accord—especially on the question of the advancement of her schooling. So she hoped he would continue to show his interest in the wonderful (to her) prospect of Rivercliff. She had no assurance that Larry even knew she was surely going to school until the afternoon came for her departure from Hudsonvale.

It was an event, indeed, for one of the Baldwins to go away by the river boat. The *Water Wagtail* was one of the finest of the fleet plying up and down the Nessing River, and Mr. Baldwin had obtained for Beth one of the staterooms for the trip.

The county paper, which ran a page of Hudsonvale news ("in spite of Mary Devine," Mr. Baldwin said), had printed a note of Beth's proposed departure for school, and the date. Was

that how Larry knew? For when Beth went down to the dock and aboard the *Water Wagtail*, the steward had just taken a box of cut flowers to her stateroom.

"I declare for't, Missy," said the shining-faced negro, "yo' friend suttently has sent yo' a heap o' posies."

"Let me see the card, steward," she said quickly.

It was Larry's, and Beth knew that flowers like these grew only in his mother's garden—in Hudsonvale, at least.

Her family had trooped aboard after her—with Mary Devine and a dozen other girls who had been Beth's friends at the high school. They made a noisy and jolly party. And how they wondered and exclaimed over the flower-filled stateroom.

"Why!" cried Mary Devine, "it's just like a bridal tour you're starting on. Aren't you lucky, B. B.?"

"I surely am," admitted Beth, smiling.

"But where's the groom?" asked one of the other girls, silyly. "Did he send the flowers?"

"How ridiculous!" rejoined Mary, scornfully. "It's the best man who sends the flowers, not the groom. He has to help smell 'em!"

The party remained on deck while the freight

was being run aboard below. Beth's glance often swept the littered dock as she talked gaily to her friends or to the children or to her mother and father. Suddenly her eyes fixed their gaze upon a tall figure striding down to the dock from Water Street.

It was Larry. Beth's heart leaped and the color came and went in her cheeks. Had there not been so much going on, her excitement must have been noticed. As it happened, however, not even the girls chanced to see Larry till he was aboard the boat and was approaching the group.

By that time Beth had quite regained her self-control. She welcomed Larry with just the degree of warmth her mother displayed—by no means as joyfully as did Mary Devine. He had to be introduced to the other girls—re-introduced in some cases. With Mr. and Mrs. Baldwin he was delightfully cordial. The children—even the twins—welcomed Larry nicely. Nothing was said about his previous neglect.

When the warning whistle sounded and the party arose to leave, Larry manoeuvred to get Beth by herself for a moment. They took the outer deck on one side of the glass-enclosed cabin, while the rest of the party went the other way to the stair-well.

“Go to it, Beth. I glory in your resolve,”

Larry said, in reference to her plunge into boarding-school life. "Get all there is for you at Rivercliff."

"I mean to, Larry," she said composedly. "And thank you for the flowers—they are beautiful."

"Oh, they were the Mater's idea," he said hurriedly. "But I have something here——"

He fumbled in his pocket and brought forth a little box—a jeweler's box, Beth knew.

"You won't want to wear those jolly old corals that belonged to your Great-grandmother Lomis at every party you go to up there," Larry said, more boyish in his confusion than ever, Beth thought. "Here's something you can wear right along—to remember me by."

He thrust the box into her hand. The children came racing to join them. Beth hid the box quickly in her bag—she knew not why.

She pressed Larry's hand in farewell. She kissed her mother, her father, and "all the tribe," as Ella called the family. The girls waved their handkerchiefs from the shore.

Larry did not wait as the *Water Wagtail* pulled out into the stream. It was his tall form, however, striding up the dock when the steamboat was really under way that Beth last saw.

CHAPTER VI

AN ADVENTURE IN MIDSTREAM

BETH had left the door of her stateroom wide open. When she went into the passage out of which it opened, she saw a girl looking in at the flowers, admiringly.

She was a merry-eyed girl, with short, fine, brown hair that had been blown about her face by the fresh, river breeze. This fact made her seem a little untidy; but she had a winning smile, was well dressed, and Beth found herself interested in the stranger even before the merry one spoke.

“How jolly!” she cried. “You certainly must have heaps and heaps of friends.”

“Why so?” asked Beth, demurely.

“Because they’ve just about filled your room with flowers. Or were they so glad to see you go that they over-speeded the parting guest?” added the girl, roguishly.

Beth laughed as she went by the other into the room and seized a bunch of roses. “Here,” she said, thrusting the flowers into the strange girl’s

hands. "I must divide with somebody. And my friends were not speeding the parting guest. I am going to school."

"Bless us! so am I," said the other, burying her rather retroussé nose in the fragrant blossoms. "But they didn't waste any lovely flowers on poor little Molly—nay, nay, Pauline!"

"My name is not 'Pauline,'" interposed Beth, her eyes dancing. "It's Beth."

"Oh, how jolly!" cried the other. "I never knew a girl named Beth outside of a story-book."

"It's my real name," Beth said demurely.

"And are you going to school?"

"Yes."

"Not to Rivercliff?"

"Yes; I am," Beth said, her own eagerness increasing. "Are you?"

"How jolly!" ejaculated this rather exclamatory girl. "I certainly am going to Miss 'Am-mersly's hestablishment, as it would have been called in 'dear hold Hengland,' had she remained there to conduct her school."

"Oh! is the principal English?" asked Beth.

"The nicest kind. And Madam Hammersly! Wait till you see her! She wears the cunningest caps."

"Who is she?" asked the puzzled Beth.

"Miss Hammersly's mother. And such a dear!

She is really the housekeeper and general manager—and, oh! so particular! No end! But she's a jolly old dear, at that."

Beth saw that this girl overworked at least one word in the English language. But it was impossible to look at her without thinking of that very word. She was jolly, indeed.

Naturally, Beth Baldwin was greatly interested in this, the first of her future schoolmates whom she met and not a little curious about her. She learned at once that Molly Granger had been to Rivercliff for two years already, having entered what Miss Hammersly called the "primary department."

"But I shall be a full-fledged first-grade with you 'freshies' this fall. I shall be in your classes," she said cheerfully. "I believe I am going to like you a lot, Beth. And that's more than I can say for some of the girls who have been with me as 'primes' and now will be in our grade too. There's Maude Grimshaw, for instance. *That* girl would try the patience of a Jobess."

"A *what?*" gasped Beth.

"A Jobess. Female for Job. Isn't that right?" asked Molly, her eyes dancing.

Beth laughed. Then she said suddenly:

"Oh, wait!" and, seizing some more of the flowers from Mrs. Euphemia Haven's garden, she

darted out of the stateroom. She had been watching for several moments a girl who stood in plain view in the cabin and who had been staring at the flowers.

She was a slim, freckled girl, rather oddly dressed, Beth thought; but her big, dark eyes expressed a longing for the flowers that could not be mistaken.

"You'll have some, won't you?" demanded Beth, offering the flowers to this stranger, as she had to Molly Granger. "I have so many of them!"

Then she realized that the freckled girl's eyes were blue. A shadow seemed to lift from them as she smiled. Whereas they had been dusky before, they shone as she looked first at the flowers and then at Beth.

"Oh, thank you!" she said, and her voice was delightfully gentle—"cultured," Beth would have said, had that expression not so badly fitted the strange girl's appearance. She wore a very odd combination of garments.

Her smile and her speech repaid Beth for her act. The freckled-faced girl crossed the cabin—she walked gracefully—and sat down upon a divan with the flowers. Before Beth turned back to her new friend, Molly Granger, the blue eyes had become clouded again and the tall figure of the

girl drooped over the handful of flowers. Beth whispered to Molly:

"I wonder who she is?"

"Haven't the first idea," said the jolly girl, carelessly.

"Do you think she is going to school with us?"

"To Rivercliff? I should say not!" gasped Molly. "Say! you don't know what you're up against there, Beth. Why, we girls of Rivercliff stand for the 'acme of style.' The only magazines we read are the fashion magazines—and we only look at the pictures in those. Maude Grimshaw could wear diamonds to each class recitation—and royal ermine, I presume, too—whatever that is," and Molly laughed.

"Oh!" exclaimed Beth, greatly taken aback.

"Only, you see, Miss Hammersly won't have it. She is for plain frocks in school. What the girls wear in the evenings or on holidays does not so much bother her. We're all supposed to be from families who roll in wealth—whatever that may mean," and Molly giggled again.

"Are—are *you*?" asked Beth, somewhat timidly.

"Am I what, my dear?" returned Molly.

"From a rich family?"

"Goodness, no! My aunts send me to Rivercliff. I'm a poor, lone orphan. My poor, dear

mother must have taken one look at me, have seen what an awful, ugly little sprite I was, and thankfully ceased to live. My father was a missionary and died of fever in Canton. There you have my history, saving that seven aunts—all my father's sisters (do you wonder he went missionarying?)—took upon themselves the task of bringing up and educating 'poor lil' Molly.' If I hadn't a well developed sense of the ridiculous, it would have killed me long ago."

Molly rattled on so recklessly that Beth was more than a little startled at first. Then it began to impress the girl from Hudsonvale that here was a person who had really never had a mother or a father, and had never learned the actual need of parents. Therefore, she could talk so indifferently about them.

Another thought was, however, buzzing in Beth's brain.

"What do you suppose these wealthy girls at Rivercliff will say to my dresses?" she asked. "I've only one better than this—and that's for evening wear."

"Goodness! How long is a string?" demanded the other girl.

"What?"

"How long is a string?" repeated Molly, laughing. "You might as well ask me that as to ask

me how Maude Grimshaw and that tribe will look on you and your clothes. And I guess there's no answer to that old wheeze."

"Oh, yes there is," said Beth, laughing too. "My sister Ella says the answer is 'from here to there.'"

It did not take much to keep these two new friends laughing. And, at the moment, it did not seem a great trouble to Beth whether the wealthy girls at Rivercliff liked her and her clothes or not.

She carried most of Larry's donation of flowers out into the cabin and told the stewardess to arrange them on one of the writing tables. Then she locked her stateroom door and went with Molly on a tour of the boat.

"You see, I've been up and down the river on this boat a dozen times," said the jolly orphan. "I come from Hambro, 'way down the river. I started early this morning. We'll get to the Rivercliff landing to-morrow evening—if the freight traffic isn't too heavy. The *Water Wagtail* staggers from one side to the other of the river, picking up freight at the landings, and sometimes the trip is delayed long beyond sched. But never mind! school doesn't really open till Monday. We've got three perfectly good days before us."

Twice Beth noticed the freckled girl as they passed through the cabin. She still sat in her

melancholy attitude, and the flowers had dropped into her lap. Beth knew she must be in some trouble or sorrow; but she scarcely saw how she could help the stranger.

Molly Granger kept up a running fire of comment upon everybody and everything. The steamboat stopped at two small towns before dark, and the new chums watched the busy scenes on the docks and talked about the new faces they saw. Beth found Molly the very best of company; for while she was light-hearted and full of fun and mischief, she was sound at the root and had no unkindness or meanness in her make-up. Indeed, Beth Baldwin had never met one of her own age before whom she liked so well on such short acquaintance.

Left to herself for a short while, Beth was going over in her mind all the adventures of this busy and exciting day. How much had happened—and how much unexpected—since she had started from the little cottage on Bemis Street.

Then, for the very first time since she had slipped it into her bag, Beth thought of Larry's present. Something in a jeweler's box! How had she forgotten it for so long?

"That proves that this has been an exciting time," murmured the girl, getting her bag and opening it. "Ah! here is the box."

It was neatly wrapped and tied, and her fingers were engaged in untying the string for a minute or so. Then she opened the box. A puffy mass of pink cotton met her gaze. She pulled this aside.

"Oh! O-o-o-oh!" she breathed. "The beauty! The *beauty!*"

She took out the pin. It was delicately wrought of platinum and studded with diamond chips and tiny half-pearls. It was not very expensive; but it showed skilled workmanship and was an ornament that would surely attract attention. Yet it was simple enough to look well if worn by a young girl.

Larry Haven's taste could not be criticized. If he had selected the pin himself (and Beth believed he had, from what he had said at its presentation), it showed that he thought of her—that he still considered Beth his little friend and comrade.

Yet, if so, why had he neglected coming to the Bemis Street cottage all summer? This still puzzled and troubled the girl.

At supper time Beth and Molly went up to the saloon deck and the captain of the waiters found the two friends seats at a pleasant table. Beth looked for the freckled girl but did not see her. Yet Beth was sure she had not gone ashore at either of the landings.

While the girls ate and enjoyed their supper,

a mist arose and enfolded the steamboat and enshrouded the face of the river. When they came out on the open deck again, the clammy breath of the mist fanned their cheeks, and all they could see of the banks on either hand were occasional twinkling lights—either on scattered farmsteads or in tiny villages or ferry-houses.

“B-r-r-r-r! It’s going to be a nasty night,” said Molly Granger. “I shall go to bed early. No fun sitting up unless the moon shines. Then it is lovely to be out here and watch the shores. The old steamer won’t stop again till we reach Marbury—about midnight.”

“I was hoping for a moonlit night,” said Beth, disappointedly.

“Better to get a good sleep, for to-morrow will be a long day,” said Molly, showing a streak of good sense that Beth had not known she possessed. “We may not get to bed to-morrow night till late; for we may be delayed in reaching Rivercliff. I’ve been as late as eleven o’clock getting off this boat at that landing.”

“I guess you know best, Molly,” agreed Beth.

But she was not sleepy herself—not even when Molly bade her a warm good-night and went into her own stateroom, which was not far from Beth’s. The latter encircled the outer main deck again. The *Water Wagtail* was in midstream. She was

a side-wheeler, and the splashing of her buckets and the creak of her walking-beam, added to the hiss! hiss! of the spray from overside, played an accompaniment to Beth's thoughts.

Her first night away from home! Never had she slept from under her parents' roof before. Her own little room, shared with Ella, was the only chamber in which the girl had ever spent the night.

Little wonder that she felt nervous, if not apprehensive. There were two berths in her room—an upper and lower. She would have been glad to share the stateroom with Molly Granger; but she shrank from admitting to even that easy-going, jolly chum that she felt the need of company at night.

She shrank, too, from going to her stateroom and locking herself in.

Instead, she wandered about the boat again. She spent more than two hours going from deck to deck—sitting a while in one place, then getting up and wandering about, wrapped well in her rain-coat to keep out the thick mist.

Several times she saw the freckled-faced girl. Either she had no stateroom, or else, with Beth, she did not feel like going to it. And her expression of countenance and deeply despondent manner troubled the girl from Hudsonvale.

"I wish I could do something for her," thought Beth. "She must be poverty poor with that get-up. Dear me! I haven't any too much money myself; but if a little would help her——"

She finally started toward the strange girl, determined to accost her; but just then the latter arose from her seat and approached one of the uniformed officers of the boat, then just passing through the cabin.

"Are we near Brakelock, yet?" Beth heard the girl ask.

"We're not far from that landing, Miss; but we stop there only on the down trip unless we're signalled to take passengers. Nothing doing to-night, Miss."

"Thank you," said the girl, quietly.

The man went about his business. The girl immediately descended the stairs to the lower, or freight, deck. Beth, hesitating whether she should speak to her or not, followed unobserved.

Nobody seemed to be about. The way was open aft to the outer deck behind the paddle-wheels. The tall girl went swiftly to the port side, slid open one of the doors, and stepped out upon the misty, open deck. Beth went out by another door. There was nobody aft but herself and that other girl—not another soul.

The girl did not see Beth and the latter hesi-

tated again. What should she say to her? How accost her?

And then—the discovery set Beth's heart to beating madly—she saw that the strange girl was leaning far over the rail of this lower deck, so close below which the black water hissed and gurgled. In a moment she had a knee upon the flat top of the rail, flinging up her tight skirts with an impatient kick to free her limbs of their entanglement.

She was teetering—almost head downward—on the rail, about—it seemed—to plunge into the swift current of the river!

CHAPTER VII

CYNTHIA FOGG

BETH had learned something about vigorous play at basket-ball under the direction of the instructor in physical culture at the Hudsonvale high school. Besides, she had not played with Marcus and the other boys—even with Larry in years gone by—without learning what is meant by a low tackle.

So, when she jumped for the girl who seemed about to throw herself into the river from the stern of the *Water Wagtail*, she “tackled low.” She seized the reckless girl about her knees, locking her legs tightly in her arms.

“You can’t! I sha’n’t let you!” Beth gasped, as the other struggled. “Oh! what a wicked thing you are doing!”

The freckled girl squealed—no other word could exactly express the startled sound she made when Beth seized her. Then she attempted to turn around and face her rescuer, as the latter dragged her down and away from the rail.

“What are you doing? Stop it!” sputtered the

tall girl. "Goodness! how strong you are! Do let me be!"

"I won't!" cried the excited Beth. "I won't! You sha'n't do such a dreadful thing! I'll shout for help!"

"Oh! don't do that," begged the other girl. "They'll do something awful to me."

"Then promise you won't do *that*——"

"What?"

"It would be dreadful——"

"What would be dreadful?" repeated the strange girl, in some heat. "They'd have got the boat back again. I wasn't going to steal it."

"Steal it?" murmured Beth, startled and confused.

"Yes. I'd have left it tied along shore there. No harm would have come to it."

"Oh, my dear!" gasped Beth. "Is there a boat there?"

"Of course there is. Didn't you see it dragging just astern? They forgot to hoist it in. I noticed it before dark. Say!" exclaimed the other, her strange eyes suddenly shining in the mist as she stared at Beth. "What did you think I was trying to do when I was hauling in on that painter?"

"I—I thought you wanted to drown yourself," whispered the confused Beth.

"My aunt!" exclaimed the girl, and laughed

shortly. "No. I'm not quite so desperate as all that."

"But you might fall overboard getting into that boat," said Beth.

"I can swim. But the current's swift here in midstream," and she shuddered. "Now you've knocked the courage all out of me. Oh, dear!"

"Why do you want to leave the boat in such a crazy fashion?" demanded Beth, regaining her self-possession.

"I've got to get away before the *Water Wag-tail* stops at Marbury," said the other, hastily.

"Why?" repeated Beth.

"Oh—because!"

"But you wouldn't dare take that boat. You might fall overboard from it. You would be lost in this fog," Beth urged.

"I know. I wouldn't dare now," said the other, gloomily.

"If I hadn't stopped you something dreadful might have happened."

"Nothing more dreadful than will happen when we reach Marbury."

"What do you mean?" asked the curious and sympathetic Beth.

"They know I am on this boat," confessed the girl, with sudden desperation. "And they'll come aboard of her and take me back."

"Back where?"

"I can't tell you. It's awful! I haven't a living soul I can call my own—not a real relative——"

"You are an orphan?" asked Beth, thinking at once of an asylum or an institution to which she supposed poor girls without parents or relatives have to go. Besides, the awful clothing this girl wore bore out this supposition of Beth's—that she had run away from a charitable establishment of some kind.

"Of course, I'm an orphan," said the other girl, quickly.

"Can't I help you?" suggested the sympathetic Beth.

"How?"

"What is your name, please?" asked Beth. "Mine is Beth Baldwin."

"Cynthia—Cynthia Fogg," mumbled the other girl, and so hesitatingly that Beth half believed that the last name, at least, was born of the thick river mist out into which the wonderful blue eyes were staring. Nevertheless, Beth said nothing to betray her doubt.

"You say these—these people will search the boat for you?" she asked.

"Yes."

"People from the—the institution from which you have run away?"

Cynthia turned her head quickly so that Beth could no longer see her face, replying in a muffled tone: "Yes; from the institution."

"How do you know they are on board?" continued the practical Beth.

"Somebody that knows me saw me at that last landing—just as the steamboat was pulling out," replied Cynthia. "I know he'll telephone up the river to Marbury. And I'll never get away from them now."

"You may escape them," said Beth, kindly. When Cynthia looked back at the dragging boat, she added hastily: "Oh, not by that means. There must be a less perilous way."

Without any thought of the possible consequences, Beth had given her heart and hand to the strange girl's cause. It meant little to her that this girl had run away from some public institution. She did not stop to ask why she had run away.

"How, I'd like you to tell me?" said Cynthia.

"Surely those who look for you will not arouse the passengers and make a disturbance in the middle of the night? We don't get to Marbury till midnight, I understand."

"That's right."

"Then," said the generous Beth, "why not come to my stateroom?"

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"Your's? Why! you don't know me," said the other girl, rather astounded.

"Surely, we've just introduced ourselves," laughed Beth. "I am alone in my stateroom. There are two berths. They'll never look for you there."

"Oh, my aunt!" ejaculated Cynthia Fogg, with such sudden animation, that her strange eyes sparkled again. "That would be great!"

Beth thought the girl an odd combination of characteristics. One moment she was morose; the next she brightened up and was all life and gaiety. But the girl from Hudsonvale was bent only on helping Cynthia.

"Will you come to my room?" she repeated.

"Surely I will—if you think they'll let me."

"Who?"

"Why, the steamboat people," said Cynthia.

"I guess they won't stop us. But we'd better not let anybody see us together. When the boat gets to Marbury, somebody may remember having seen you with me, and then they'll suspect where you are hidden," said the practical Beth.

"My aunt! so they will," admitted Cynthia.

"So we'll go singly. Don't let the stewardess see you," said Beth, warningly. "I'll go first. You'll surely follow?"

"Of course I will," said the other girl, warmly.

"And no trying to go overboard—into a boat or not?" added Beth, smiling.

"I'm afraid now," confessed the other. "You've scared me."

"Then I'll take care of you," promised Beth, laughing again.

"You *are* a nice little thing," repeated Cynthia Fogg.

"Thank you. My room is Number Fifty-three."

"I know," said the other. "I saw those flowers. I'll wait till you get there before I come upstairs."

Beth re-entered the enclosed part of the boat and went up to the main deck at once. She had been in her stateroom ten minutes before she heard a quiet little rustle outside her door. She had left it unlocked, but now she turned the knob invitingly.

The freckled girl pushed it open and glided in, closing it noiselessly behind her.

"Here I am," she said.

CHAPTER VIII

QUEER TALK

THE dress of this unfortunate in whose fate Beth had taken such a strong interest, had already made the girl from Hudsonvale wonder. Such a shocking combination of color and tawdry finery Beth had seldom seen, even in a mill village, which Hudsonvale was.

Yet the tall, freckled girl wore the incongruous garments with utter unconsciousness. She never seemed to give her dress a thought.

On a green straw hat of the season's mode, was a purple feather, which had plainly seen service in the rain. She wore a ragged feather boa and a rather soiled brown silk waist much worn under the arms and evidently originally built for a much fuller figure.

A black serge skirt of very narrow proportions seemed shrunk upon her, and was spotted and shiny. Low brown shoes and spats completed the costume.

"I suppose these awful garments are better than the uniform of the institution she fled from,"

thought Beth. Then she asked aloud: "What did you think of doing when you ran away?"

Cynthia's face blossomed into one of her unexpected smiles. "Just thinking of running away," she said.

"But how did you propose to live?" asked the practical Beth.

"By drawing my breath—the same as usual," and the strange girl went off into a spasm of laughter which Beth thought showed rather poor taste to say the least.

"But we all must do something besides breathing to live," she said shortly.

"True," said Cynthia. "Eat. And to eat we must have money, eh?"

"Yes," said Beth, still with gravity.

"I intend to work," said the older girl, composedly enough now.

"What kind of work can you do?"

Cynthia hesitated. She put her head on one side. Her eyes grew dark and unfathomable again.

"I ought to get a job at housework, oughtn't I?" she said.

"I don't know," said Beth, thoughtfully. "Wherever you apply for work you will have a better chance of obtaining it if you look—look a little more like other girls, don't you think?"

"What?" questioned Cynthia, evidently puzzled.

"Why—your dress, I mean. Perhaps we can help you make your appearance nicer."

"You mean my clothes are ugly?" asked Cynthia, bluntly.

"And not altogether clean," added Beth, quietly.

"Well, housemaids don't have to dress very fancy, do they?" demanded the refugee. "I got these things I am wearing from a girl who worked as a maid and waitress, and I paid—— Well! I paid enough for them."

"Of course," mused Beth, "you couldn't risk going out on the street in your uniform."

"My what?" exclaimed Cynthia.

"Why—uniform. Didn't you all dress alike in that place where you were?"

Cynthia turned her face from Beth suddenly. "Oh—yes," she said, in a muffled tone. "I see. I just had to get different clothes."

"Well, maybe we can fix you up a little better."

"Who's 'we?'" demanded Cynthia, quickly and sharply.

"There is a friend here who is going to school too."

"Are you on your way to school?" asked Cynthia.

"Yes," Beth replied.

"What school?"

"Rivercliff."

"And is that other girl I saw you with?"

"Yes. We had just met. She is an awfully nice girl. Maybe she can help."

"What do you mean? To give me some of your clothes? Bless you, child!" and this strange girl laughed heartily. "Both of you are chunky and I am tall. Your clothes never would fit me in the world. I don't want skirts half way to my knees. Make me look like a giraffe reaching for the highest branches of a cocoanut palm!"

She laughed again, and Beth joined her—but rather ruefully. To tell the truth, Beth thought her strangely particular for a poor girl—a runaway from an orphans' home, or something of the kind.

But she did not prolong the argument with her guest. Cynthia Fogg (if such was her name) was frankly yawning.

"We will talk of it in the morning," Beth said, with sympathy. "I see you are tired. You may take either berth——"

"Oh! I could never climb into an upper," gasped Cynthia. "If I have to sleep in such a place it has to be in the lower berth."

Evidently the runaway was used to taking the

best there was to be had—whatever that best might be. She seemed quite careless of other people's needs or desires. She took Beth's kindness in offering her the choice of the berths quite as a matter of course.

Naturally, there was not much room in the stateroom for two people. Cynthia seemed so tired that Beth sat back on a stool and allowed her to undress first. The girl from Hudsonvale could not help noticing that the stranger's underclothing was very good and spotlessly clean. These did not match her outside apparel in the least. Beth Baldwin could not help but think this strange.

"Well, I didn't suppose I'd be sleeping in a stateroom to-night," said Cynthia, with a careless laugh, as she got into the wider lower berth. "I didn't have much money left after I bought these clothes of that girl."

Beth wanted to ask how she had obtained money at all at the orphan asylum; but she did not wish to appear too curious. Perhaps they allowed the girls there to earn money by outside work. Cynthia spoke as though she had been bred to domestic service.

Beth, who was not unobservant, had looked more than once at the strange girl's hands. They were white and soft, well kept, and slenderly

formed—not at all the hands of a girl who had dabbled in dish-water or used the mop and scrubbing brush. Her clean-cut features, too, and her low, cultivated voice, certainly belied the thought that she had spent her life in domestic service.

Beth began slowly to coil her hair for the night, having slipped out of her shirt waist. Cynthia blinked at her for a moment, yawned twice (showing very even, strong looking teeth, likewise perfectly kept) and then—deep, even breathing from the lower berth warned the other girl that Cynthia was asleep.

CHAPTER IX

RIVERCLIFF LANDING

BETH was roused from her reverie by the mournful tooting of the *Water Wagtail's* whistle for the landing at Marbury. Here Cynthia Fogg expected her pursuers would come aboard to search the boat for her; but she was a sound sleeper and did not arouse at all while the steamer was at the dock, discharging and receiving freight.

Nor did Beth hear anything outside her state-room door that indicated a search of the passengers' quarters for the runaway girl. Beth was a little worried, now she stopped to think of the matter more seriously. What would the authorities do to her if it was learned that she had hidden Cynthia away?

She wondered about another thing, too. If Cynthia safely escaped her pursuers, what was to be done with her? Beth wondered whether or not she should take Molly Granger into the secret. She felt that she ought to advise with somebody, and Molly seemed the only person at hand.

Yet she realized that the laughing, joking, care-

less Molly might not be just the best sort of individual to advise with in any important emergency.

Somehow, Beth felt that Cynthia Fogg was one of those persons who are apt to trust implicitly in the suggestions or help of others rather than themselves exert mind or body in an emergency. Having given herself into Beth's hands, the runaway had gone to sleep as peacefully as a baby, leaving her hostess to think out her future course—if she would.

The steamboat finally got under way again, and nobody disturbed the occupants of stateroom Number 53. Beth then undressed, said her prayers, put Larry's present and her purse under her pillow, and climbed gingerly into bed, being careful not to awaken the slumbering Cynthia.

She did not expect to sleep much, the situation being so strange and the day such an exciting one. But scarcely was her head comfortably settled on the pillow than she was off.

One o'clock was a late hour for Beth Baldwin to be awake. Therefore, the early morning stir upon the boat—even its stopping at several small landings—did not arouse her. But a fist pounding vigorously on the door of Number 53 did finally awaken her.

“Beth Baldwin! Beth Baldwin! For the sake

of goodness! Do you die at night and have to be resurrected every morning?"

"Is—is that you, Molly Granger?" yawned Beth.

"It is. Get up!"

"Isn't it *dreadfully* early?"

"No. It's only cloudy. The day is broke, my child—dead broke, by the looks of it, I should say. A nasty day! and I so wanted it to be nice."

Beth had reached down and was fumbling at the key in the lock. Now she turned it and Molly bounced in.

"Well! you lazy girl!" cried Miss Granger, who was fully dressed. "You'll learn to get up more promptly than this at Rivercliff. Miss Hammersly believes in early hours. So does the madam."

"I did not go to sleep till after the boat left Marbury," said Beth, yawning frankly again.

"Mercy! and I never even knew we stopped there," laughed Molly. Then suddenly she uttered a suppressed shriek and fell back from the berths.

"What's the matter?" demanded the startled Beth, sitting up wildly and bumping her head.

"What—what's *that*?" asked the other girl, pointing.

"Oh! Ow! Ouch!" groaned Beth, placing both

hands tenderly on her poor, bruised crown. "What is the matter with you, Molly Granger?"

Then she remembered Cynthia Fogg and carefully crept down from her berth. In the lower berth, the freckled runaway was wound up in the blanket like an Egyptian mummy in its wrappings, quite unconscious of what was going on about her.

"For mercy's sake!" repeated Molly. "Did that grow there in the night?"

"Oh dear me, no!" gasped Beth, between laughing and weeping, for the bump hurt. "That's Cynthia."

"What?"

"Cynthia Fogg."

"Goodness! Did you have her in your bag? Was that why I didn't see her before?" asked Molly Granger.

"Why—don't you see? It's the girl I gave flowers to. Don't you remember?"

Molly was staring wonderingly about the stateroom. She spied the green hat and purple feather.

"Cracky-me!" she sighed. "That dowdy?"

"Sh!" began Beth, but Molly interrupted:

"She's dead, isn't she? Nothing less than Gabriel's trump will wake her up. Tell me about it—do! A strange girl in your stateroom? I shouldn't have thought you'd dare."

"Why—I never thought there was the least harm in her," Beth said, wonderingly. "And she was in trouble."

"What sort of trouble?"

In whispers Beth told Molly all about it. The jolly girl laughed when she heard how Beth thought the freckled girl was about to commit suicide; but she listened to the remainder of the story with some seriousness.

"I don't see how you dared do it," repeated Molly. "To take her right into your stateroom!"

"But she's only a girl like ourselves."

"But from a public institution of some kind!"

"Is that different from a boarding school?" demanded Beth, with some warmth. "Only the girls, I suppose, are all poor and don't have very much fun."

"Cracky-me!" exclaimed Molly again. "Maybe she's from some place where they send really bad girls. Perhaps she's escaped from a reform school."

"Nonsense!" laughed Beth. "She's nicely spoken and is very ladylike. And has such wonderful eyes!"

"I noticed those eyes last evening," said Molly, reflectively. "And she is older than we are."

"Not much."

"Maybe she has been with people who are not

nice. To think of the risk you took, Beth Baldwin! And she admitted the authorities were after her."

"Yes."

"Suppose a policeman had come right here to this room and demanded her—and taken you to jail, too?"

But Molly's eyes twinkled, and Beth laughed again. "You can't scare me, Molly Granger. I don't believe there is a mite of harm in Cynthia Fogg."

"Well, what are you going to do with 'Cynthia-of-the-minute?' " asked Molly.

"That's what I want to talk to you about," said Beth, seriously.

"With me? Goodness! Am I going to be in this?"

"Of course. We're chums, aren't we?" laughed Beth, roguishly, as she drew on her stockings. "Sit down on the edge of the berth, Molly, and we'll talk. I don't think Cynthia means to wake up."

"She wouldn't awaken if the upper berth fell down," declared Molly Granger. "Well now! what is it, Beth Baldwin? I believe you are going to get me into trouble."

"Not a bit of it. But we both must help this poor girl."

"Why must we? I don't like that word, anyway," confessed Molly.

"But if we can help folks in this world, we ought to, oughtn't we?"

"That is, if we find a convict, for instance, escaping, we should aid him rather than the police?" giggled Molly.

"Hush! I tell you I have every confidence in Cynthia's being a good girl. But she is a poor girl, and she needs some better looking clothes than those she has. And then, she needs work."

"What kind of work?" asked Molly, wide-eyed. "We couldn't find her work to do."

"I don't know whether we could or not. She speaks as though she were used to domestic service."

But Beth refrained from mentioning the fact that the appearance of Cynthia's hands did not bear this out.

"Might introduce her to Madam Hammersly," said Molly, really thinking about the situation now. "She is always hiring and discharging maids and waitresses. She is awfully particular."

"But we'd want to get Cynthia a permanent position," said Beth.

"Oh! if the madam liked her—if this girl could suit her—she would have a good situation. Madam pays well, I believe," said Molly.

Just then the bundle of blankets on the berth began to heave, and a voice came from out of it, saying:

“ ’Nuff said! I take the job! Ow—yow! yow! Is it morning? Who’s this girl sitting on me, anyway?”

Molly got up in a hurry. Beth laughed, saying to the girl in the berth:

“How do you know the position will suit you, Cynthia?”

“Why, any position suits one if one has no money—isn’t that so?” said the philosophical one. Her clear, low voice made Molly think more favorably of her—the jolly girl showed this in her expression of countenance.

“How jolly!” she exclaimed, and throwing all her previous caution to the winds. “It would be great fun to take you to Rivercliff with us.”

“To school, you mean?” yawned Cynthia Fogg.

“To school. But to work for Madam Hammersly. She is housekeeper and general manager. Why! there are twenty or more girls on her staff.”

“They don’t have to take lessons, do they?” demanded Cynthia, apparently rather startled by the idea.

“Oh no!” giggled Molly. “I should say not.”

“Then I’m willing to try it,” said Cynthia, swinging her slender limbs out of bed. “But,

Miss Baldwin, you didn't tell me this girl's name?"

"So I didn't. Pardon!" said Beth. "Miss Granger."

"All right. Now, there isn't much room in here, Miss Granger, for us to dress. So if you'll go out while Miss Baldwin and I are about it, it will facilitate matters—don't you think so?"

"Well, I like that!" gasped Molly, in a tone that showed she did not like it at all.

But Beth only laughed. That the strange girl assumed the right to give orders did not trouble the even temper of Beth Baldwin. She said:

"Cynthia is right, Molly. It is close quarters in here. And please run and see if you haven't a collar or a collarette that you can spare, and that will help out on this shirt waist I am going to ask Cynthia to wear instead of that brown one."

"Huh!" grunted Molly.

"My! you girls are awfully particular about the way I look," Cynthia Fogg declared.

"If you want to go to Rivercliff with us," Beth said firmly but pleasantly, "you must look neat. Mustn't she, Molly?"

"Yes indeed!" exclaimed the girl questioned.

"If I look too nice will they think I need the job?" Cynthia asked, bluntly.

"Cracky-me!" ejaculated Molly, losing her momentary "grouch." "Madam is awfully particu-

lar! She'd judge your ability to keep her things neat by the neatness of your own apparel—sure she would!”

She ran away cheerfully to find things in her suitcase to help bedeck the runaway.

“If I could only get to my trunk!” Beth said to Cynthia. “I've a hat there that——”

“Why! mine is a perfectly good hat. Don't you think it's rather striking?” asked Cynthia, with her face turned from Beth's gaze.

“Goodness, yes! That's the very trouble,” gasped Beth, looking at the green hat with the purple feather.

“And the girl who wore it really worked as a maid and waitress,” declared Cynthia, as though that settled the question of its suitability.

But Beth was puzzled. Cynthia spoke just as though she were playing a part and was proud of the fact that she had dressed for it. Yet the girl from Hudsonvale could not put her finger upon one word Cynthia had said or one thing that she had done which really bore out the suspicion that she was not exactly what she pretended to be—a fugitive from some institution where girls without home and friends were confined.

There was nothing vulgar or mean in the strange girl's speech or actions. She was abrupt and rather impolite at times. But that abruptness

seemed to spring from a frank character repressed, rather than from a lack of appreciation of proper behavior. Indeed, Beth fancied that Cynthia felt no social inferiority and was used to treating others as her equals in that respect. Or was it that she felt herself naturally superior to most of those whom she met?

A strange combination was Cynthia Fogg, that was sure.

Beth finished dressing first and went in search of Molly Granger. The jolly girl demanded first of all:

"Isn't that the strangest girl you ever met, Beth Baldwin?"

Beth sighed. "I don't know," she said. "Either she does not know when she offends good taste or she does not care. She is an odd-acting girl for one in her position."

"Yet," said Molly, reflectively, "there is something taking about her."

"That's what I say," said Beth, brightening up.

"Anyway, we'll see if we can get her taken on by Madam Hammersly. My! she is so abrupt. I wonder what the madam will say to her?"

"Will she even give her an interview?" asked Beth.

"Sure. We'll get her a chance to see the madam," said Molly.

"You must do that," said Beth. "I am a stranger."

"Leave it to me," said the other girl, with assurance. "But that hat! If we could only lose it!"

"I'd gladly give her another," Beth cried.

"Jolly! leave it to me," Molly said, again nodding. "I know what to do."

They went back together to Number Fifty-three. Cynthia was completely dressed, and Beth said to her:

"Come on now. We'll go to breakfast."

"But I've no money!" exclaimed the freckled girl.

"I have invited you to go with me," said Beth.

"With us," put in Molly Granger. "You will be our guest to-day. How far up the river is your fare paid?"

"To tell you the truth, I had a ticket—er—given me to Jackson City," replied the other, speaking slowly.

"All right," said Molly, quickly. "That's beyond Rivercliff. You can get a stop-over."

"Well!" said Cynthia Fogg, with a burst of emotion. "You are good to me!"

"Let's go out on deck for a breath of fresh air first," Molly suggested.

The trio went outside, through one of the sliding doors. The deck was wet and the mist stood

congealed in drops upon the railing. Into the fog their gaze could not penetrate a dozen yards. All they could see was a portion of the steamboat itself, and the grayish, muddy water lapping alongside and below them.

"Ugh, how nasty!" said Cynthia Fogg with a shudder, leaning over the wet rail.

"Oh!" squealed Molly, and fell heavily against the taller girl. In grabbing at her own hat, her elbow struck Cynthia's topheavy "creation," and the abomination flew off the freckled girl's head.

"What *are* you doing?" demanded Cynthia, in some heat, although her voice remained low and well modulated.

"How awkward!" gasped Molly. "Will you forgive me, Miss Fogg?"

The hat had dropped into the water and now danced astern. Cynthia cried, rather wildly:

"How shall I ever recover it?"

"Hat overboard!" exclaimed Molly, giggling now. "Call all hands!"

"Well—it's my only hat! I don't believe you care," said Cynthia, eyeing Molly doubtfully.

"Well, never mind!" Molly said. "No use crying over spilled milk."

"That isn't milk," said the freckled one. "It was a perfectly good hat."

"Oh!" gasped Molly.

"What's the matter, Miss Granger?" asked the tall girl, suspiciously. "Don't you suppose I paid good money for that hat?"

"I—I don't know," giggled Molly. "Only if you did, you must have been color blind."

At that Cynthia Fogg burst into a low, agreeable laugh. Her blue eyes brightened and twinkled. Under her usual demure manner there certainly was some sense of fun in this strange girl.

"If I could only get to my trunk," Beth began, but Molly cried:

"She'll look all right bareheaded."

"They will take me for an immigrant," said Cynthia.

"That's better than looking like a scarecrow," said the saucy Molly. "Jolly! if you'd worn that freak hat up to the school, and the girls had seen you——"

"But I sha'n't mix with the young ladies who attend Rivercliff School," said Cynthia Fogg, demurely.

"You won't mind going without a hat for one day—and on this boat?" said Beth.

"Of course she won't!" cried Molly.

"I'll leave mine in the stateroom, too," suggested Beth.

"So will I," the jolly girl declared.

Cynthia laughed again. "I never saw girls like you two before," she said. "Go ahead, I'll do whatever you say. I'm in your hands."

Beth secretly thought that Cynthia had made a very honest confession in this statement. She seemed perfectly satisfied to allow her friends to go ahead and plan for her.

They went upstairs to the saloon deck to breakfast, and had a very pleasant meal, despite the gloominess of the day. Beth noted that Cynthia had surely been well brought up. She was quite used to good form in table manners. She was not on her guard against mistakes; the proper table etiquette was as natural to this runaway girl as breathing.

The *Water Wagtail* plodded up the river through the thick mist all the forenoon, stopping now and then at misty landings. But at noon the weather cleared suddenly and then the beauty of the banks was revealed to Beth Baldwin, who had never before been so far from Hudsonvale.

During the forenoon two girls came aboard the steamboat whom Molly Granger introduced to Beth. They were Stella Price and Lil Browne.

"Notice the 'e,' please, at the end of Lil's name," said the jolly girl. "That is why she is a 'Brownie'—and we all call her that, don't we, Brownie?"

"Of course *we* do, Jolly Molly," returned the new girl, laughing.

So Beth learned that, quite in keeping with her language and character, her new chum was known by everybody at Rivercliff as "Jolly Molly" Granger.

Cynthia Fogg stayed in the stateroom most of the day. She did not put herself forward or try to take advantage of the other girls' consideration for her. She kept to herself, either from a feeling that she was not of the class of these girls going to Rivercliff to school, or because—because——

"Can it be that she feels herself *above* us?" thought the puzzled Beth.

But she did not whisper this thought, even to Molly Granger.

The day was spent pleasantly enough by Beth and the other girls. The banks of the river were an ever-changing panorama of beauty; the small landings and the larger towns came in rapid succession, for it was a thickly inhabited part of the State.

Late in the day Rivercliff came into view. Molly pointed it out to the Hudsonvale girl with pride.

There was a small landing at the foot of a high, gray bluff. The village on the river's immediate bank did not number fifty houses. A road, plainly

marked, wound up the face of the bluff, to which several little houses clung like limpets to a rock. On the brow of the bluff was a huge, brick house, with towers at the two front corners, and wings thrown out on either side. There were several smaller buildings that evidently belonged to the school, too.

To tell the truth, Beth Baldwin, at first view, thought Rivercliff School rather ugly.

CHAPTER X

A NEW WORLD

BETH BALDWIN had always supposed that all girls were "just girls." Her experience in the public schools of Hudsonvale had taught her that most of her companions were, as Ella sometimes said, "made by the piece and cut off by the yard."

That is, after all was said and done, there was not much variety in girls' characters as displayed by the girl pupils of the Hudsonvale schools. There were the nice, quiet girls, and the wild, "giggly" ones; the vain girls, as well as the meek, inconsequential girls; with a scattering of smart, up-to-the-minute girls, as well as some lovable, cheerful girls whom it was a delight to know; and, of course, there were a few downright mean girls who were best left alone.

In fact, Beth, before coming to Rivercliff School, had thought of girls as "sorts," rather than as individuals. She was now to learn that one of the things that a well conducted boarding school does to a girl, is to bring out her individuality, and if she has any color to her character at

all to deepen that color and develop her distinctive traits.

Molly Granger was just a little different from any girl Beth had ever before known. Despite her jolly, careless, cheerful disposition she was certainly different, for instance, from Beth's friend, Mary Devine. There was a self-confidence in Molly that no girl could possess without having been out in the world for some time. Yet she was not bold.

Stella Price and "Brownie," as Beth found all the other girls called Lilian Browne, were likewise distinctly dissimilar. Both were in the grade above that which Beth would enter. They called themselves "sophomores."

Stella was a strangely aloof girl—one of those persons whose minds seem traveling afar most of the time, without being dreamers. Oh no! there was nothing idealistic in Stella Price's character. But, if a member of a group of girls, she was always the one who appeared to be listening and who seemed to have little in common with the rest of the crowd.

"You'd think," was Molly Granger's comment upon Stella, "that she was as wise as an owl. The appearance of wisdom fairly trickles out of her lineaments right now, doesn't it? And I wager she's thinking of nothing more important than



A TALL, MASTERFUL GIRL STOOD AT THE MAIN ENTRANCE
TO WELCOME THEM.



whether she'll have two or four rows of stitching on the hem of her skirt."

"Oh, Molly!" laughed Beth.

"Fact. As for Brownie—she's just a nice, cuddly girl, and I love her. But she's the most obstinate toad in the whole school!"

This conversation had been held on the boat. Of course, Beth had little chance to see many of her schoolmates that first evening. She and Molly, with the two sophomores and Cynthia Fogg, piled into an automobile bound for the school. Molly put Cynthia beside the driver. Stella and Brownie were very curious about Cynthia.

"Who is she, Molly?" whispered Brownie. "She's never coming to the school?"

"Not as a pupil. I'm going to try to get her a place with Madam Hammersly."

"Goodness! The poor thing," sighed Stella, commiseratingly.

Evidently, the girls considered the principal's mother a good deal of a Tartar. Beth herself had an opportunity for judging almost as soon as they arrived at Rivercliff, regarding the important person in question.

A tall, masterful girl stood at the main entrance to the great school building to welcome the arrivals.

"Just report yourselves at the office, Stella and Brownie and Jolly Molly. Who's the freshie?" she asked, halting Beth.

"Beth Baldwin," she was told.

"All right. You for the madam's room."

"I'll see to her, Miss Teller," said Molly, very respectfully, to this senior. "I'm going with Miss Baldwin to the madam."

"And who's this?" demanded the monitor, stopping the hatless Cynthia.

"I am going to take her to the madam, too," whispered Molly. "She's a girl looking for work as parlor-maid or waitress or something."

"We-ell. You know this isn't the entrance for them. And madam is dreadfully particular," said Miss Teller, doubtfully. "Come back and tell me if she's to stay, Molly."

"All right," agreed the other, and she with her two protégées went in.

The entrance hall of Rivercliff School was a revelation to Beth. She had been in two or three of the better houses of Hudsonvale besides that of Mrs. Euphemia Haven; but none of them had been on a scale with this, nor of such style.

The ceiling was very lofty. There were several very good paintings on the walls, and they were properly hung. The furniture was heavy and of substantial appearance, rather than ornate. The

upholstery and hangings were in soft tones and of rich fabrics which gave an air of splendor to the place that almost awed the newcomer. She felt very much like the country mouse visiting his city relative.

"Isn't it scrumptious?" whispered Molly, who appreciated just how the new girl felt. "I tell you, this and the two drawing rooms are the show places of Rivercliff."

"And this beautiful staircase," murmured Beth, gazing up the polished spiral that ascended in the middle of the great room.

"Do you know," giggled Molly, "this reception hall and that staircase were what brought me here to school?"

"No!"

"Yes," exclaimed the jolly girl, but with more seriousness. "Aunt Celia came here first and saw it. Then Aunt Catherine journeyed up the river to behold its wonders. Next, Auntie Cora and Aunt Carrie thought they must see it—and they did so.

"I came to school for the first term, and Aunt Charlotte got so lonesome for a sight of me, so she said, that she came up to visit. But I found her here, every chance she got, just soaking her mind in the artistic atmosphere of this reception hall," giggled Molly.

"After that Aunt Cassie and Aunt Cyril simply *had* to see it——"

"But, Molly!" almost shrieked Beth, in amazement, seizing the other girl by her arm. "Every one of your aunts' names begins with 'C'!"

"Yes. I know it."

"But—but—— Isn't that funny?"

"No. Only alliterative," said Molly, wide-eyed.

Cynthia's low, mellow laugh broke out suddenly. "And their parents never even thought of my name, I suppose?" she said.

"I don't know. At least, grandmother had no other girls to name. She liked the 'C,' I suppose, because all her forebears were mariners," declared Molly, with great seriousness.

"Did you ever hear the like?" murmured Cynthia Fogg.

"I wonder how much we can really believe of what Molly says?" said Beth, pinching the culprit's ear. "All this about your aunts—and seven of them!—make me doubt if you have any aunts at all."

"Cracky-me!" ejaculated Molly. "Wait till you see 'em."

"Shall I ever?" said Beth Baldwin.

"I have their pictures—drawn by myself—in my room," said Molly, solemnly.

"Come, Jolly Molly!" warned the tall senior behind them, "take the freshies along with you to the madam."

Molly marched briskly in the lead toward the rear of the great hall. Beth saw several girls looking over the balustrade above; but they popped back in a hurry, laughing, when they saw themselves observed. There was, however, from somewhere above, the hum of voices.

It was after the supper hour. There must be, Beth thought, a recreation room on the second floor where the pupils gathered in the evening.

Molly was knocking with gloved knuckles on a door at the rear of the hall. A brisk voice said, "Come in!" and the girls entered a very plainly furnished, yet pleasant room. It was a contrast to the luxurious entrance hall of the school; but everything was good and very comfortable.

There was revealed, when the door swung open, a lady in black, with a white lace collar on her old-fashioned, full-skirted gown and a white cap on her iron-gray curls. She was sitting in a high-backed chair at a small desk, on which was an account book. She stood up promptly, in quite a military fashion, and looked at the trio of youthful visitors through her eyeglasses.

She was a small, slight woman, in reality; yet she stood so straight, and looked so stern and un-

bending, that she seemed to Beth to be at least six feet tall.

"Good evening, young ladies. Miss Granger, I am glad to see you back. How did you leave your aunts?"

"All seven of them, Madam?" asked Jolly Molly, roguishly. "Collectively, do you mean, or shall I give their individual symptoms?"

"I see you are determined to wear the cap and bells," said Madam Hammersly; yet she smiled "I fancy all seven are reasonably well."

"And all seven sent their respects to you, Madam," declared Molly.

"They are very kind. Will you introduce these others, Miss Granger?"

She glanced swiftly from Beth to Cynthia and back again as she asked the question.

"This is Miss Beth Baldwin," Molly said. "She comes from Hudsonvale. I met her on the boat. We are chums already, Madam Hammersly."

The madam nodded and smiled at Beth; but the latter did not feel that she was expected to take the lady's hand, nor was it offered.

"She enters the first grade, you know, Madam. Can't she have the room next to mine?" begged Molly. "You see, she has no friend here but me, and has never been away from home before."

"I will think of that," promised the madam. Then she looked inquiringly at Cynthia Fogg.

"And this, Madam Hammersly," Molly said, stepping nearer to the lady, "is a girl we met who is quite needy. She is looking for work. Her name is Cynthia Fogg. I am very sure she is a nice girl. She came up from Hudsonvale and shared my friend, Beth's, stateroom. I told her I would introduce her to your notice, Madam. She really needs work."

The madam looked askance at Jolly Molly for an instant. "This is scarcely the time," she began, but Molly interrupted:

"I know, Madam. I hope you will forgive me. But she had nowhere to go—no friends and no money. She had a ticket to Jackson City, where she was going to look for work; but she had nothing in view there, and no more friends than she has here. Not so many, for Beth and I are her friends."

Cynthia Fogg flashed the jolly girl a single wondering glance. That anybody should show particular interest in her seemed to amaze her.

"I—don't—know," said Madam Hammersly, slowly, looking at the applicant thus introduced with her very sharp eyes. "You may sit down, girl. I will see you after I have finished with the young ladies."

She at once made a sharp distinction between the pupils of the school and the applicant for work. Cynthia calmly turned to seat herself in a chair in a retired corner of the room. Madam Hammersly looked again at Beth, and with more interest.

"And this is Miss Baldwin?" she asked.

"Beth Baldwin, Madam," said Molly, naively. "And she's awfully nice."

"I do not doubt it," said the lady, kindly. "I hope you will find Rivercliff a pleasant home and school, Miss Baldwin. You will not see Miss Hammersly until morning. Then you may go to her office for examination after prayers, which immediately follow breakfast. Miss Granger can tell you all about the rules of the school—not because she never breaks them, however," she added, with grim pleasantry.

"Go to Miss Small for your supper, Miss Granger. Later I will see if I can do as you wish about Miss Baldwin's room. Have your trunks come?" she suddenly asked Beth.

"My trunk and bag came with me, Madam," answered Beth.

"The remainder of your baggage will come later, I presume?" said madam.

"Why, that trunk is all I have!" Beth blurted out.

“Ah? Your parents do not believe in an extensive wardrobe for a schoolgirl. Perhaps they are quite right,” the lady said placidly. “I will see, Miss Granger, if I can assign Miss Baldwin to the room of which you speak. You mean Number Eighty, of which Miss Purcell was the last occupant?”

“Yes, Madam.”

“I will see. You may now go. I wish you both good night. I hope you will find your place in this—to you—new world, Miss Baldwin, and find it easily.”

Beth thanked her, and then turned to Cynthia before she left the room in Molly's wake. “I do hope you will be successful in pleasing her,” she whispered, warmly squeezing the freckled girl's hand.

Then she hurried out. She felt that the madam's stern eyes were upon her. This was, indeed, a new world to Beth Baldwin, and she had much besides book-lessons to learn in it.

CHAPTER XI

“THE GLASS OF FASHION”

THE two girls had supper in Miss Small's room. Miss Small was the under housekeeper, and a very excellent woman. Beth liked her at once.

While they were still at the table, a set of Japanese gongs, somewhere in the corridor, rung by electricity, sounded. This marked half-past eight.

“No chance to show you off to the girls to-night, Beth,” said Jolly Molly. “That's the signal for us all to retire to our rooms. Of course, ‘lights out’ is not sounded for an hour yet; but visiting back and forth in the final hour before bedtime is frowned upon by the ‘powers that be.’ That is why I hope the madam will give you Number Eighty. I have Eighty-one. There's a door between and we have the sole use of a private bathroom. It's scrumptious!”

Just then a lady entered whom Beth had not seen before—a pleasant-faced lady with youthful features but very white hair. Miss Carroll

owned a baby-fair, pink and white complexion. Her lovely hair, massed high upon her small head, made her look queenly—something, Beth whispered to Molly, in the style of Marie Antoinette!

"Is this Miss Baldwin, Molly?" asked the lady.

"Yes, Miss Carroll," Jolly Molly said. "She is my new chum."

"Yes? She is to occupy Eighty. I hope we shall have only good reports this half from Eighty and Eighty-one."

"My goodness!" whispered Molly to Beth. "It's fairly uncanny the way they seem to expect bad reports from us! Madam hinted at it. I don't see how they all came to have such a doubtful opinion of you, Bethesda Elizabeth!"

"Of me?" gasped the new girl.

"Why—yes—of course. They *know* me," said Molly, demurely.

Beth laughed. She was sure her new chum had not a spark of real wickedness in her. But Molly Granger was full of mischief. Beth now asked about Miss Carroll.

"Oh, she's math and Eng—and an awfully nice sort, too."

"'Math' and 'Eng?'" repeated Beth, laughing. "Is that her religion and politics?"

"No. What she teaches. Mathematics and English."

"Oh!"

"She's altogether lovely," Molly said. "That cannot be said of all the instructors—no, indeed! Good night, Miss Small," she added, in a louder key to the under housekeeper. "Come along, Bethesda! We'll go up and say 'how-do' to our rooms. Have our bags been sent up, Miss Small?"

"Jonas has them on the lift, Miss," the housekeeper said.

"We'll walk," said Molly to Beth. "I don't like that elevator, anyway—just because they call it a 'lift.' That's too awfully 'Henglish' for me, you know. I am a true-blue American girl—a regular 'jingoess.' I shout for the Stars and Stripes, and scream with the eagle——"

"Or at a mouse?" suggested Beth, wickedly.

"Ugh! Yes! Who doesn't?"

"I wonder if Cynthia Fogg was hired by Madam Hammersly?" Beth said aloud, as they mounted the main stairway.

"I'd really like to know, too," agreed Molly.

"You don't suppose that Cynthia was turned out? Put right out-of-doors, I mean, if the madam did not like her looks?"

"Sh!" whispered Molly. "That's why I sprang Cynthia on the madam the way I did. She's really the most tender-hearted thing you ever saw or heard of. She only appears stern. And when she

understands that that girl has no home and friends——"

"You think she will be kind to her?"

"Sure she will! She's kind to all the girls who work for her. Only she's awfully particular. You ought to see her going around after them when they sweep and dust. Oh! if they leave a speck of dust—— M-m-m!"

"I hope she'll take Cynthia on," sighed Beth, as they reached the top of the stairs.

Two corridors branched away, right and left, from the gallery around the hall.

"I tell you how we'll find out about Cynthia—— maybe," said Molly. "We'll ask Jonas. Come on! We want our bags, too. He'll be waiting at the elevator in the south wing."

She started along the corridor into the wing in question, and then mounted ahead of Beth another flight to the third floor. They met no other girls, although some of the doors were open and Beth caught glimpses of pleasant interiors and groups of gossiping girls.

They finally came, panting, to the elevator cage, where a shiny-faced negro boy sat on his stool inside the car, with the bags belonging to the two girls at his feet.

"I'm yere, Miss Molly," he said, grinning at the girl he knew.

"I see you, Jonas," she said, collecting her suitcase and bag. "I've had my eyes treated while I was home and I can see pretty well now, Jonas."

"He! he!" giggled the black boy.

"Say, Jonas! Tell me something."

"Yes'm," said Jonas promptly, as he saw Molly fumbling in her purse.

"Who is the new girl the madam has just hired?"

"Lawsy!" chuckled Jonas. "How'd you knowed she hired that girl?"

"She was in madam's room while we were," said Molly, composedly.

"You mean that tall, freckled-faced girl, don't you?" asked Jonas.

"Yes. What is her name?"

"Cynthia. Dat wot Miss Small called her when she brought her downstairs," said Jonas.

The two girls exchanged satisfied glances. Molly put a small coin in the boy's palm. "Come on, Beth," she said. "Eighty and Eighty-one are right around this way."

A side corridor brought them, followed by Jonas with the bags, to two doors not far from each other and with the two numbers in question painted on the lintels. Other doors were open on the corridor and Molly Granger was hailed by other girls.

"Hullo, Jolly Molly!"

"How are the seven pussy cats?" was one mysterious greeting.

"How's tricks, Molly?" demanded one girl. "Full of new ones?"

"Sh! don't ruin my reputation right at the start," begged Molly, of this last girl.

Beth was peering into the open door of Number Eighty—her room, where Jonas had already left her bag. Suddenly a voice drawled behind her:

"Who is that with you, Molly Granger?"

"My new chum," said Molly, sharply; and Beth turned to see who had first spoken.

A girl stood at the open door directly across the hall from Number Eighty. She was a pale girl in a light blue kimono of heavy, beautiful silk, with silver dragons worked upon it—a most beautiful garment, Beth thought. The girl herself was languid in her manner, had pale eyelashes and hair as well as bloodless complexion. Indeed, she looked as though some pigment was lacking in her system entirely, she was so positively colorless.

"What's her name, Molly?" drawled this apparition.

"This is Miss Beth Baldwin. Miss Maude Grimshaw, Beth. You live right opposite to each

other," whispered Molly, in conclusion, "and, believe me! you have opposite natures."

Miss Grimshaw had given Beth a cold little nod and had gone back into her room.

"What a beautiful kimono that is she wears," Beth said calmly.

"Maude is the one of whom I told you," Molly sniffed. "Our 'glass of fashion and mold of form.'"

"Oh! the dreadfully fashionable girl?"

"Fashion is no name for it!" groaned Molly. "She sports the finest frocks at Rivercliff. She turns all our heads. Oh! she's a charmer."

"Why," said Beth, "I fancy you don't like her, Molly.

"Cracky-me!" ejaculated Molly, round-eyed. "How did you come to guess that?"

Beth saw that her friend felt rather keenly on this subject, so she did not probe deeper. She had not seen Miss Grimshaw long enough, herself, to judge the pale girl. But Molly seemed to be such a universal favorite, and so kind and merry with everybody else, that Beth wondered about Maude Grimshaw. As it chanced, Beth was soon to learn just what her neighbor in the blue silk kimono was.

At the present time, however, the girl from Hudsonvale was more interested in the room she

was to occupy. There were small girls in the school who roomed together—"a whole raft of primes in each dormitory," Molly explained—but the older pupils of Rivercliff had each a room of her own and they could live as privately as they could at home. And when she had seen them, Beth thought Numbers Eighty and Eighty-one must be the nicest rooms in the whole school.

"Which they are—about," Molly said, when Beth expressed this belief. "I expected to have to fight for Eighty-one when I came back this fall. You see, Greba Purcell had your room for four years. She left in June just before graduation. Right away Princess Fancyfoot——"

"Who?" gasped Beth.

"That's what I sometimes call Maude Grimshaw. She wanted a couple of her 'Me toos' to have Eighty and Eighty-one——"

"What do you mean by 'Me toos?'"

"Why, girls who agree always with Princess Fancyfoot. There are 'sich,' my dear, though you mightn't suppose it," Molly said, laughing. "'For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together.'"

"Oh, Molly! I wouldn't speak so," begged Beth.

"Oh, pshaw! *Grimshaw*, I might say," chuckled Molly. "You don't know her yet."

But there was so much to see and so many new ideas to grasp, that Beth did not that evening give much thought to the possibility of an unpleasant neighbor. Her own room was of good size with two windows. The bathroom between Number Eighty and Eighty-one was tiled and had a shower.

"You see," explained Molly, "Greba's father had this bath put in at his own expense for her particular use. Miss Process, who had my room before I got it, enjoyed Miss Purcell's friendship, too. Oh! Greba was an awfully nice girl—and her father could have bought and sold Princess Fancyfoot's father half a dozen times over and never missed the money. The Purcells are a different breed of rich folks from the Grimshaws—believe me!

"And say! we're two lucky girls to get these rooms. First grades don't usually get their pick of accommodations. No, indeedy!"

It was not until the next day, however, that Beth realized the truth of this statement of Molly's—and learned, too, what a very unpleasant neighbor she had in Maude Grimshaw.

CHAPTER XII

FINDING HER PLACE

IN each corridor was a set of the Japanese gongs, and Beth Baldwin lay awake the next morning and listened to the electrically rung bells beginning at the top of the great house and in both wings, and repeated all down the line. They were mellow bells and pleasant to hear—and Beth did not mind rising at seven o'clock.

Although lessons did not begin until Monday, and not more than half the girls had yet arrived, the discipline of the school began on this Saturday morning. Breakfast was at eight; prayers three-quarters of an hour later. After this general gathering in the general hall, Beth found her way to the office, and to her first interview with the principal of Rivercliff.

Miss Hammersly was of small stature like her mother. But there was scarcely anything else in the principal's appearance, Beth thought, that reminded the new pupil of the stern and military madam.

Miss Hammersly had curly hair, it is true, as

had her mother. Possibly she might have been very pretty as a girl; but the duties and trials of her position had marred her forehead with lines of care, and had tinged her hair with gray. She had very bright eyes like the madam's own; but they often softened and became dreamy as she spoke—the eyes of a truly imaginative person.

Imagination was the root of Miss Hammersly's success. Had she not possessed it, and in abundance, she could never have brought this great school (and that twenty years before) to a standard of excellence quite remarkable.

Fortunately, she had obtained the patronage of wealthy people from the start. Without sacrificing her standard of excellence that put her graduates considerably above those from other preparatory schools of the State, Miss Hammersly managed to satisfy the parents of girls on whom much more money than was good for them was spent.

Not that all her pupils' parents were like Maude Grimshaw's. Miss Hammersly had to coax Maude and her kind along the thorny paths of learning. Yet some of the brightest girls at the school were daughters of extremely wealthy people. Wealth was not a barrier which it was impossible to hurdle!

"I wrote to your principal at the Hudsonvale high school," Miss Hammersly said to Beth Bald-

win, "and he gave me an excellent report of you. He likewise tells me that you are striving to earn a part of the money to pay for your courses here at Rivercliff. Is this so, Miss Baldwin?"

"Yes, Miss Hammersly," Beth said, rather flutteringly.

"I am glad to have such independent girls as you with us," the lady said, smiling kindly. "We have too many of the 'parasite' class in this world. Welcome to the producer! Be something and do something in the world; that is a good motto.

"There are ways open to bright girls to earn money, not only in vacation time, but during the semester. Later, when you have proved your ability, there may be pupil teaching. Some of our primary pupils are not forward children and they need the encouragement of older girls. I shall be glad to make use of you in this way, Elizabeth Baldwin, if you prove yourself capable."

The lady spoke very kindly to Beth all through this interview, evidently wishing to convince the new pupil that she was just as welcome to Rivercliff School as those girls from wealthier homes. Yet Beth had already gained an impression that the tone of the school was one of fashion and idle show.

At prayers, better than at breakfast, Beth had been able to gain a view of the school—or of

such of its membership as was present—and she saw that there was scarcely a girl among them all as plainly dressed as she.

Even Molly Granger seemed very fancifully clothed beside Beth. Beth's traveling dress was a very good one. As she had confessed to Molly, that, and the poplin she had worn to Larry Haven's party, were her two best gowns. The other frocks Mrs. Baldwin had made for her daughter were of good wearing material, but inexpensive.

"My, but you look like a quiet little brown mouse!" Molly had said that morning, when she saw Beth dressed to go down to breakfast.

And even that pleasant comment was a criticism, Beth now realized. This was truly a new world to her. She had no idea that girls from fourteen to eighteen could be so fashionable.

There was a rustle of silk petticoats as the girls took seats beside her in the hall; the laces displayed were real; the ribbons flaunted were of the very best quality; and almost every girl she saw wore more or less jewelry.

Beth tried the effect of Larry's present at the collar of her simple gingham when she went back to Number Eighty after her interview with Miss Hammersly, and saw immediately that the pin did not go at all with such a frock. Even Larry knew more about what girls wore at a school like

Rivercliff than she and her mother had known! It was a very pretty pin; but to wear it with a gingham dress was certainly not the thing.

Jolly Molly said nothing to her about her appearance save that first comment. But Beth began to be afraid that her commonplace garments would shame her new chum before the other girls. Molly did not dress in such expensive gowns as many of the girls; but her seven aunts certainly did not restrict their niece to plain clothing. Beth saw her chum's two trunks unpacked in wonder.

It did not take Beth long to unpack her trunk. It was a small affair at best, and she had had hard work to find enough to fill it properly before leaving home. She hung her dresses in the closet very quickly and shut the door. She was actually ashamed to have Molly or any of the other girls examine her possessions.

The girls were continually running back and forth from room to room, chattering and displaying their new possessions, and having a good time generally. For, there being no lessons on this day, there was naturally more freedom allowed than usual.

Molly, Beth found, had a wealth of ornaments, photographs, pennants, Indian beadwork, a real Navajo blanket, cushions galore, and a multitude of other articles for the adornment of Number

Eighty-one. Many of these possessions she had left in the school storeroom during the vacation months, and now brought them forth.

Beth had brought with her photographs of the home folk, of course. She had also her own pretty toilet set and various nicknacks that she fancied particularly. But Number Eighty looked like a poor place indeed beside Molly's room.

"Oh, it takes a year or two at school for a girl to collect sufficient 'lares and penates' for her room to look real homey," declared Molly, when Beth mentioned this difference in the appearance of their rooms.

"It's really scarcely worth while my spreading around my poor little possessions," laughed Beth. "There are not enough of them to make a show in this big room."

"Quite true, Miss Baldwin," drawled a voice at the open door of Number Eighty. "And, therefore, before you unpack any more of your things I've a proposal to make to you."

"Hullo! here's Princess Fancyfoot," muttered Molly Granger.

"Good morning, Miss Grimshaw," said Beth, placidly, to the girl from across the hall.

"I want you to know my friend, Miss Laura Hedden," went on Maude, with a most patronizing air. "Miss Baldwin, Laura."

Laura was a very dark girl—as dark as Maude was fair. Instead of having Beth's brilliant brunette coloring, however, Laura had a muddy complexion. Her straight hair was black and her sharp eyes suspicious. She had not a word to say for herself, but nodded to Beth rather sullenly.

"We've come to talk to you, Miss Baldwin," said Maude Grimshaw, looking significantly at Molly.

"Cracky-me!" cried the latter. "Is anything you have to say ever a secret, Maude?"

"Not if you get hold of it, Molly," said the other girl, promptly. "That is why I have inquired of Miss Baldwin if we may speak with her alone."

"Well, I declare!" ejaculated Molly, and before Beth could interfere her chum had flounced into the passage between the two rooms and banged shut the door.

"Now that you have driven my friend away," Beth said, rather sharply, "perhaps you will be kind enough to tell me what you want, Miss Grimshaw?"

"Shut that door behind you, Laura," said Maude, looking at the hall door by which she and her friend had just entered. "She may come around to listen if it is open. Oh, Miss Baldwin, don't look at me in that way. We know Molly

Granger rather better than you do, I fancy. I understand that you only met her on the boat coming up to school?"

"That is true," admitted Beth, quietly.

"So Brownie said. Well! we know Molly. Don't we, Laura?"

"Oh! don't we!" echoed the dark girl, and immediately Beth guessed that Laura Hedden must be one of the "Me toos" of whom Molly had spoken. She was Maude Grimshaw's satellite.

"Is—is it Molly you have come to speak about?" asked Beth. "For if it is, I shall call her in. I would not discuss any friend in such a way as this."

Maude laughed, but her pale eyes flashed. "Oh, no. It is your own affairs of which I wish to speak."

"Thank you for your interest, Miss Grimshaw," said Beth. "But I do not understand."

"Well!" exclaimed the rather exasperated Maude. "You came up the river with another girl—a girl whom the madam has hired as maid. Isn't that so?"

"Yes."

"She's a friend of yours, of course?"

"Cynthia? Certainly."

"Then I presume—by that and other unmistakable marks—that you are not from very well-to-do

people, Miss Baldwin?" demanded Maude, complacently.

"My father earns three dollars and seventy-five cents a day; my mother made my dresses; I expect to pay for a part of my tuition here by some work—of what kind I do not yet know." Beth said it all defiantly, her black eyes flashing.

"Quite so," Maude rejoined, as though all this was pleasing to her. "Very commendable on your part, I'm sure, too, Miss Baldwin. And I can show you how you may at once aid yourself—and nobody be the wiser."

Beth looked at her curiously, but said nothing.

"I have always wanted one of my friends to have Number Eighty," Maude hurried on to say. "I'd like to get Eighty-one for another, too; but Molly Granger is a regular dog in a manger. You, however, have more sense, I should suppose."

"Thank you, Miss Grimshaw," said Beth, but in a tone that did not seem entirely grateful.

"Now, you see what we're after, Miss Baldwin," said Maude, coolly. "I want you to exchange rooms with Laura. Really, she has a very nice room in the other wing; but she is too far away. She is quite necessary to my comfort—really, she is," continued the girl. "And I am sure you will find the girls over there quite as pleasant as those on this corridor."

"Thank you, Miss Grimshaw. I do not care to change," Beth said, quite calmly. "Of course, you will excuse me?"

"But you haven't heard my proposal yet," Maude hastened to say. "I expect to pay you for the accommodation. One doesn't get something for nothing in this world—I have found that out!" and she laughed rather scornfully.

"I do not understand you," said Beth, sharply.

"Why, you will do something or other for money to help pay your tuition here. I don't suppose it much matters what as long as it is not too hard. We have had girls like you at Rivercliff before, Miss Baldwin. Miss Hammersly rather prides herself upon having about so many each year, I believe," she added, carelessly.

"Still I do not understand you!" cried Beth again, her eyes flashing.

"No? Really? I fancied I spoke plainly enough. I will pay you for the exchange you make with Laura, Miss Baldwin," said Maude, rather sharply.

"I do not care to make the exchange."

"But I will pay you for it—don't you understand?" demanded the other girl, exasperated.

"You cannot pay me for it—for I refuse," said Beth. "I like this room. I like my neighbors—all but you, Miss Grimshaw. I do not care to

make the exchange. Now, am I plain enough?"

"My goodness me!" giggled Maude, her pale face suddenly reddening in a very ugly way. "Nobody would call you pretty I should hope, Miss Baldwin."

"Then I am quite understood?" repeated Beth, ignoring this remark.

"I suppose you think your room is worth more than we can afford to pay?" sneered Maude.

"You have struck it—exactly," said Beth, with flashing eyes. "You think that I have a price," she continued. "Perhaps you have been in the habit of dealing with girls who will sell anything they possess for money. I have made Molly my friend. If I exchanged in this way it would look as though I did not appreciate her friendship——"

"Pooh!" exclaimed Maude. "You don't know her as well as we do. Does she, Laura?"

"I should say not," sniffed the "Me too."

"I am glad I do not know Molly in the way you seem to think you know her," Beth said, so angry that her voice shook now. "Will you please go? The room will remain mine as long as Miss Hammersly allows me to keep it."

"Oh, come on!" snapped Maude, finally, grabbing Laura Hedden by the arm and marching with her out of Number Eighty.

Beth was glad to see her go; but she wanted a few moments to recover herself. This was an unexpectedly unpleasant incident, and the girl from Hudsonvale shed tears over it—and shed them frankly. As the door had closed she had heard a muttered “show such girls their place.”

CHAPTER XIII

THE SUNNY SIDE

“PEEK-A-BOO!”

Beth started from her chair, hastily wiped her eyes, and turned to see Molly Granger peering in at the door of the passage between the two rooms.

“Oh, my dear!” cried Beth, with half a sob. “I thought you had gone.”

“Did you hear me bang the door?” demanded Molly, standing culpritwise before her chum with her hands behind her back. “Well! when that door is banged *it doesn't latch!* There was method in my madness.”

“Goodness!”

“So you thought I had truly gone and wouldn't hear all that nasty Princess Fancyfoot had to say?”

“Why—why—— Did you?”

“Did I what?” asked Molly.

“Hear her?”

“I listened,” proclaimed Molly, unblushingly. “I glory in the fact. I am an eavesdropper. By

so doing I learned good instead of evil about myself. And I learned something else."

Beth was silent.

"I learned what a perfectly loyal friend you are, Beth Baldwin! You are a dear!" and Molly flung her arms about the other's neck and kissed her warmly. Beth returned the caress; she had never met a girl before whom she found as dear as this jolly creature.

"What a really hateful thing that Maude Grimshaw is!" said the new pupil, after a pause.

"What did I tell you?" cried Molly. "And so sneering! Not that what she says can hurt *us*. Maybe she would have given you a tidy sum to change rooms with Laura Hedden."

Beth laughed and tossed her head. "I'll get money other ways—or go without," she said.

"Is it really a fact that you need to earn money if you stay here in school? Are your folks as poor as you told Maude?" asked Molly, hesitatingly.

"I'm all right for a year. But after that—the deluge!" Beth replied.

"Well! that is too far ahead to worry about. Lots of things can happen in a year," agreed the happy-go-lucky Molly. "Maybe some rich old uncle will die and leave you money."

"But there isn't any rich uncle—nor any uncle of any kind," laughed Beth.

“Well! that’s good, too,” declared the optimistic Molly. “There won’t be any poor uncle, then, to come and live on your folks. Always be thankful!”

Jolly Molly’s sunny disposition was just the tonic Beth needed after her interview with Maude Grimshaw. In fact, a naturally serious and thoughtful girl like Beth easily found her counterpart in Molly Granger.

“We live on the sunny side of the street,” Molly frequently proclaimed. “So why not smile? Send dull Grouch flying to the tall timber. ‘Eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow’—there are lessons!”

Which was not literally true, for this was said on a Saturday. That day Molly spent in introducing her new chum to all the nice girls she knew. As, after all, “nice” was a very elastic word with Molly Granger, the girls Beth met were of all sorts.

Yet they had one thing in common. They were all well dressed. Beth saw plainly that her simple wardrobe, prepared by her mother with such tender care and love, was going to set her a little apart from the other girls, and mark her as from another world than theirs. Some of the good friends of Molly, even, looked askance at Beth’s gingham.

However, Beth determined to say nothing in her letter, which she retired to her own room to write, about this condition of affairs. She put nothing but love and happiness in the epistle to the family at home, although she had overheard one girl ask Molly:

“Say! does she wear that ugly calico because she likes it or on a bet?”

The jolly girl, however, had foreseen the comments and the amazement of her friends over Beth’s plain clothes; and wherever she could, she repeated (and the story lost nothing in her telling) the interview Beth had had with Maude Grimshaw.

“That’s the sort of girl Beth Baldwin is,” Molly said, out of her new chum’s hearing, of course. “She is true blue, she is! And it isn’t that she doesn’t need the money. She does. She’s only got enough to pay for this first year’s schooling, she tells me; and she is determined to get three years at Rivercliff in order to teach. I know she’s the kind of girl who will succeed. Most of us here at Rivercliff are a lazy pack——”

“Speak for yourself, Jolly Molly!” cried one.

“That’s all right, Bertha Pilling. I don’t have to hire a prime to come in every morning and put a cold key down the neck of my nightgown to get me out of bed in time for breakfast,” shot back

Molly, and the other girls giggled delightedly, for Bertha was a lie-abed.

"At any rate," Molly continued, "Beth wants to earn all she can toward her next year's tuition in these two semesters."

"Why! what can a girl like her do?" demanded a senior. "Fancy trying to earn money at River-cliff. She might borrow it."

"Beth Baldwin isn't of the borrowing kind," said Molly, staunchly. "She's earned some money this summer. She told me so."

"What doing? Picking berries?" cried one girl. "She comes from the country, doesn't she? I have a cousin who lives on a farm, and she earned six dollars one summer picking berries. Her father put enough more to it to pay for a piano and Madge is always telling about her piano that she earned by picking berries!"

When the laughter over this story had passed, Molly said:

"Why, Beth Baldwin posed for an artist. She told me the woman used her in painting a magazine cover."

"What magazine?" demanded the senior, suddenly diving for the magazine shelf of her study table. "I thought I'd seen that face before."

"Yes," said Molly, whimsically. "Beth wears her face in front at present."

"Smarty! Miss Baldwin has rather a striking phiz."

"Hasn't she?" cried the enthusiastic Molly.

"And here she is!" exclaimed another girl, who had likewise been going over the magazines. "No mistaking it for anybody else. That's Miss Baldwin, sure enough," and she showed the cover of the magazine so that all could see.

"How clever!" drawled another girl. "Fancy posing for a famous artist."

Molly was delighted that she had interested these girls—some of the wealthiest in the school—in her chum. But a very unpleasant experience was to arise out of the event for Beth. That, however, was in the future.

Beth had time in this first very busy day at the school to think of Cynthia Fogg; but it was not until Sunday morning that she saw the freckled girl again.

On Sunday morning the rising bells rang an hour later than on other days. Beth, having entirely recovered from the weariness caused by her journey and her broken sleep on the boat, awoke at her usual time—and they had been early risers at the little cottage on Bemis Street. Mr. Baldwin always went to the locomotive works at half past six.

The sun was just peering above the eastern hills.

Beth's windows faced the south and the farther shore of the river. Mist was rising from the surface of the stream, and the few boats plying up and down the current were scarcely outlined in it.

Up on the bluff the air was clear enough, and the banks of red and yellow branches across the river were beautiful in appearance. Up-stream Beth could see tall pillars of smoke rising through the fog from the factory chimneys at Jackson City—not as many of them smoking as usual, however, because of the day.

The air was too sharp for her to stand at the window for long; she went about her bath and her dressing so as not to arouse Molly in the next room. She put on the dress she had traveled in. She thought she would wear that on Sundays. Then she ventured out of her room and along the corridors to the front stairway.

She saw nobody, nor did she hear anybody until she had descended to the second floor, and there, as she started down the staircase, she heard a mighty yawn from the hall below.

Beth peered over the balustrade. There was somebody stirring below and in a moment she caught sight of a girl in cap and apron, waving a feather-duster at the pictures as though she expected, by so doing, to conjure the dust off of them.

Beth went down quietly, intending to go out by the front door; but at the bottom of the flight of stairs she came face to face with the maid, and saw that it was Cynthia Fogg.

"My aunt!" ejaculated the freckled girl, smiling as though she really was glad to see Beth. "Isn't this the greatest place you were ever in?"

"I think it's quite wonderful," admitted Beth.

"So many girls! I never dreamed of so many before—never!" laughed Cynthia.

Beth wondered what kind of asylum it was from which Cynthia had run away.

"How do they treat you, Beth Baldwin?" asked the maid, curiously.

"Oh, very nicely—those to whom I have been introduced," Beth replied.

"Don't you find them proud and stuck up at all?" was the shrewd query that followed.

"Well—there may be some who are addicted to that sin," laughed Beth.

"They tell me there are none but rich girls here," went on Cynthia Fogg. "Philo Grimshaw's daughter is one. Philo Grimshaw, you know, is the big soap manufacturer. The Grimshaws never let people forget that they have money, and people can never forget how the money is obtained," and Cynthia's mellow laugh did not sound as kind as usual.

Beth thought it not right to discuss the characters of the girls with one of the maids. Perhaps Miss Hammersly or the madam would not like it. So the girl from Hudsonvale said:

“Do you like the madam, Cynthia?”

Cynthia looked up from her dusting, and there was a queer look on her features. “Hist!” she said. “Here she comes. Watch her.”

Beth had not heard her coming, but looking upward she saw the madam at the head of the stairs. She had not met her since the first evening when she and Molly, with Cynthia Fogg, had had their interview with her. Now, while Madam Hammersly was descending the staircase, Beth had a better opportunity to scrutinize her.

She certainly was a very prim old lady. She was dressed in rustling silk, every fold of which lay just so. Her cap was wonderful in its starchiness; the lace at her throat and wrists was beautiful. In one hand she carried a fine cambric handkerchief which, now and then as she descended the stairs, she touched to the spindles of the railing or flirted into the carvings, glancing at it sharply through her eyeglasses to see if any dust lurked there.

Cynthia winked drolly at Beth. “If she catches us leaving anything undone,” whispered the freckled girl, “good-night!”

Beth stepped aside, waiting to greet the madam when she reached the hall. The lady greeted her with a smile.

"Good morning, Miss Baldwin. You are an early riser," she said.

"Yes, Madam. I am used to getting up early. May I go out upon the grounds?" Beth asked.

"Surely. Take a run about the estate. There is just frost enough in the air to make it invigorating."

Then, as Beth turned toward the door, she heard the madam say to Cynthia:

"There is dust on the balustrade. See my handkerchief, girl? Begin at the top of the flight and come down carefully. I will have thoroughness from you girls, or I will have nothing."

Beth heard Cynthia utter a faint groan. Then she slipped out of the door into the open air.

CHAPTER XIV

A GREAT DEAL TO LEARN

MOLLY GRANGER possessed at least one talent besides the ability to extract fun out of most things. She could draw quite remarkably for a girl who had had so little instruction; and made many really clever cartoons in black and white.

Over her dressing-table was a long study in feline humor; as Beth called it when she first observed the piece, "a yard of cats."

"Isn't it cute?" she cried. "You never did it?"

"Yes, I did. From life," Molly said, smiling at the row of kittens tenderly.

"From *life*? Nonsense! How could you get cats to pose for you? And they are too, too funnily human!"

"Didn't get the cats to pose. But my aunts did. I flatter myself I have hit off the characteristics of the dears."

"Your aunts?" gasped Beth, horrified.

"Yes, my dear. All seven of them."

"There are seven of the cats," admitted Beth, weakly. "But you never deliberately caricatured your aunts like that?"

"They're not caricatures. My aunts are regular tabbies, anyway; they don't mind. They begin to look upon my talent for drawing cats as a 'gift.' You see, Bethesda," said Molly, laughing again now, "I can draw cats, and I can't draw folks. If I ever attempt your portrait, you'll have to appear as a cat. Whatever artistic talent I have, I'll never be a portrait painter. So I told the aunts I wanted to draw them in black and white, and they all sat for me."

Beth was as much amazed as she was amused.

"The grave looking cat at the end, with spectacles and a book, is Aunt Celia; the next with the knitting and goloshes on her feet is Aunt Catherine. She always either wears overshoes or carries them. Auntie Cora is the cute little blue kitten with the fan.

"Aunt Carrie stands there in her wedding finery—she still has hopes. She is engaged to a sea captain who comes home for three weeks about once in three years. Doesn't she look too sweet for anything? Aunt Charlotte is the sly, plump one—you *know* she's just lapped up all the cream. Aunt Charlotte manages to get the best of everything.

"Aunt Cassie is the one in furs and mittens; she's always cold. I believe she'd get chilblains in July. On the end is Aunt Cyril—you can see

she is an aristocrat, the dear! I'm quite proud of my aunties—but nobody ever called them a yard of cats before," and Molly giggled.

Beth Baldwin's introduction to Rivercliff School was not all fun and frolic. On Monday came lessons—the beginning of the fall and winter semester. Miss Hammersly and her teachers were quite firm in their intention of making the students of Rivercliff work. And few of them—lazy or otherwise—cared to have a monthly report go home, across which was printed "defective."

Miss Hammersly's idea was that girls came to her to study—and for no other reason. This was not a boarding school where the pupils could work or not, as they pleased. "Ours is not an institution for the encouragement of girls lacking in gray-matter," Miss Hammersly was wont to say. "I am very sorry for the defectives; but three such reports send them home."

Beth found that the working hours of the school were fully occupied, and that the recreation hours were not long enough for any of the students to get very deeply into mischief.

Even jolly Molly had to repress her superabundant spirits; or rather, after being under the ministrations of the instructors of Rivercliff School all day, by supper time the most spirited girl in the school was subdued.

"Goodness!" confessed Molly to her chum, coming wearily into Number Eighty and dropping an armful of books on Beth's study table, "I feel like a wornout dishcloth that's been drawn sixty times through a knothole! Miss Carroll has just about finished me this time, Beth Baldwin. If I don't get up to-morrow morning, just write my seven aunties that I died in a good cause—in an attempt to acquire all the knowledge in the world within an infinitesimal length of time."

"Oh, Molly! it's not so bad as all that," Beth said, laughing, though rather ruefully, for she found the system followed at Rivercliff entirely different from that at the Hudsonvale high school. Larry had been right. Three years at this establishment—if she could keep up—would put her a long lap ahead in education.

Her own end of the table was piled high with books, for the two chums studied each evening together—and preferably in Number Eighty. Eighty-one was too apt to be the Mecca of girls who desired to scamp their work and barely get through on the monthly reports "by the skin of their teeth."

"Which is a perfectly proper expression, and *not* slang, Beth Baldwin, no matter what Miss Carroll may say," Molly declared. "Who was it said it—Job or the psalmist?"

"That is your question—you answer it," replied Beth. "But what do you make out of this awful passage Miss Felice has given us to construe? It's a heart-breaker, isn't it?"

They set to work. They were not the only studious girls on the corridor; but there was a good deal of noise outside, and Beth closed the door to shut some of it out. Having retired to Number Eighty, Molly hoped her old friends would not annoy her.

"I am determined to delight the aunts this year," Molly said. "I've told them I have a new chum and that she is studious. Maybe it's catching."

This evening was within the first fortnight of the term. Naturally, Beth had not made many friends as yet. The girl who attends strictly to her lessons in a boarding school is slower in making friendships than she who is careless of her standing on the reports. So the gay ones were not apt to come and pound on the door of Number Eighty for admittance.

Not that Beth did not take plenty of recreation. Indeed, that was compulsory to a certain extent. There was a physical instructor and a splendid gymnasium—the latter a handsome building, the gift of a wealthy graduate of Miss Hammersly's establishment.

There was a splendid athletic field, too, with a cinder track, courts for basket-ball and tennis; and at the foot of the bluff, which was reached in the school wagonette, was a boathouse with a number of two, four, and eight-oared shells, as well as canoes and a power launch of some size.

Nothing was neglected that would add to the physical development, as well as the mental well-being, of the girls. Miss Hammersly did not graduate weaklings in any particular.

Save Maude Grimshaw, such girls as had spoken to Beth had been kind. But except Molly and a few of her intimate friends, nobody at Rivercliff had paid very much attention to her. She had been popular in Hudsonvale, and she missed Mary Devine and her other schoolmates who had deferred to her there.

She did not even have an opportunity of talking with Cynthia Fogg, the strange girl who had come up to Rivercliff with her on the steamboat. She saw Cynthia now and then, going about her duties. She waited at a neighboring table to Beth's in the dining-room. But there could be no communication of any extended character between the "young lady students" and the maids employed at the school. Madam Hammersly's eye was too sharp.

This night, while Beth and Molly were deeply

engaged in their books, both suddenly looked up to see an unexpected figure standing in the doorway of the passage into Molly's room. It was that of a girl in a kimono with a red bag over her head, masking her completely, for there were only two little holes in the bag to see through. It was a startling apparition, and Molly exclaimed:

"Cracky-me! How you scared us! Go away—do!"

The girl behind the mask of turkey-red giggled. Then she stalked forward and placed two folded red bags, like her own, on the study table.

"Number Sixty-two. Ten-thirty," she said, in a sepulchral voice, and immediately marched out again by the way she had come.

"Well!" gasped Beth.

But Molly began to giggle now. "It's just awful—this trying to be a 'grind.' My poor, poor Bethesda! your chum's former reputation is against our ever being the twin Minervas of Rivercliff School."

"But what does this mean?" demanded Beth, trying on one of the bags.

"Kimono party—sometimes called red-head party. You can see what the bags are for. Unless you are familiar with the kimonos of the whole school, you can't be sure of who is at the party—save the legal occupant of the room in which the

party is held. And sometimes the girls exchange kimonos. So that helps."

"Helps! How?"

"Why, if we are caught, and can run, the teacher or monitor who catches us can't see who we are with the bags over our heads. And those who are captured can't tell on the rest, for everybody's masked and we can't be sure. See?"

"Are you going to-night?" Beth asked.

"What number did she say?" rejoined Molly.

"Sixty-two."

"Let's! That's Mamie Dunn's," cried Beth.

"Aren't there two Sixty-twos?"

"Oh, the kimono parties have to be wing affairs. Guests can't slip over from one wing to the other. They have to be localized."

"Why?" asked the curious Beth.

"Why, there's always somebody on watch at the top of the main flight of stairs—and there's no other way to go from wing to wing than by that cross-corridor."

"On watch all night, do you mean?"

"Sure. For fire protection; likewise if anybody should be taken sick in the night."

"I suppose," said Beth, reflectively, "that these after-hours parties are against the rules of the school?"

"I suppose they are," admitted Molly, with ser-

ious mouth but twinkling eyes; "but I never really asked."

Beth laughed. "Did you ever get caught at one of these parties?"

"Never mind about that! We'll go to-night. All work and no play makes Jill just as dull as her brother."

"We'll do our tasks first, dear," said Beth.

She was not a prude; but she felt herself in honor bound to keep up with all her lessons. She had been at Rivercliff long enough to know that she could not earn her diploma in any easy way. To fall back one recitation would mean hard effort to make it up. There were no delays for the slow and inattentive under Miss Hammersly.

Beth, of course, had written home several times. She had told the home folk of all the interesting things she had encountered thus far in her school life, and about her teachers and the students as she had met them with the one exception of Maude Grimshaw. She had not mentioned that haughty and purse-proud girl. Beth hoped she would never be obliged to come in contact with Maude again. She thought that, by letting her unpleasant neighbor strictly alone, Maude would let her alone.

She was yet to learn the fallacy of this belief—as well as much else that Beth could never have learned anywhere but at Rivercliff School.

CHAPTER XV

THE RED MASQUE

THE two chums working in Number Eighty, South Wing, Rivercliff School, closed their books before the retiring bell rang at nine-thirty, fully satisfied with what they had accomplished.

"No use climbing into bed, Bethesda," said Molly, with a yawn. "Just get into something comfortable—of course, your kimono—and we'll put out the lights at the proper time."

"Why—will anybody look in?"

"Perhaps. You never can tell. It is according to who is on watch to-night. We never know whose duty it is. Miss Crouch is perfectly sneaking——"

"Oh, Molly!"

"Yes, she is. She wears sneaks when she is on guard, and she often opens our doors and looks in. And if you lock your door she is likely to rap on it and wake you up. Says she wants to be sure you are all right."

"Are we supposed to leave our doors unlocked?" Beth asked.

"Why, you can do as you please. But if Miss Crouch feels like looking into your room in the middle of the night, she'll get you up to open the door. She's a suspicious creature."

"For no reason, I suppose?" laughed Beth.

"Never mind!" Then Molly's voice dropped to a whisper: "I'll show you how to fool Miss Crouch."

"What about?" asked Beth.

"If she should feel it necessary to look in while we are gone—see here!"

Molly rolled the extra blanket which lay upon the foot of Beth's bed into the semblance of a human figure and put it under the bedclothes. There it looked like a person asleep, wrapped head and heels in the coverings. Then she made the same masquerade in her own bed.

They sat in the dark and told each other "giggly" stories in whispers until it was about half past ten and the whole school seemed buried in sleep. But there is scarcely anything more uncertain than a boarding school between retiring hour and the first bell in the morning. That is an axiom known to all instructors of experience.

When the two chums ventured out with the red bags pulled down to their shoulders, there were other "red-heads" flitting about the corridors. They slipped in and out of the various doors like

red-topped ghosts. It was evidently to be a large party in Mamie Dunn's room.

"Sh! Who's on watch?" one unknown asked Beth.

"Oh! I'm sure I don't know," returned the new girl, and at once the girl asking the question laughed, and said:

"So you're the new one, aren't you? I thought I'd know your voice. And now I'll know your kimono."

"That's Stella—didn't you hear?" said Molly. "She caught you."

"Oh! aren't you supposed to know each other?" asked Beth.

"Just as well if we're not identified. I've got on a new kimono. I'm just going to keep it for these red-head parties. You get one, and then we'll fool 'em."

The question was repeated several times before the chums reached Sixty-two:

"Who's on watch?"

"I wager it's Miss Crouch," jolly Molly said, but nobody would have recognized her voice.

"Is that you, Phoebe Mills?"

"No. It's Phoebe's sister," said Molly, solemnly. "Don't try to catch me, honey!"

"Well, if Miss Crouch is on watch or not, I dare you to look," giggled the inquisitive girl.

"Not me," declared Molly, shaking her head vigorously. "Get that crazy Molly Granger to run and look."

"I'm looking for her," admitted the other girl, going away from the chums.

Molly giggled. "What a chance! That was Izola Pratt, I believe. She's a 'Me too.'"

"You mean one of Maude's friends?"

"Just so," said Molly, nodding. "I wonder why they are all trying to identify us? Maybe Princess Fancyfoot has some scheme up her sleeve."

"You don't mean that she would report us to the teachers?" asked Beth, in some alarm.

"I'd like to see her! That would just about settle Maude Grimshaw in this school. If her father had as much money as King Midas, and Maude lived to be as old as Methuselah, she could never live down such a thing. No indeed! There! here's Sixty-two."

Beth knew Mamie Dunn, but she did not know who welcomed her into the room. Everybody in the apartment wore a red mask, and at first the new girl was not able to recognize any one.

It was a chafing-dish party. A tall girl in a striking red and black kimono (somehow Beth thought she must be the senior, Miss Teller)—the kimono itself well fitted to clothe one who did deeds of magic—presided over a cheese dish war-

ranted, as Molly said, to give everybody "dreams of the rabbit fiend."

There was bottled ginger ale and tea and coffee. Such a combination to go into one's stomach at such a late hour would ruin the digestion of anybody but a boarding-school girl.

Beth, even at this party, could not but compare her own state with that of the other twenty-five or thirty girls present. There were all sorts and conditions of kimonos; but all were of very much richer material than her own pretty, but cheap, cotton crêpe.

She was really sure of the identity of nobody save Molly at first. But she began to enjoy herself, for she was not left alone. She tried to disguise her voice in answering questions, and so puzzle the others.

The laughter was subdued, although the walls were thick and the doors sound-proof. One girl frequently ventured into the corridor to peer about. There was a delicious feeling of uncertainty and peril that spiced this "red-head" party.

The guessing of each other's identity was a popular pastime, and when they held a mock court, with the tall girl in the red and black kimono as judge, and appointed two guards to bring culprits before the bar for identification, the fun waxed boisterous.

Sometimes the girls guessed who the prisoner was very quickly; at other times they shot broad of the mark, as was attested by the gaiety of the one under examination.

But when Beth was seized and forced before the girl in the red and black kimono, there fell a little hush of expectation. It seemed to the new girl as though many of these present had been waiting for just this event.

"Here is a stranger in our midst," said the red and black kimono, in a sepulchral voice. "Who can she be?"

"It's plain to be seen she's a person of note," said one, demurely.

"And a person of quality," added a sharp voice. "Note the gown she has on. It must have cost 'trippence' a yard, as Miss Small would say," and there was a rising giggle from a group of masks in one corner.

Beth flashed a glance that way. She felt the enmity of these masked girls in the very air. Had she known how to escape she would have done so before the mock examination went any further.

In that particular group of girls Beth suddenly recognized Maude Grimshaw's blue and silver kimono. And it was from the wearer of this beautiful garment that the next unkind observation fell:

"We are advertised by this young person. Oh! she is an acquisition to Rivercliff, undoubtedly."

"You're not!" snapped Molly Granger's voice from behind Beth.

But Maude had her speech ready, and was not to be sidetracked.

"I suppose this girl began by being photographed as a patent-food baby. Then she advertised a brand of soap as she grew older, until now she has arrived at the dignity of being flaunted in seven colors on the cover of a cheap magazine."

There was a murmur of objection from some of the hooded girls; but there was laughter, too.

"She will doubtless become famous," went on Maude, scornfully, "and make Rivercliff famous, by winding up as the exponent of a toothwash, or illustrating the use of a pair of shoulder braces."

The whole company was now in ungovernable laughter. Beth knew that she should have laughed herself had the victim been some other girl. Indeed, she could have laughed with them at the fun poked at her, had it not been so venomously done.

"Beth Baldwin!" somebody shouted. "Discovered! She must pay a forfeit."

Beth heard Molly sputtering angrily behind her; but she realized that if she took offence, or if Molly was allowed to do so, it would only make

her the more ridiculous. One decision Beth made, however, right then and there. It was a decision bound to change the tenor of her whole career at Rivercliff School.

“Unmask! You’re caught,” ordered the “judge.”

Beth did so and managed to show a smiling, if flushed, countenance to the assembly.

“Well, I think it’s mighty clever of her,” drawled one girl, “if she can earn money posing for her picture.”

The others were, however, clamoring for Beth to pay a forfeit. The judge was supposed to accept suggestions for that. Maude’s sharp voice was ready:

“Oh, it doesn’t really matter what she does, I fancy. As long as there’s anything to be earned by it, Miss Baldwin is prepared to do it. Like our politicians, she is ‘out for the dough.’ ”

“How very vulgar, Maude!” said the “judge,” tartly. “Suppose Miss Carroll should hear that?”

“It’s the truth!” snapped the angry girl. “We, who are well-to-do, are exploited for the benefit of these—these paupers that Miss Hammersly allows to come here to Rivercliff. At least, she should have the decency to put them in a department by themselves, and have their sleeping quarters with the servants.”

"Shame! Shame!" cried a dozen voices.

"You go too far, Maude," declared the "judge."

"That's what is the matter with Maude Grimshaw," ejaculated Molly, boiling over in her wrath, finally. "She wanted Miss Baldwin's room for one of her 'Me toos'—and Miss Baldwin wouldn't make *that* exchange for money. Nasty thing!"

"Girls! stop this!" ordered the girl in red and black, rising from her seat.

Suddenly Mamie Dunn herself took a hand in the discussion. She stood up and plucked off her red bag. She was a plain, rather unattractive girl who seldom asserted herself; but now she was quite indignant.

"Stop, Maude Grimshaw. You are the meanest girl in Rivercliff School—I don't care if you are the richest. This is my room and I declare I'll never invite you into it again."

She turned swiftly to Beth and put a protecting arm about her. "You are a girl I am proud to have for a friend, Miss Baldwin—I don't care what others may say. I know I wouldn't have the pluck to try to work my way through school, providing I could get an education in no other way. I—I hope you'll forgive me for inviting you here to-night where you have been so insulted and

abused by my other guests. I assure you, it was not with my connivance."

"Oh, I am confident of that, Miss Dunn," faltered Beth, for Mamie's kindness touched her more deeply than Maude Grimshaw's unkind speech. "I thank you, Miss Dunn. I—I can't stay. I see very clearly now that I should not have come in the first place."

"Don't say that!" cried somebody whom Beth thought was Brownie, and who was sobbing, frankly.

"Yes," Beth said, more calmly now, "I see that I was wrong in accepting the invitation. I am different from you other girls. I want to get an education, and I must get it in my own way. My way is not yours. I hope that hereafter I shall not be led into accepting invitations that lead to friction and make everybody concerned unhappy."

"You're all right, Baldwin!" said the girl behind the judge's mask, huskily.

"I am going to ask you, Miss Dunn, to excuse me," Beth proceeded. "I quite appreciate your kindness, and all you meant to do for me in inviting me to your party. But—you see yourself—it is not wise."

She stammered this—halted at last in her speech, chokingly—and then made swiftly for the door.

CHAPTER XVI

NO MARTYR'S CROWN

BETH bolted both the doors, once having entered Number Eighty, and refused to open either, though she knew that it must be Molly Granger who came and softly tapped upon the panel.

It was some time after Beth had got into bed that Molly tried to get in. The party in Mamie Dunn's room could not have immediately broken up on Beth's departure.

The latter lay quietly in her bed and thought matters out, coolly. She did not weep. She realized that she had done a foolish thing in trying to become the comrade of these girls who had so much more of this world's goods than she could ever hope to possess.

"I am different from them all—different, even, from Molly," she told herself. "I can keep dear Molly's friendship—I prize it too highly to lose it for any cause; but I cannot be even her social equal.

"I have come here with the avowed intention of earning part of my expenses. That immedi-

ately puts me on a different plane from the girls who never have to think of money—only how to spend it! Maude Grimshaw, hateful as she is, is more than half right. My place is with Cynthia Fogg.

“I have a year before me in which to get established here in my proper place. I can be helpful to many of these girls. I *must* be helpful. And I must be helpful for money. There are things I can do, and that they need done, and for which they will willingly pay me. I am not ashamed of any decent means to earn money—why should I be?

“Such time as I have aside from the study and recitation hours and such physical exercises as I need, must be devoted to earning money. Why! there are thousands and thousands of girls situated just as I am, who are making their way through school and college. Just because I happen to be in a school for wealthy girls, should make no difference. What will be the odds, whether they like me or not, a hundred years from now?

“Nor will I sport the willow,” declared Beth, “nor wear the martyr’s crown!

“That Maude Grimshaw is half right on another point, too. I must do anything—anything that is decent—for money. I can’t be too particular.

"I won't dawdle around here like an abused chicken, looking for sympathy. I don't need sympathy. What did I come to Rivercliff School for, anyway?"

"Why! I came to *work*—in two ways. I've taken hold of my lessons all right, I flatter myself," went on Beth, answering her own question, "and now I must think of taking up my other branches. I am to take a special course of training—learning to make money. I'll begin to-morrow."

And with this resolve she finally went to sleep, and slept soundly. Beth Baldwin was blessed with a strain of *practical, common sense*.

She could be hurt as easily as most naturally refined girls. She was by no means thick-skinned. Only, she could grit her teeth and go at a thing that had to be done, and without weeping over it.

In the morning, almost before Beth had her bath and was dressed, Molly burst in—but in no jolly mood, as was plain.

"Oh, my dear! Oh, my dear!" she wailed, seizing Beth about the neck. "I haven't slept half the night for thinking of you. That nasty, mean, horrid Maude Grimshaw——"

"*And a cup of tea!*" interposed Beth, laughing. "No more of *that*, Molly—if you love me. In the language of my younger brothers, 'forget it!'"

"But it isn't to be forgotten. And I told them all after you came away last night——"

"Now, Molly dear, if you tell so much you'll be completely empty and will collapse—sure," declared Beth, laughing.

"But, Beth!"

"But, Molly!" mocked Beth.

"Don't you care, Beth Baldwin?" cried Molly.

"If I do, I don't want to wear the martyr's crown," and Beth smiled. "Come, my dear! 'What can't be cured must be endured.' And it had better be endured cheerfully—don't you think?"

"But it can be cured, I tell you!" cried Molly, very much excited. "Do you suppose the really nice girls of Rivercliff are going to allow a little clique of stuck-up things to insult and abuse a girl who has positively done no wrong? We think too much of our school itself to allow such a blot to stand——"

"That sounds very fine, dear," said Beth, calmly, "although your metaphor is hazy. And it is awfully nice of you and your friends to stand up for me. But there is something to be said on the other side, I guess."

"On whose side—yours?"

"No. I fancy I have very little standing in the premises, when it comes to the facts," and Beth

laughed again, though rather bitterly. "I mean on the side of Maude Grimshaw and her crowd."

"Oh, them!" sniffed Molly, disgustedly, as well as ungrammatically. "What about Princess Fancyfoot?"

"She can claim to hold the welfare of Rivercliff quite as high as you and your friends do," Beth said argumentatively. "She believes that the school is for a certain class of girls—and for no other. And, really, the girls themselves bear out her claim, don't they? Am I not about the only poor girl here?"

"Well, I'm sure!" exclaimed Molly, "I'm not rich."

"What! with seven aunts to support you?" laughed Beth, bound to keep a cheerful tone in all the argument.

"But that has nothing to do with it."

"Yes it has. If I were Maude Grimshaw I should probably feel just as she does. I am an interloper. But I am here," added Beth, with vigor, "and I mean to stay and get what I came to Rivercliff for."

"Hurrah!" cried Molly. "Then you will fight 'em?"

"Fight? Certainly not. I have no reason to. I tell you, dear, that I was in the wrong—besides being *in* wrong! I should not have gone to Miss

Dunn's party. I tell you I am not one of you, and cannot be one of you, save in my standing in classes."

"Oh, Beth! What do you mean?" wailed Molly.

"I am going to keep to myself—'flock together,' as it were," and again Beth laughed, and this time quite cheerfully. "No, no, Molly! It's of no use to try to get me into your class in society. I should merely be a 'hanger-on'—and I should positively hate myself for such sycophancy.

"Let me be myself. I am poor; no getting around it. Girls from whom I hope to earn money won't treat me as their equal. At least, not these girls at Rivercliff, for the true feeling of 'equality in knowledge' has never become a tenet of this institution, as it has in so many colleges."

"Goodness!" cried Molly. "You mean we are a school of snobs?"

"Very near it! very near it!" returned Beth, allowing herself some small display of malice for the moment. "But, yet, you are not to be blamed."

"I am sure, Beth Baldwin, you cannot accuse me——" began Molly, when Beth swooped down upon her, seized her in her arms, and cried:

"Don't be hurt, dear! You are the loveliest girl that ever lived. But you are not 'the whole

push,' as Marcus would say. You mean well, and you could influence some of the other girls, I know; but I would merely cause a schism in the school if I went your way."

"What do you mean?"

"A few of your nice girls would always be taking up cudgels for me. That would cause friction and do me more harm than good. I must quietly withdraw from too much publicity. Let me go my own placid way. I positively will not accept any invitations to private parties of any kind," and Beth laughed. "Never again!"

"Oh, Beth! That's just what we intended to do. Every girl that likes you agreed to invite you, one after another, to little parties, and so show those stuck-up things that you were more and more popular."

"I thought so!" exclaimed Beth, and she smiled through her tears now. "It is very lovely of you—and of your friends. But I am going to excuse myself from all such affairs. Yes, I mean it. This is my room. Those girls who like me can always find me here at a proper time. But I shall make it a rule to attend no other private social 'orgies.' "

"Oh, Beth!" wailed Molly, again. "You are shutting yourself off from everything!"

"Oh no, dear."

"Oh yes, you will!"

"No. I shall not be shutting myself off from the most necessary thing in my life here at Rivercliff School," Beth declared firmly.

"For pity's sake! what is that?"

"Work. If I am not socially connected with any clique of girls I shall stand a better chance of getting work from all."

"Cracky-me! What work?" gasped Molly.

"You didn't think I was in earnest!" cried Beth.

"But—but—you have a whole year to think of work."

"No. I have a whole year—or, almost—to earn what I need for next year. I must take opportunity by the forelock, for he will certainly be shaved close for me behind. A regular 'Riley cut,' to quote my slangy brother again. I must not let the first opportunity get by me."

Nevertheless, this expected and much longed-for opportunity, did not at once appear, as Beth hoped. She proved to her own satisfaction, however—and in time to Molly's—that her attitude toward the other girls was the wiser one.

She refused every invitation that came to her, explaining quietly why in each case. If the girls wanted her, they were welcome in her room during the short time in the day when visiting back and forth was permissible.

Many learned to like her—some to admire her—in that first month of school. Some offered help that Beth could not accept; but they meant it kindly. Some few had suggestions that led to the new girl earning small sums; but nothing regularly.

Indeed, it was her own bright mind and thought that opened the first really broad path to a certain independence. She seized this opportunity by its forelock at the first monthly social evening of the whole school, arranged by Miss Hammersly.

All through the school year these monthly socials in the huge drawing-rooms were the principal events of the kind. There was music and dancing and a collation. Sometimes there were visitors. The girls looked forward to the parties with delight.

And as she sat in her pretty poplin in the great reception hall, quite popular enough, she thought, Beth had an idea. This season skirts were worn very short, but the high boots had not come in. As she glanced up the stairway she had a continual panorama of silk-clad ankles, as the girls tripped up and down.

She already had heard some of the girls complain of the hard wear their silk stockings received. Every girl in the school (including herself) wore some quality of silk hose. The pair

she had on were darned; but so neatly that it would have taken very close inspection to discover the mended place.

That was one thing Mrs. Baldwin had taught Beth—how to darn neatly. She sat now, with the music and confusion about her, and an endless procession of silk stockings paraded before her mental vision.

The very next day she sent off for silks of all shades, needles, stocking feet of good quality, and other necessities, and in a week she put Molly's artistic ability to the test. Molly demurred at first; then she entered into the idea hopefully. She did her very best in lettering the card Beth tacked up outside of Number Eighty:

SILK STOCKING HOSPITAL

Major & Minor Operations Performed

"Well, there's some fun in *that*," admitted the jolly one. "At least, the sign will make 'em laugh."

But Beth looked for more serious returns than mere amusement.

CHAPTER XVII

FLINT AND STEEL

MEANWHILE letters had passed frequently between Beth and the little cottage on Bemis Street, Hudsonvale. Ella was Beth's most frequent correspondent. The flyaway sister was eager to learn every particular about Beth's new environment.

But Beth was very careful to say nothing in her letters to those at home to lead them to suspect that all was not fair sailing for her at Rivercliff. Having resolved to bear bravely such trials as she had, Beth was not the girl to weaken.

She was glad to get the home letters, and those from Mary Devine and the other girls; but the letter that secretly pleased her most came from Larry Haven.

To her surprise she had learned that Larry, immediately after she had departed for school, had taken up his old habit of dropping in frequently at the Baldwin cottage.

Ella's letters were full of "Larry says this" and "Larry did that" when he was at the house last. Beth knew he had obtained clients almost at once.

He even would try a case—his maiden case—at the October Court.

So his letter, when it came, did not surprise Beth; and it was evidently written in the first exuberance of his victory.

“ ‘Hail to the chief who in triumph advances—
Who falls off his saddle whene'er his steed
prances!’ ”

the letter began. “ ‘*In hoc signo vinces,*’ likewise ‘*E pluribus Unum*’ and all hands around! I have arrived. Believe me, Mrs. Euphemia Haven’s son is being congratulated on the street by the Elders.

“A certain man in our town, Who was not wondrous wise, Jumped into a legal bramble bush, And scratched out both his eyes. I made him see his eyes were out, So, with all his might and main, He jumped into another bush, And scratched them in again!

“That, my dear Beth Baldwin, is the sole and only meaning of ‘going to law.’ A man goes mad and runs, frothing at the mouth, to another chap, to whom the law schools and local bar have given the right to separate him from his money without giving laughing-gas. Old Coldfoot, next door to me, is lots nicer to his victims than I am.

“Well, the chap with the sheepskin shows the

mad man a perfectly obvious thing to do—and charges him for the advice; and he collects a second fee when thirteen other men tell the mad man the obvious thing is correct.

“This is what I have done, Beth Baldwin. Congratulate me! All hands think it is wonderful. So it must be. And I feel that I should have been broken-hearted if the other side had beaten us.”

“Oh! I *was* scared before the issue. I thought I must go to extremes to convince the jury that the other side hadn't a leg to stand on. I prepared a very touching appeal in which I should have begged the jury for mercy and the Court for clemency for my client, as though he were convicted of a capital crime.

“In the end—oh! let me confess it—our opponent's witnesses made out our case for us. I put in no testimony but our answer, got up and said ten words, the jury did not leave its seats, and the good old judge congratulated me upon having more sense than most fledgling lawyers because I did not insist upon making a speech.

“Honestly, Beth, I was greatly relieved when it was all over. They say I have won my spurs; but *I* don't think the rowels are very sharp yet.”

There was more to the jolly letter and Beth read it over and over again. She was delighted to

hear from Larry; she was delighted, too, to know that he had succeeded in winning his first case. Still she wondered. Why had Larry been silent and kept away from the house during the summer, and now had become such a steady visitor at the Bemis Street cottage?

She knew she had her parents' sanction to write to Larry, and she did so in reply to his letter. She told him much about the school and Molly, and something about the other girls. She wrote of what she studied and how she took hold of athletics. But one thing she did not mention. She said nothing about the "Silk Stocking Hospital." She was not ashamed of working to earn money for her schooling; yet, somehow, she shrank from discussing that point with Larry.

The hospital, so-called, had become an established institution long before the holidays. Beth sometimes found it difficult to keep up with the principal activities of her school life—her lessons, the compulsory athletic work, and her stocking darning.

Miss Hammersly was sharper with her, Beth thought, than with the other girls, for the very reason that Beth was striving to do extra work.

"I want to see you succeed, Miss Baldwin," the principal said to her on one occasion; "but in earning money for your tuition, you must not

lose any of the advantages which the money is supposed to pay for. I approve of your attempt at independence only in so far as you neglect no lessons or other activities that a normal school-girl is supposed to obtain in an establishment of this kind. You must retain your interest in every item of school life and work, or your course here will fail of its end."

Beth took this advice to heart. She neglected nothing which she believed was for her mental or physical benefit. With Molly she won a place on the Second Five at basketball; and before Christmas week she had proved herself the superior of most of the girls on the ice.

The river was frozen from the docks to the bend soon after Thanksgiving, and now Beth and Molly Granger usually ran down the bluff and spent the hours between daylight and dark, and before supper, on their skates. Molly admitted the exercise woke her up after the long day in classes and gave her spirit for the study hour before bedtime.

Beth was not allowed to sit up later than the other girls, so she usually disappeared right after supper and sat in Number Eighty, working, with her darning-basket beside her, until the half past eight bell. Then she joined Molly in studying for the next day's recitations.

She lost that general social hour between supper and the first bell; so it was true her personal acquaintanceship among her fellow students did not rapidly expand. Yet many came to her for help in the "hosiery department."

"That Baldwin girl in the South Wing darns so nicely," one girl said to another. "Why throw these perfectly good stockings away?"

"What is it some philosopher said?" Beth asked her chum, laughingly. "If a man does some one thing better than anybody else, the world will beat a path to his door?"

"Yes," grunted Molly. "But how about the man who goes in for raising skunks? Guess the world will beat it the other way from his door, won't it?"

It was not that Beth deprived herself of all social intercourse with her fellows, but she would not be tempted to put herself forward or be led into situations where girls of Maude Grimshaw's type could snub her. Since that unlucky night of the first red masque of the term, Beth had been able to escape Maude's particular notice.

Yet Maude sat directly opposite Beth at table. The meals at Rivercliff School were social to a degree. The girls filed into the dining room in perfect order and were seated. At once a hum of conversation arose. The big dining room

sounded like a hive of bees. There was no attempt by the teachers or monitors to quench cheerful talk and moderate laughter; but even the primes in their corner could not be boisterous.

Maude Grimshaw gave many exhibitions of her boorishness; but usually such occurrences escaped the notice of the teachers. Having put Beth in what the rich girl considered "her place," Maude did not trouble herself further about the girl from Hudsonvale.

Sometimes the waitresses came in for a taste of Miss Grimshaw's sharp tongue. She seemed to have taken a special dislike to Cynthia Fogg, possibly because she believed Beth to be a friend of the freckled girl's, or because the latter had a perfectly detached and untroubled way of receiving Miss Grimshaw's strictures.

Beth once heard Maude say to Laura Hedden:

"I even dislike the face of that Fogg girl—'Cynthie,' do they call her? Do you know, she has the impudence to look like a very dear friend of mine."

"It can't be!" drawled Laura. "That waitress?"

"Yes. She really does look something like Miss Freylinghausen. You've heard of the Freylinghausens, of course. Emeline is an heiress half a dozen times over. She is traveling in Europe

just now. Oh! we are very good friends. An old Philadelphia family, you know, the Freylinghausens. One of the very oldest."

So Beth thought that perhaps Cynthia's unfortunate resemblance to the heiress of the Freylinghausen millions was rather a drawback. Maude evidently did her best, on every occasion, to be unpleasant to this particular waitress.

One evening at supper she called across the table to Beth and Molly, who sat side by side:

"Say! one of you see if you can wake up that dummy behind you and get some butter passed this way. It's a shame how inattentive that girl is!"

"Whom are you speaking of?" demanded Molly, coolly.

"Oh, I forgot! She is a friend of a friend of yours, Miss Granger," rejoined Maude, sneeringly. "I mean that big-footed dummy standing there—in a *fog*, of course, as usual."

Laura Hedden and one or two other "Me toos" giggled. Beth could not see Cynthia, but her own face flushed. Maude looked scornfully across the table, taking in all three of the girls she disliked in this glance.

"I believe you are the very meanest girl who ever walked on sole-leather!" exclaimed Molly, but quite low, so that none of the teachers would hear. "If I were Cynthia I'd box your ears."

"I'd like to see her try it!" cried Maude, her pale face turning red, as it did in a very ugly fashion whenever she was angry. "I'd teach her her place——"

"Are you sure, Miss Grimshaw, that you can teach me anything?" Cynthia's low, cultivated voice broke in, and she laughed, as though the rich girl's spitefulness only amused her.

"How dare you speak to me?" demanded Maude, starting up. "I'll report you for this."

"And if you dare, Miss Grimshaw," said Beth, quietly, "I shall tell madam just what you said to her."

"So will I," broke in Molly, eagerly. "And glad to do it!"

Maude hesitated, then sat down. She knew that with two against her no story she could tell the madam would hurt Cynthia Fogg.

"Well, anyway," she grumbled, at last, "let her pass the butter."

At that there was general, if subdued, laughter all about the table; for most of the girls had heard a part of the controversy. For some time thereafter, whenever Maude Grimshaw threatened to fly into one of her tantrums, somebody would be sure to say:

"Well, anyway, let her pass the butter!"

CHAPTER XVIII

ANOTHER BARRIER

BETH went home to Hudsonvale for the winter holidays, which lasted till the middle of the first week in the new year. Molly went with her on the train, as, of course, navigation on the river had ceased, keeping on to Hambro—and the seven aunts—farther down the stream.

Beth was delighted to see her father and mother and the children. And many of her old school-mates beside Mary Devine came to see her.

But she did not see Larry. She had heard from him again, after that first letter; and he had told her he would be away over the holidays. Mrs. Euphemia had expressed a sudden wish to go to Old Point Comfort and had insisted that Larry go with her.

“And what the Mater says, goes,” he had written to Beth. “She’s been awfully good to me—especially since I came home from the law school. Why! I never could have afforded such a fancy office if it hadn’t been for her. She’s bribed me to take this trip; but I don’t really see how the

local bar is going to get along without me for a fortnight or three weeks."

Nevertheless, Beth felt distinctly disappointed that Larry was not in Hudsonvale. There was something lacking in her holiday.

She had but one other source of worryment. And that she was not sure should be a worryment.

She noticed that her father was thinner, grayer, and that his walk seemed to have less springiness. She asked him if he did not feel well, and he laughed at her. Yet the laugh was not convincing.

She would not whisper to her mother or to the other children her fears for him. Mr. Baldwin had always been a thin and wiry man—one of the kind, as he often said, that wears out, but does not rust out.

The holidays, however, were gay. Besides a party given for her young friends by her mother on Christmas Eve, Beth went to the usual mid-winter ball at the Town House—a very popular affair, indeed. She wore the poplin, and she danced many times with the men and boys who remembered her from the night of Larry Haven's "coming out" party.

There was one little thing that, strangely enough, rather marred Beth's enjoyment of the evening. She had never put on her pretty frock at Rivercliff without wishing that she had her

Great-grandmother Lomis' corals to wear; and now she suggested to her mother that she be given a second chance to display her heirloom.

Mrs. Baldwin suddenly looked troubled—exceedingly troubled. Hesitatingly, she said: "My daughter, I do not think it would be wise. You are really too young to wear such things yet. It caused, I believe, some comment before."

Beth laughed. She would not show her mother how deeply she was disappointed. "I guess it's because Mrs. Haven or Larry will not be there, isn't it? You wanted to show me off before them. Now confess, Mother mine!"

Her mother seemed unable to laugh at this pleasantry. But Beth cheerfully put Larry's present into the lace at her bosom and went to the ball. No taxicab this time, although there was snow on the ground. She carried her slippers, like most Hudsonvale people, under her arm.

The holidays slipped away and Beth soon boarded the train again, finding jolly Molly Granger, by agreement, in one of the parlor cars. Molly had a warm invitation for Beth to spend a part of the summer vacation at Hambro.

"We'll neither of us get home at Easter, you know," Molly declared. "It's too far to travel, and the time's too short. And, as I tell the aunties, we've got to work."

"I shall have to work, that is sure," proclaimed Beth. "I'm afraid I spent too much money for Christmas presents. Oh dear!"

"How much money have you earned altogether?" demanded the curious Molly.

"I wouldn't dare tell you. It might arouse your cupidity. And there's only a door between us at school," laughed Beth. "But I'll tell you this: I put twenty-five dollars in the postal savings bank at Rivercliff before we came away."

"Oh, cracky-me! What a lot!" cried Molly. "You'll be a millionairess yet."

"Not much, considering what I shall have to earn before next fall when Rivercliff opens again. We have to pay half the year's fees in advance, you know."

"I suppose it does mean a lot of work for you. My! the aunties think you are wonderful to do it."

"Haven't done it yet," sighed Beth. "But I hope to."

"Oh, I hope we'll both have a better half year this time than the last."

Beth looked forward with equal hope, too; but it proved to be dashed within the month. Her fears for Mr. Baldwin were realized. Her mother wrote that he was ill.

Beth was in some suspense for several days,

for the information at first was very meager. But finally she learned the particulars. Her father had been taken with a hemorrhage in the shops—a strain had brought on the attack, the doctors said. But the trouble was deeper than that.

“He must stop all indoor work for months—perhaps he can never go back to the Locomotive Works,” Mrs. Baldwin wrote. “It is a sad loss; of course, they will not hold his situation open. They never do, no matter how long or how faithfully a man has worked for that corporation.

“My dear, you must make the most of this year’s schooling that we have paid for. I am afraid it will be your last. You cannot look forward to being a teacher, my poor dear. Marcus has already got a situation—‘job,’ he calls it. He insisted. He declares he is going to be the man of the house till papa gets well.

“I am sorry for you, Daughter—after all your high hopes. But there must be some good reason for it and He will not put upon our shoulders a harder trouble than we can bear.”

Beth could not agree with this doctrine of her mother’s. Either she was not sufficiently orthodox, or she had a clearer vision. She knew her father had been warned years before by physicians

that his work was not suited to his constitution. And Mr. Baldwin had made no attempt to change it.

"It isn't fair," thought the young girl, "to lay it on God. I could not believe that He is love, if we suffered such trouble because He willed it. We have brought it on ourselves—and I guess it's our work to hustle around and get the best of this trouble. Poor papa!"

She wasted no time in useless worry. First of all, she drew fifty dollars from the bank and sent it home.

"I will not be behind brave, little Marcus," she wrote her mother. "I want you to use this. I can earn more—a lot more. And I'll earn all I can before I come home for the summer."

She confided in nobody but Molly—and to her under promise of secrecy. Beth shrank from the casual sympathy of others. Sympathy of that quality is so apt to be mixed with curiosity.

Molly was heart-broken. "Beth Baldwin! you'll never leave Rivercliff before your three years are finished—never! Don't tell me such a horrid thing!"

"I don't see how it can be helped," her chum said. "It is a dreadful blow to my hopes. Don't say much about it, Molly dear, or I shall cry."

Molly was already frankly sobbing. She ran

into her own room and came back again in a moment with her purse. The contents of this she dumped into Beth's lap.

"There!" she sobbed. "You can have all I've got—only say you'll stay. There's most as much as you sent home. I'll willingly go without bonbons and ice-cream sodas and furbelows and all the rest of it, if you'll take it, dear, and say you'll stay the three years out. I'll give you *all* my pocket money!"

"You dear goosie!" cried Beth, hugging her closely in her arms. "Oh! how glad I am that I have such a friend. But I can't take your money, Molly. It would be right for neither you nor for me. You need bonbons and furbelows just as much as I need money for other expenses. No, no, dear! 'Take back thy gold!' I am Independent Elizabeth—and you must not tempt me."

Resolved, as before, to earn all the money possible, Beth did not neglect her studies. Even Miss Hammersly had to admit that her standing averaged better and better as the months went on. She was among the few first students in the so-called freshman class.

In Easter week Beth made seventeen dollars by mending and repairing lace and silk hose. The news that one of the girls did fine mending spread outside of the school. Between Rivercliff School

and the town of Jackson City was a suburban district occupied by many wealthy and well-to-do people. Some orders began to come to Beth from these households.

The girl sent for a special thread and began to make a specialty of repairing the fine lingerie of her more fortunate fellow students. And this work increased steadily.

Saturday afternoon at Rivercliff was always free. Beth, as the spring advanced, began to refuse to spend this holiday with Molly and her friends. "Four whole hours to myself!" she proclaimed to her disappointed chum. "I cannot spare them, my child. I must make hay while the sun shines."

"But the sun isn't shining to-day," said Molly, pouting.

"The more reason, then, that I should get my cured hay in the barns," declared Beth, with a grim little nod. "'Avaunt! Avaunt! I scorn thy gold, likewise thy pedigree; I am betrothed to Ben-ja-min, who sails upon the sea,'" quoted Beth from a burlesque verse that they were fond of. "Tempt me not, I tell you."

And on this very Saturday afternoon something happened that made Beth very glad she had remained in her own room, working. A pair of very plump bay horses, drawing an old-fashioned

family carriage, came to the main door of the school, and a footman as fat as the horses, who sat beside the coachman fatter still, got stiffly down and puffed up the steps.

He bore a card which he gave to Miss Small, who chanced to be in the hall at the moment. The card read:

MRS. RICARDO SEVERN

"Does Miss Baldwin live here?" asked the fat footman, asthmatically.

"There is such a student," the under housekeeper said, wonderingly.

"My missus sent me for her," said the man, blinking sleepily.

"Mrs. Severn?" repeated Miss Small.

"Oh! who does Mrs. Severn want?" cried Maude Grimshaw, who chanced to be passing through the hall and saw the footman's gorgeous livery, as well as heard the lady's name mentioned.

She came swiftly to the under housekeeper's side and whispered: "Mrs. Severn is the e-nor-mously rich old lady who lives on the Boulevard, in the stone house, with the parrot and a whole raft of servants. Who does she want, dear Miss Small?"

"Miss Baldwin," puffed the footman, gloomily.

"Oh!" gasped Maude, taken aback. Then her

venomous tongue came to her rescue: "Of course! She has heard that one of the girls of Rivercliff goes out to service, I presume," and she went away, laughing scornfully.

But Miss Small sent Mrs. Severn's card up to Beth's room. However, Maude wrote home that day and told about the ridiculous way in which Miss Hammersly was allowing "a pauper girl named Beth Baldwin to go out to work by the day like a common servant."

As it chanced, Maude's equally light-headed mother read this part of her foolish daughter's letter to a caller. That caller made inquiries and learned that Beth came from Hudsonvale. She knew Mrs. Euphemia Haven of Hudsonvale—had recently met her at Old Point Comfort.

Immediately, this mutual friend wrote Mrs. Haven what Maude had written to her mother. And something came of that!

CHAPTER XIX

MR. DENNIS MONTAGUE

MOLLY GRANGER had not left Number Eighty-one when the maid knocked at her chum's door with Mrs. Severn's card and the message. Beth was not only surprised, but uncertain as to what she should do.

"What is it?" whispered Molly, very curious. "A visitor?"

"Who is Mrs. Ricardo Severn?"

"Oh! I know who she is," cried Molly. "Such fun! Doesn't she want you to come down to the carriage?"

"No. To go to her house, so the footman said," explained the maid. "Mrs. Severn isn't in the carriage."

"But who is she?" repeated Beth Baldwin.

"Just the oddest person you ever saw," Molly cried. "You *must* go, Beth."

"But, why?"

"She's got something for you to do, of course," Molly said. "And depend upon it, it will be work that pays well. They say Mrs. Severn's house is

just crowded with beautiful things. She's heard of you through Mrs. Pepper—you know, the woman who brought you the baby's lace dress to mend that the puppy tried to eat up."

"Query: Did the puppy try to eat up the dress, the baby, or Mrs. Pepper?" demanded Beth, solemnly.

"Never mind splitting scholastic hairs," cried Molly. "You must go!" and she hurried Beth into her coat and tam-o-shanter.

When Beth saw the old-fashioned carriage, she laughed to herself. It was queer. But she noted that the upholstering of the carriage was very elegant, indeed, and that the vehicle swung on behind the fat horses in a very easy fashion.

She was solemnly deposited at the big stone house on the Boulevard within a short space of time. The big footman presented her at the front door where a second footman, in still more gorgeous livery, passed her into the house and up the first flight of stairs.

Here a maid received Beth, looked her over carefully as though she feared the girl might have dynamite concealed about her person, and doubtfully announced her as "Miz Baldwig."

The great room into which Beth was ushered—really a suite of rooms which had been thrown into one vast apartment—tapered away from a

first appearance of dim grandeur to a sunny point, where sat a huge old woman, in a huge morris chair, with her gouty feet in huge slippers on a stool, while a green and red parrot, hanging upside down from its perch, was in a big gilded cage in the bow window.

Mrs. Severn was a broad-faced woman, with several small wens on her cheeks, who would have been very coarse-featured, indeed, had it not been for the cheerful smile with which she welcomed Beth.

But she could welcome her in no other way at first, for as the girl marched down the long room the parrot, still upside down, sang out:

“Here comes the bride!” and then, in the shrillest possible whistle, and much out of tune, vented the Bridal March in a most deafening fashion.

Beth could see that its mistress was trying to quiet the parrot. She could see Mrs. Severn’s lips move, and a frown came upon her brow, above which both her “false front” and her cap were awry.

Finally, losing all patience, she seized a handy cushion and flung it with evidently practised hand at the parrot’s cage. The bird broke off short in his whistling.

“Drat you, Mr. Montague! Shut up!” cried Mrs. Severn.

"Shut up yourself—and see how *you* like it," croaked the parrot; but he desisted after that and his mistress and Beth could talk.

"Mercy!" was the lady's first comment as Beth stood before her. "You are only a child!"

"But grown-up folks are not taught at Rivercliff School, Mrs. Severn," Beth returned, with a smile.

"I suppose that is so," agreed Mrs. Severn, laughing. "But they say you are quite wonderful at mending."

"Oh, no," Beth replied. "Only painstaking."

"Why! I guess that must be wonderful in this day and generation," and the lady smiled one of her rare smiles again. "How pretty you are, child."

"Thank you, Mrs. Severn."

"I had much your style of looks and figure when I was your age, my dear," said Mrs. Severn, complacently.

Beth trembled. Then she remembered that, by no possibility, was there any blood relationship between her and Mrs. Severn, so there was hope that she might not, in the end, acquire the good lady's present personal appearance.

"I did not know that any of the students of Rivercliff had gumption enough to do anything useful," went on Mrs. Severn, nodding her head.

"Take a seat, my dear. Don't come too near my gouty foot. Gout runs in our family—and we date back to William the Conqueror."

"Oh! the noble Duke of York—he had ten thousand men!" began the parrot, as though feeling that something was expected of him to substantiate his mistress' appeal to ancient history.

"Shut up, Mr. Montague!" commanded Mrs. Severn. Then to Beth: "He is a dreadfully saucy bird. His full name is Mr. Dennis Montague——"

"Dennis Mudd! Dennis Mudd!" shrieked the parrot.

"There! that wicked nephew of mine taught him that. Roland Severn has no regard for the dignity of our family name and history, and Montague——"

"Piffle!" growled the parrot, still swinging upside down.

Secretly, Beth thought the parrot and the nephew were probably both right. But she, nevertheless, liked Mrs. Severn. The lady proceeded to show Beth that she approved of her at once.

"Now, I want your time each Saturday afternoon—oh, for some weeks. Until the end of this term, at least," said the lady. "I have a number of table-throws and bureau scarfs and the like, made in the Irish convents, and the carelessness

of my maid in putting them aside and having them laundered by people who did not know their business, has almost ruined some of the pieces. It is very particular work."

"Perhaps I cannot suit you on such fine work, Mrs. Severn," said Beth. "But I will try, if you like."

"That is the right answer," declared Mrs. Severn, gaily. "From what Mrs. Pepper showed me I know you will suit."

"Thank you."

"And you will give me each Saturday afternoon?"

"Yes—until supper time. We have to report at that hour unless we have a special permit from Miss Hammersly."

"Very strict, is she?" asked Mrs. Severn.

"Oh, yes. She has to be, with two hundred girls under her care."

"Quite so. Well, under that cloth you will find some of the articles to be repaired. Look at them and tell me what you think?"

"Oh, but I have nothing with me to work with," said Beth. "You see, I did not know what was wanted of me."

"Of course not. That makes no difference. I have you for the afternoon. Is two dollars for each afternoon you come, too little, my dear?"

"I should make more than that in my room, Mrs. Severn," said Beth, quietly. "I am a rapid worker, and the girls bring me a great deal of their mending to do. I should be glad to come to you each Saturday from half past one till half past five for three dollars. I could not do it for less."

"My! that seems a lot for a child to charge," murmured the lady.

"You can try me one afternoon if you like, and decide yourself if my work—and the amount I do—is satisfactory," the girl said, with dignity.

"Well," chuckled the lady, suddenly, "I suppose I want your company as much as I want anything. You can talk while you work, can't you?"

"Oh yes!" laughed Beth, her face brightening. "Conversation will not be charged for extra."

Mrs. Severn laughed. Immediately Mr. Dennis Montague began to cackle, and went into a veritable spasm of laughter which drowned all other sounds for the nonce. The parrot was a jealous bird. He cared only to hear his own voice. Again he was quenched (for the moment) by a cushion and the undignified command to "shut up!"

Beth saw that Mrs. Severn's hands and fingers were swollen with the gout, too—called by more plebian patients, "rheumatism." Beth wondered

if she was ever able to get the several costly rings which were imbedded in the flesh off those swollen fingers. Mrs. Severn wore, too, an old-fashioned "sunburst" of considerable value.

"Now, don't go," said the lady, when Beth rose, considering the bargain completed. "You begin your work here to-day."

"But really, Mrs. Severn, I have nothing with me to work with. And I do not suppose you have the proper thread?"

"Never mind that!" exclaimed the lady. "You can talk without a needle and thread in your fingers?"

Beth laughed. "Oh yes. But three dollars for just talking would be rather an overcharge, wouldn't it? And I cannot afford to give my time."

"You are not supposed to," said Mrs. Severn. "I admire you for knowing your own mind and sticking to it. I shall pay for your time this afternoon just the same if you do not work. Tell me, Miss Baldwin, why do you have to do this sort of thing? For I suppose you have to. No person of your age would rather work than play."

"Oh no," said Beth, hesitating to take the lady into her complete confidence on such brief acquaintance. "I do not do it from choice."

"Until Mrs. Pepper told me, I had no idea

that one of the girls at Rivercliff ever did anything useful."

"Oh, Mrs. Severn! that is hard. We are all learning."

"Oh yes. They stuffed me when I was young with a lot of nonsense at school. But if the chief end of a girl's existence is to get married, what good do books do her?"

"Why, that isn't the chief end of girls of to-day, Mrs. Severn," laughed Beth. "At least, not of the girls I know."

"You do not know many of your fellow-students very well, do you?" asked Mrs. Severn, shrewdly. "I know that class of young ladies pretty well. They haven't, as a rule, a practical idea once in a year. But you are evidently different."

"I am different in that my people are not well-to-do," confessed Beth. "I had money enough to get through one year at Rivercliff. I hoped to earn enough to pay for two more years. That is why I began mending for the other girls."

"And don't you expect to accomplish your purpose?" asked the interested lady.

"It does not look so now," said Beth, sadly. "My father has been taken ill. His income has stopped. Had my school fees not been paid until the end of the term I should have gone home at once. But I am earning all I can to take home in

June with me and try to repay the folks for some of the money they have spent on me."

Beth then turned the current of the conversation skilfully and got off the subject of herself and her poverty. Mrs. Severn was really an idle woman who craved amusement. She had little within herself to occupy her mind, and had never learned to occupy her hands.

Beth extracted some enjoyment out of the afternoon, however; but when she went the parrot screamed after her: "I don't care if you *never* come back!"

She thought, too, that the foreign maid looked at her with a frown as she watched her through the hall and down the stairs. There were evidently two jealous individuals in the great stone house that did not care to see the mistress of it become interested in a stranger.

CHAPTER XX

SOMETHING UNEXPECTED

SUCCESS in life comes from putting to use that gift, or those gifts, which the individual possesses and developing such talent to the highest degree of excellence. That is what Beth had done in her small way.

The opportunity to darn silk hose had come her way, and she had a natural taste for such work and ability in it, as well as considerable training from her mother. Out of the "silk stocking hospital" had grown the other mending. She was in a fair way to earn sufficient money during the year, in the vacation and all, to carry her through the subsequent two school years which she had originally resolved to obtain at Rivercliff.

But Mr. Baldwin's illness seemed to preclude such an event. Beth kept bravely on with her work, but with a new resolve.

She wanted to carry home with her in June as much money as she could possibly earn with which to repay the loan she supposed her mother had made before Beth entered Rivercliff School.

In writing home Beth said very little about future plans, or even about her immediate work. That she was very busy, both with her books and outside work, they knew. Twice a week she heard from either her mother or Ella. Sometimes Marcus wrote.

Marcus was particularly proud of the fact that he had obtained a paying "job." He brought his four dollars home each Saturday night, and felt himself to be a man.

"He is getting to be insufferably important," Ella wrote. "If he could raise whiskers there would be no living in the house with him. I believe he has been pricing safety razors at the cutlery store. I tell him he will first have to lather his face with cream and let the cat lick it off."

To tell the truth, Beth felt sometimes that Marcus was doing much more for the family than she ever could—and she was so much older. Of course, if she could have carried through her plans, in the end she might have been the family's main support if her father's illness continued. Now——

All her plans had tumbled. She could not see ahead. Living from day to day was not an easy thing for Beth Baldwin.

Soon after her father was taken ill she heard from Larry. He expressed his sorrow for Mr. Baldwin's condition; and Beth knew he was at the Bemis Street cottage just as frequently as before the holidays. But Larry said nothing in his letter regarding the change the event of her father's illness must make in Beth's plans for an education.

Ella wrote: "Larry comes and potters around with papa in the old shop, sometimes for a whole afternoon at a time. I guess his clients aren't keeping him so awfully busy. He isn't so much fun as he used to be. But the other night he took all us kids to the picture show."

Mr. Baldwin was up and about; but his strength did not return and the doctor would not hear of his attempting any regular work. Beth knew her father had half a dozen different inventions partly finished—Mr. Baldwin laughingly called them "dinkuses"—in the old shop in the back yard, over which he sometimes worked. He never expected to make anything of the machines.

It was several weeks after Beth began to work for Mrs. Ricardo Severn on Saturday afternoons that she heard again from Larry, and that in a most unexpected way. But first something happened to Cynthia Fogg.

All this time Beth had sought Cynthia from time to time when opportunity afforded, and showed the girl that she felt more than an ordinary interest in her. Cynthia was not of a particularly grateful disposition, perhaps; or else she did not consider that she needed the interest or sympathy of anybody. But with Beth she was always much franker than with any one else.

That she made a good waitress or maid it could not be said with truth. She did not, indeed, seem to care whether she really suited madam or not. Yet the madam, so particular and exact with every other girl on her staff, seemed rather lenient with Cynthia.

Was it because she felt Cynthia Fogg to be, somehow, different from the other maids in her employ?

Beth retained her habit of early rising. Sometimes, indeed, she worked a little before the first bell—especially as the days grew longer.

But almost always when she was up an hour or more before the rising bell rang, she took a run out of doors—a very excellent practice, indeed, for one working as hard as she did.

As, at that hour, only the front door was unlocked, Beth usually ran down that way. So she frequently saw Cynthia Fogg and spoke to her, as the latter dusted the furniture and woodwork.

Madam Hammersly, with her cambric handkerchief, which all her maids learned to fear, was always up early, and many a little talk did the madam and Beth have together. Sometimes, too, would Beth hear her complain to Cynthia of her lack of attention to her duties.

"I can never teach you the importance of trifles, Cynthia," the madam said in Beth's hearing on one occasion. "How many months have you been with me?"

"Almost nine now, Madam," said Cynthia, briskly. "We ought to know each other pretty well, don't you think so?"

"Girl! it is only necessary that you should know your work. My character has nothing to do with the matter," said the madam, stiffly.

"Goodness!" drawled Cynthia. "Don't you see that it has? If you were not so particular——"

"Cynthia! how dare you?"

"Madam?" replied the freckled girl, raising her eyebrows and turning the full battery of her saucy blue eyes on Madam Hammersly.

"If you were not a homeless and friendless orphan——"

"Who has saved almost a hundred dollars out of her wages these past eight months, Madam, so don't let that bother you," interposed the girl, flipantly.

"You are discharged!" exclaimed Madam Hammersly, finding the girl's impudence past bearing.

"You dear!" retorted Cynthia, in her very pleasantest tone of voice.

"You shall go at once, girl—this very day!" and the angry madam almost sputtered.

"I just love you for it!" said Cynthia. "You don't know how I have fairly hungered to be discharged!"

She tossed the feather duster on one of the great settees, her cap and apron after it, and, humming a tune, departed for the rear premises. Beth, who stood by with coat and hat on, had been horrified.

The madam was really in tears—none the less sad to see because they were tears of rage. Beth could not forgive Cynthia Fogg for her callousness and flippancy. But at first she dared not speak.

When, however, she saw the madam pick up the duster and attempt to reach the top of the pictures with it, Beth interfered. She took off her cap and coat and laid them on a chair. Then she took the duster from the lady with a decisive hand.

"Let me finish here, Madam Hammersly. I shall like to," said Beth. "And I'll put on Cynthia's apron and cap, and do it in style. I am sorry she has acted so, Madam—and after all your

kindness to her," added Beth. "But I dare you to find any dust after I get through," and she finished with a laugh, giving the madam a chance to recover her wonted calm.

"But, my dear Miss Baldwin," Madam Hammersly finally said weakly, "what—what will my daughter—and the instructors—say?"

Beth looked over her shoulder roguishly. "I don't believe they will see me," she whispered, "for they are none of them up."

"But the other young ladies?" put forth the madam.

"I might say the same about most of them," laughed Beth. "But I will say instead: What if they should see me?"

"It—it might cause comment," said the madam, doubtfully.

Meanwhile, the substitute parlor-maid was going briskly about the work Cynthia Fogg had left undone. Madam Hammersly ceased objecting, sat down upon one of the hall chairs, smoothed out her black silk dress, and watched Beth.

In twenty minutes the reception hall was finished, baseboards wiped, and the walls brushed as high up as Beth could reach with the feather duster. Then the girl went over the polished balustrade of the stairway again with the soft dust-cloth.

"There!" she said, with satisfaction. "I don't think you will find any dust here now, Madam. Try your handkerchief."

"No, my child," sighed the lady, nodding her head. "I have watched you. That is sufficient. You are thorough. You see the importance of trifles. I wish I had a girl to train like you."

"Do you think I could suit you, Madam?" asked Beth, demurely.

"Indeed, I am sure of it," cried Madam Hammersly, vigorously.

"By getting to work at half past five and working till seven, I could dust the stairway and hall and one of the drawing rooms each morning. Then, in the hour between three and four in the afternoon except Saturdays, when I could start half an hour earlier in the morning, I could do the other drawing room."

"Goodness me, child!" exclaimed the madam, rising quickly. "What are you saying?"

"I am applying for the position that I see is open, Madam," said Beth, laughing. "If you think I'd suit——"

"But, child!" gasped the madam. "Can you do it with your manifold other duties?"

"Why," said Beth, laughing outright, "my mother says that the only people in the world who find time to do extra work are the busy people."

"Perhaps she is correct," agreed the lady, though somewhat slowly. "I—I do not know what to say, my dear."

"Say yes. I will go right ahead and do the south drawing room this morning. Then this afternoon, in my free hour, I will do the north room. Is it agreed?"

The madam showed weakness at that moment. She believed Beth would make a "perfect treasure" of a parlor maid. So she said: "Yes."

Beth ran upstairs just as the rising bell rang, and removed the cap and apron in her room. She hid them away and said nothing about the dusting, not even to Molly.

By "grapevine telegraph" Maude Grimshaw learned before breakfast that Cynthia Fogg was going. She was delighted.

"What did I tell you?" she asked loudly, at the table. "I told you I would not stand that impudent waitress remaining here. No, indeed!" and she tossed her head as though it were by her influence that Cynthia had received her discharge.

"Pass the butter!" said somebody, in a sepulchral voice, and the whole table tittered, while Miss Grimshaw flushed red, leaving the table abruptly.

Molly learned that Cynthia would not leave the premises till afternoon. The down boat stopped

at the Rivercliff landing at four-thirty. So Beth took her time about seeing the departing girl.

Of course, Cynthia was her senior, and, after all, a much more sophisticated girl than Beth. Yet the latter felt somewhat responsible for the freckled one.

At least, had it not been for her and Molly, Cynthia Fogg would not have come to Rivercliff School to work. And it hurt Beth to think that she was going away under such circumstances.

She believed the madam must have really liked the strange girl, or she would never have kept her so long; for Cynthia had done none of her work well. Miss Small whispered that Cynthia had been the slowest and most careless girl that had ever worked in the house—and yet Madam Hammersly had borne with her.

When Beth saw Cynthia to bid her good-bye she did criticize the freckled girl's course. "You might have tried to please the madam—she was so kind to you," Beth said.

"Goodness me!" smiled Cynthia. "Are housemaids ever grateful? I didn't know it. And, to tell the truth, Miss Baldwin, I don't think they have much to be grateful for.

"I was put at the top of the house to sleep, in a stuffy little room with a window that would open only a few inches at the bottom, and with the

coarsest of bed clothing, and a rag of a carpet on the floor. We were expected to keep our rooms neat, and there was little pleasure in doing so, for they were so ugly—and everything in them so ugly—that one could not make them livable. My bureau had only three legs and the mirror was cracked. And in the cold weather! Why, the halls up there are barely warm. You can't tell me anything about what maids have to put up with hereafter. When I go back——”

“Go back where?” asked Beth, pointedly. “To the institution you ran away from?”

“Well! And if I did it would be no worse, at least,” and Cynthia's wonderful eyes smiled again, lighting up her freckled face and making it very attractive for the moment.

“But don't you worry over what is to become of me, dear girl! I have nearly a hundred dollars, and it will last me a long time. I am all right. I will write you when I get settled.”

That afternoon Beth stole down in Cynthia's discarded cap and apron, opened the north drawing room and began her dusting. The madam was on hand, evidently to see if Beth kept her part of the contract, and hardly had Beth begun her work when Cynthia, dressed for departure, appeared in the reception hall.

“Oh, Madam Hammersly!” she said cheerfully,

"I must bid you good-bye before I go. I hope you will get another girl to suit you better than I could—— What! Beth Baldwin? Are you doing my work?"

"No, Cynthia, I am doing my own work," laughed Beth.

"And much better than I could ever do it, I warrant," laughed the older girl. "Well, Madam, I know that you will be perfectly satisfied with Miss Baldwin. Good-bye!"

"That is not the door for the serving people to use, and you know it well, Cynthia," said the madam, her voice shaking.

"Bless your dear heart! I know it," and Cynthia's laugh was mellow and her manner unruffled. "But I came in this way and I might as well depart like a lady too."

Suddenly she seized the madam around the neck and planted a warm kiss upon either of her wrinkled cheeks. "You are a dear!" she repeated. "Good-bye!"

The next moment she had flashed through the open door and out over the porch and down the steps—just as a motor-car stopped before the door. Madam Hammersly stood, actually thunderstruck at the liberty Cynthia had taken, so only Beth saw the young man who alighted from the car.

The chauffeur was about to start again when Cynthia spoke to him, and then stepped into the tonneau and was whisked away. For a servant she certainly was departing in style from River-cliff School.

But Beth was looking at somebody besides Cynthia. She saw the young man turn and stare after the departing girl; then he came slowly up the steps.

It was Larry Haven. He caught sight of Beth standing just inside the hall door and his face brightened. He sprang forward, exclaiming:

“Beth! Why, Beth Baldwin! How lucky to see you at once!” and Beth met him quite as warmly, forgetting all about Madam Hammersly’s presence, and put both her hands—one still holding the dustcloth—in Larry’s gloved ones.

CHAPTER XXI

THE BURIAL OF FRIENDSHIP

BOTH the young people were for the moment quite unconscious of Madam Hammersly's presence. They shook hands longer than was necessary, and burred inconsequential questions and answers, as most people do to hide their deepest feelings. Beth's black eyes sparkled through a film of teardrops and Larry's blue eyes expressed all the admiration they were capable of showing.

But he said: "How nice to see you again, Beth. Say! is there a girl going to school here named Freylinghausen?"

"Freylinghausen?" repeated Beth, puzzled, yet feeling that the name struck some chord of memory.

"Yes. Miss Freylinghausen, of Philadelphia. No end of a swell——"

"We have plenty of that kind here, Larry," said Beth, her eyes twinkling and the dimples coming into her cheeks at the call of mischief. "But I do not think that a girl of that name attends Rivercliff School."

"Why! I just saw her come out. She passed me on the steps. She took the car I rode up in just now," cried Larry, rather excitedly. "I met her once with a party of Philadelphians that came to New York——"

"Oh, my dear!" laughed Beth. "That was Cynthia Fogg."

"Who was? The girl I met in New York?"

"No. The girl who just went out. She—she—she has been doing parlor maid's work here, and has just been discharged."

She said this so low that Madam Hammersly could not hear it. Then she wheeled and led Larry toward the austere looking lady in the background.

"I beg your pardon, Madam Hammersly," Beth said. "This is my very oldest friend, Mr. Lawrence Haven. He is just like an elder brother to me, and comes from my home."

The madam welcomed Larry with some cordiality. She evidently liked the young man's appearance. After a minute or two of conversation, Beth asked, placidly:

"May Larry sit down here in the drawing room, Madam, while I finish my dusting? We can talk just as well."

"Why—yes, child. I see no objection," replied the madam, yet looking at Beth oddly.

"Would you not rather postpone the—er—assistance you were so kindly rendering me until your guest has gone?"

"Oh, no, Madam," Beth said brightly. "Can't afford to put it off till later. Mother always says, 'Later never strikes by our clock.' And Larry has often bothered me while I did housework."

Larry said nothing. His face, however, was a study. He followed Beth with some hesitation into the north room. The madam, who believed in the proprieties, remained just out of earshot.

"Now tell me about everything and everybody, Larry," Beth said blithely, recommencing her dusting. "You may sit in that corner by the door. I have dusted there."

"But, Beth!" gasped Larry. "What does this mean?"

"What does what mean?"

"This—er—masquerade?" he said, pointing to her cap and apron.

"I'll have you know, sir, this is no masquerade," cried the girl, laughing. "This cap and apron are the badges of independence."

"Independence!"

"Yes, sir. I have taken Cynthia Fogg's place. She did not suit. I am going to earn real money by doing parlor maid's work—if I can satisfy Madam Hammersly."

"But, Beth!" Larry repeated. "What—what will people say?"

"What people?"

"The—the young ladies here at school?"

"Why, they don't care who keeps the furniture polished," and Beth laughed again, but she shot her friend a penetrating glance.

"How about Miss Hammersly—the principal? I should think she would not allow such a thing. Why, Beth! it is dreadful!"

"What is dreadful?" she asked him, with sudden tenseness in her tone. "My earning money in an honorable way? Why, Larry, you know I came to Rivercliff with that expectation."

"But this—er—domestic service," he said faintly. Then, with sudden heat: "And is it true that you go out—by the day—to people's houses—to do such work?"

"Not just like this, Larry," said the girl, gently, and still watching him covertly.

"But it seems too dreadful! Does your mother know it?"

"I presume she has her suspicions," and Beth laughed shortly.

"I don't mean to offend you——"

"Then let us talk of something else, dear Larry, for I see that we never shall agree in this matter. I will tell you that mother borrowed from some

one four hundred dollars to pay for my first year at school here. I must pay that sum back, for, with father out of work, my education must cease with the completion of the term paid for. Now! we will drop it. How is father?"

Larry, too, tried his best to get away from the subject, and to talk pleasantly of home affairs. But how could he ignore Beth's domestic activities when she kept on busily dusting all through his visit?

The drawing room was finished, Larry's call came to an end, and her free hour was over, all at the same time. She went composedly with him to the front door, removing her cap and apron as she heard the girls come out of the lecture room above. Madam Hammersly had stolen away and left them alone.

"Good-bye, Larry," Beth said calmly, giving him her hand. "Remember me to everybody at home."

Larry looked away. He coughed, tried to clear his throat, attempted to say something, and then suddenly looked around to find his hand empty and that the door had been gently closed behind him.

Beth went trippingly up to her next recitation, appeared as usual at supper, and spent some time at her mending afterward. When Molly came up-

stairs, the two chums spent an hour conning the problems for the next day, and Beth showed no shadow of the pain that throbbed within her with every beat of her pulse.

When the lights were out, however, and a wind-driven moon peered in at the window of Number Eighty, South Wing, it caught Beth Baldwin lying wide-awake upon her pillow, and that pillow wet with bitter, bitter tears. She was busily engaged in burying a friendship that had begun with her very first childish remembrances.

This day—the one on which Cynthia Fogg departed and Larry Haven called—was the last day of mark for Beth in this year at Rivercliff School.

Of course, other important things happened—very important, indeed, to Miss Hammersly's graduating class. But little save lessons and the usual grind of daily duties seemed to stir the life of the freshmen and the sophomores.

Beth continued to mend and patch for her clientele up to the very last week of school. She would carry home nearly one hundred dollars with her.

Mrs. Ricardo Severn had continued to be Beth's very good friend. Although the girl earned quite all she was paid at the big stone house on the Boulevard in mending Mrs. Severn's drawn-work and laces, she was really of the most value through her cheering presence.

But the foreign maid and the parrot continued to look askance at the pretty schoolgirl, whom the former continued to announce as "Miz Baldwig." As for Mr. Dennis Montague, or "Dennis Mudd," as the bird preferred to call himself, he stared always at Beth with little, evil, red eyes, and the girl was careful never to go too near when the cage door was open.

"And, my dear," begged Mrs. Severn, "don't ever ask him if he wants a cracker. That always throws Mr. Montague into a rage!"

Beth saw Mrs. Severn the Saturday afternoon before school closed for the year. The lady dismissed her kindly, making Beth promise that, if she should come back to Rivercliff for another term, she would take up her work at Severn Lodge just where she laid it down.

The parrot yelled after her for the last time, "I don't care if you *never* come back!" The foreign maid scowled her down the grand stairway; and Beth went away feeling really sorry to be parted from Mrs. Severn.

The next few days were those of hurry and bustle incident to the closing of any large school; and finally Beth and Molly were off on the *Water Wagtail* again for their trip down the river—and home.

CHAPTER XXII

A RENEWED RESOLVE

BETH only half promised to go to Hambro later in the summer to visit Molly Granger and the seven aunts. She was not at all sure that she could accomplish it, for she did not know exactly how she should find things at home.

Molly said: "If you don't come, Bethesda, I'll advance on Hudsonvale some day soon, with all the aunts at my back, and like a crew of brigands we will capture you and carry you bodily away."

There was more cheerfulness in the atmosphere at home than Beth expected to find. Mr. Baldwin had obtained some light work that paid a few dollars every week, Marcus had been raised by his employer to five dollars, and the family in the Bemis Street cottage was getting along fairly well.

Of course, there were no new dresses, and Mrs. Baldwin was doing her own washing and ironing with the smaller girls' help, while what came upon the table was very plain. "We fortunately have no rent to pay, and the taxes are small," Mrs. Baldwin said.

When Beth produced the hundred dollars she had saved, her mother really seemed more troubled than amazed.

"Why—why, Beth! you are quite wonderful. I will put it with that other fifty you sent——"

"Haven't you used that?" cried her daughter.

"No, my dear. We have not had to."

"We've nearly half the sum you borrowed for me, and can soon pay it all back, for I shall get more work this summer," Beth declared briskly. "I shall start right out to call upon the folks in town and show them the work I can do mending lace and silk hose and the like. I can make more at such work, if I can get enough of it to do, than I possibly could in a store or at the factory."

"But, my dear child——"

"It is my duty to do it, Mamma—and I love it," Beth said firmly. "The money you borrowed was spent for me. I'll make up the whole in time."

"It was not a loan to be paid back—at once," said Mrs. Baldwin, desperately.

"Why, Mamma! what do you mean? All loans must be paid."

"At least," the troubled mother hastened to add: "You are not to try to repay it. This hundred and fifty dollars you have earned so bravely in your school year, must be kept to help pay your next year's fees at Rivercliff."

"Oh, Mother! I cannot do it," cried Beth. "I must help you here. It is only right that I should."

"Let me be the judge of that, Daughter," Mrs. Baldwin said. "I thought you had resolved to win your teacher's certificate—and at Rivercliff?"

"But, how can I?" murmured Beth. "It is impossible."

"It seems to me," and Mrs. Baldwin's eyes twinkled a little now, "that you have proved quite the contrary. I am proud of you. You have done so well according to your school reports, and been able to earn so much money, too, that I feel you are to be highly commended. I wonder what Euphemia will say?"

Beth looked at her mother sharply. In that moment she guessed half her mother's secret. The four hundred dollars had been loaned by Larry's mother!

She felt that she could say nothing to her mother about it. The subject of the supposed loan and her possible return to Rivercliff in the autumn was avoided by both of them for a time. Meanwhile, however, Beth thought deeply about it.

If there was anybody in the world to whom Beth did not wish to feel indebted, it was to Mrs. Euphemia Haven. She could scarcely have told why had she been taxed with the question. She certainly had no dislike for Larry's mother; only

she always felt that the lady was patronizing her and trying to push her aside.

She might have guessed before, Beth told herself, that Mrs. Haven was the only person her mother could possibly have borrowed four hundred dollars from—and without security. So that was how, the summer before, Larry had known that she was going away to school and when, and so had filled her stateroom aboard the *Water Wagtail* with flowers.

Beth suspected, from what Larry let drop when he called at Rivercliff, that he had come there for the special purpose of learning if reports his mother had evidently heard of Beth's work were true.

"And he got his answer—with a vengeance," sighed Beth.

She believed that now Mrs. Haven must be sorry that she had lent the money to pay for the first year's expenses at Rivercliff. "Of course, my earning money in the way I do has disgusted her. And Larry——"

She could not bear to think of her old friend. Never—till the day she died—could she have just the same measure of affection for a friend that she had for Larry Haven!

He must have known that his mother had loaned the four hundred dollars which Beth had men-

tioned at their last interview—the day Larry called at Rivercliff School. He knew then that Beth was intent upon paying that loan with the money she earned. And here was her mother desiring her to go on with her education, and so necessarily postponing the evil day of payment into the future.

Beth did not know what to do. It was evident her mother did not wish to discuss the loan—did not wish to be questioned about it. Beth had been brought up too strictly to doubt her parents' judgment.

And now, soon after her return home, came kind Mr. Lomax, the principal of the high school, to congratulate her on her standing at Rivercliff.

He brought with him, too, a letter he had received from Miss Hammersly. Although that good woman had said nothing to Beth before she came home for the summer, in this letter she begged Mr. Lomax to use his influence with Beth's family, that they would allow her to complete her course at Rivercliff.

"I do not approve, as a general rule, of my girls working as many hours or as hard as Miss Baldwin does to earn money to pay school expenses," wrote Miss Hammersly. "Usually, the girls who have to struggle so to achieve the bare

necessities through school and college, are the ones who, after all, gain but a superficial benefit from the educational courses. The work they must do to live comes first with them, as is natural. They fall behind in their school work. Not so with Miss Baldwin. I am proud of her and I want to see her finish her course so auspiciously begun."

"Somehow, Mrs. Baldwin," Mr. Lomax said to Beth's mother, "you must push Elizabeth on. She must continue her course at Rivercliff. Why! it will be a distinct loss to the educational community if she does not become a teacher."

"I do not know how that may be," said Mrs. Baldwin, quietly; "but I do know that I want Beth to continue at the school. At first, when Mr. Baldwin was taken ill, I did not see how we could accomplish it. But now, by her own exertions, she has proved that it is possible. Why! she has already in hand enough to pay the first half of next year's expenses."

So it was settled. Beth renewed her resolve and, as Marcus said, "buckled down to work."

She had cards printed, and with them she went from house to house in the better residential sections of Hudsonvale and the neighboring towns, showing samples where she could of her really beautiful work. Both Mrs. Baldwin and Beth

had a "sleight," as old-fashioned people called it, with the needle—especially on such fine work as Beth now essayed.

"You work up a good trade this summer, Daughter," said the practical Mrs. Baldwin, "and I'll hold it for you until next long vacation. Ella is getting such a big girl now, and Prissy is so helpful, that I can do it."

Beth had already shown her own capability in getting ahead. She was not afraid to ask for work, and where she was allowed to show specimens of mending she was almost sure of being engaged for similar tasks.

One thing she would not do, and her mother suggested it only once—and that faintly. Beth refused to take her samples of work to the Haven place and ask Mrs. Haven to recommend her to her friends.

Everybody who could afford it in Hudsonvale went away for at least a fortnight in the summer, and Mrs. Haven and her son went to some northern resort soon after Beth came home from Rivercliff; so it was not strange that Beth saw little of Larry, even in the most casual way, during the vacation.

She was once during the summer at a simple evening party, dressed in the poplin, refurbished with new ribbons, and Larry unexpectedly dropped

in. He devoted himself to her entertainment for a part of the evening and, quite as a matter of course, saw her home.

Both talked very fast, and about perfectly uninteresting matters, all the way—both too nervous and excited to know afterward just what either had said—and parted with a handclasp at Beth's gate.

Several times, however, during the later summer, Larry was at the Bemis Street cottage to see Mr. Baldwin. Beth's father and the young man usually remained closeted together for some time, and once Mr. Baldwin came into the sitting room after such an interview, smiling broadly.

"Let me tell you," he said, "that young chap has got something in his head that didn't have to be put there by a surgical operation!" But just what he meant by this commendation he did not explain.

Beth was very successful that summer, and for a girl, earned a good deal of money with her nimble fingers. It was a fact that she had remarkable talent for the occupation she had taken up. People who own nice laces and the like, are only too glad to pay a commensurate price for their restoration by skilful workwomen.

She had put her acceptance of Molly Granger's invitation to Hambro off as late in the summer as

she could. But now, finally, Molly threatened so seriously to lead a pirate band of aunts into the Bemis Street camp, that it was decided Beth must go to her chum's. And she welcomed the diversion, too.

She went to Hambro by boat, of course; and the day of her departure on this outing she received a letter from long silent Cynthia Fogg. It was rather a queer letter, too—just as queer as the girl herself!

“Are you going to return to Rivercliff School?” was a part of the epistle. “I’ve heard your father is ill and that you are not going back there. Tell me if this is so at once. . . . I have a good job and all is well with me.”

There was something so insistent about that question that Beth wrote at once, reassuring her strange friend, that she was to return to Rivercliff. Cynthia’s address was on Dekalb Avenue, Philadelphia. Beth wondered what part of the city that was—whether it was in the wealthy residential portion, where presumably Cynthia had secured her “good job,” or among the poor of the Quaker metropolis. Beth did not believe that it could be at the orphanage in which Cynthia presumably had been brought up.

Beth had looked forward to her visit to Molly and the seven aunts with a great deal of satisfaction and curiosity; nor was she disappointed. It proved interesting and she made seven very lovely friends. The aunts and Molly lived together in a big house in the better residential section of Hambro, and were, indeed, quite the most important people, socially, in the whole town.

Aunt Celia liked Beth because she really was a student and loved books. Molly's eldest aunt spent her days in a comfortable chair in her own sitting room, reading—and reading the solid, not to say stolid works of certain English authors who have mostly gone out of fashion in this day.

Aunt Catherine—almost always suffering from a cold in the head and never by any possibility going out of doors without overshoes—was considered delicate by all the family. She confided to Beth her favorite remedies for most diseases, from cholera to housemaid's knee.

Auntie Cora was society's devotee—a little, bustling woman, who was the cheerfulest company and never talked of anything that amounted (so Aunt Celia said) to “a row of beans.” She took Beth and Molly to afternoon teas to show them off, and drove with them in borrowed coupés behind stiff-backed coachmen and footmen through the pleasant roads around Hambro.

Aunt Carrie, the maritime one, took Beth to her room and displayed for her admiration much of the wedding finery she had been preparing with her own hands through a series of heart-hungering years, against the time when her captain should come home and settle down.

"John has not had his own ship very long. He must first lay aside a competence—and for years he had a father and a mother to support. But this voyage to the East and one more will 'complete the tally,' he says," and she blushed very prettily, for she was a sweet maiden lady with all the modesty of a girl.

On a teakwood table in a corner of her room—a present from the captain, of course—was a mariner's chart on which every day was faithfully pricked the possible course of the ship *Rollingsgate*—a huge fourmaster.

"I correct it by John's letters," Aunt Carrie said. "And really, it is quite surprising to see how close I come to it—sometimes."

She had learned the elements of navigation, too, so as to know more about John's calling. To Beth's mind this romance of the maiden lady was the very sweetest of which she had ever heard.

Aunt Charlotte, the plump, capable aunt, was housekeeper, and was of a much more practical nature than the other "Granger girls," as Hambro

people knew them. Aunt Cassie actually had an attack of croup while Beth was in the house.

"And if you can beat that in August, I wish you'd tell me!" Molly exclaimed.

Aunt Cassie's whole existence, it seemed, had been one series of coughs and colds. Aunt Cyril was very kind to Beth, but rather aloof. She could not wholly approve of a girl who did housework for her school tuition. Yet she was too sweet and lovable to snub her niece's chum.

"They are just the sweetest, loveliest dears that ever lived—all of them!" Beth Baldwin declared to her mother, when she returned from this visit. "And the house is full of cats—both living ones and those Jolly Molly has drawn. The aunts are too tender hearted to have a single kitten drowned, or to destroy even one of Molly's attempts at feline portraiture."

Beth was not in Hudsonvale long this time. The semester would soon open at Rivercliff, and she took the boat again for the twenty-four hour journey up the river.

Beth bade Larry good-bye the evening before she departed for school, and in full family assembled. The heart-high courage and happiness that had attended her first departure for school was lacking when the *Water Wagtail* left the Hudsonvale landing.

But Beth had many things to think of now that she had not dreamed of the year previous. She was much older, too—much more than a year older! And hers was not a nature that “hugged sorrow to its bosom.” She had too many plans for the future.

She wished to get to Rivercliff, get settled, and put out her “hospital” sign. Molly had painted a new one with an added line:

“First Aid to Lingerie”

She had counted on Mrs. Severn’s work as a solid asset for her school campaign. Arriving at Rivercliff on Friday, Saturday afternoon Beth called at Severn Lodge at her usual hour.

The gorgeously liveried footman let her in—but she thought his look was doubtful. Before she could mount the stairs the foreign maid appeared at the top of the flight.

“Miz Baldwig iz to wait below,” she hissed.

Beth stepped back in surprise. The foreign person disappeared—then reappeared again. She brought a folded note downstairs and extended it at arm’s length to Beth.

“Ze compliments of madam,” said the maid.

Beth unfolded and looked at the note, quite stunned. It read:

“Mrs. Severn will not again require Miss Baldwin’s assistance.”

It was written and signed in the upright, old-fashioned hand of the lady herself.

As Beth left the house she almost thought she heard the parrot shrieking after her:

“I don’t care if you *never* come back!”

CHAPTER XXIII

SUSPICION HOVERS

FORTUNATE it was that lessons began on Monday, and that there were certain preparations to be made for them. Likewise, there was some work for Beth's nimble fingers, for some of the girls who had arrived at Rivercliff first, had actually brought their summer's mending with them.

"For you do it much nicer than I can get it done at home, Baldwin," cried one.

"I tell you, Beth, you are an institution," Mamie Dunn declared. "I don't know what we should do without you. I, for one, would go in rags."

So Beth did not have much time to worry over Mrs. Severn's odd action. She merely comforted herself by saying that rich old ladies—especially with parrots and foreign maids—are apt to be fanciful.

Miss Hammersly called Beth into her office for a special interview on one of the days soon after the opening of the term.

"I am pleased to see you with us for another year, Beth," she said, with that shade of cordiality

with which she always received her second year pupils. "You have come, I presume, fully prepared to take up your studies with renewed vigor and a steady application?"

"Oh yes, Miss Hammersly," Beth said cheerfully. "I love to study."

"And you will—ahem!—make no engagements which will interfere with recitations or study hours?"

"No," and Beth flushed a little. "Madam Hammersly tells me she has engaged a girl to do my dusting."

"Yes; at my suggestion," said the principal. "Besides, I think it debarred you from proper physical exercise—which you need, Beth."

"Yes, Miss Hammersly. I will try to make it up in some other way," said the girl, doubtfully. With both Mrs. Severn's work and the dusting lost, Beth was worried about the future.

"By the way," Miss Hammersly said. "Do you help Mrs. Ricardo Severn this fall?"

For some reason Beth could not keep from blushing. "No, Miss Hammersly," she said. "I expected to, and I went to her home on Saturday prepared to do so; but I was informed that my services were not wanted any more."

"By whom were you so informed?" the principal asked quickly.

"Why, Mrs. Severn really told me herself—in writing. She sent down a note," said Beth, somewhat surprised at the interest the principal of Rivercliff displayed in the matter.

"You—are you familiar with Mrs. Severn's handwriting?" questioned Miss Hammersly.

"Oh, yes. She has sent me notes before."

"Do you not think it strange, Beth?"

"Ye-es; in a way. But I know she is notional."

"Did you know that she sent here after you in June—the very day after the school closed?"

"Sent for me?" cried Beth, in amazement.

"Yes."

"Why—how odd! She knew I was going away. I bade her good-bye."

"Of course, you can imagine no reason for her treating you so now?"

"None at all. Unless she may have found somebody else to amuse her. I do not really think," confessed Beth, flushing again, and dimpling, "that it was my work she cared for so much as my chatter. She likes to be amused."

Miss Hammersly smiled—yet her gravity returned instantly. "Very well," she said, tapping on her desk with her pencil in a thoughtful way.

"You may go, Beth."

Beth continued at times to wonder about Mrs. Severn's refusal to see her when she called. That

she could not understand. She believed that the foreign maid did not like her and might have influenced Mrs. Severn against Beth herself by some means, although the girl could not imagine how.

The opening of a new school year is like the picking up of scattered stitches with a knitting needle. Not only must the mind become attuned to lessons and to discipline again, but one's former friends must be greeted, new friendships made, and—unfortunately—old enmities and feuds attended to.

Rivalries always will exist where youths congregate—in school, or elsewhere. The very system of education followed at Rivercliff fostered rivalries. And a healthy competition between students is always of benefit.

Warped and selfish natures, however, can never enter into any struggle and play the game with fairness. The "give and take" of the playground can never please these.

Although Miss Hammersly and her instructors watched the two hundred and more girls at Rivercliff School as closely as was wise, they could not foresee all feuds nor could they break them up when once started. Maude Grimshaw and her friends continued at times to vent upon Beth their spleen; and occasionally they succeeded in ruffling the placid surface of Beth's life.

Ordinarily, "Princess Fancyfoot," as Molly called Maude, was content to lift her sharp nose to a more acute angle when she noticed Beth or to cast a slurring remark or two in her direction. These attentions Beth did not allow to trouble her soul.

She seldom came in direct contact with Maude. To tell the truth, Maude was not a brilliant scholar. Beth and Molly were forging far ahead of the heiress to the Grimshaw millions. Molly had been fired by Beth's example and wished to become self-supporting, too; and was preparing herself to teach.

"I don't care what Aunt Cyril says," Molly announced. "She thinks it beneath a Granger to earn money at any occupation. Aunt Charlotte is more practical. She tells me she will take the money I earn teaching and invest it for me so that it will earn at least seven per cent. Then, she says, I will have something to make me independent in my old age. For, you see, Bethesda, my father spent all his patrimony on the heathen, so I have nothing but what the aunts give me.

"It looks as though Aunt Charlotte had an uncanny belief that I shall remain an old maid like all the other 'Granger girls,' " and she made a little face at the thought.

With all her hard work at her books and in the

“hospital,” Beth went in for at least one relaxation. She played an excellent game at basket-ball, and there was great rivalry at Rivercliff in this athletic pastime.

Beth and Molly had won places on the second basket-ball team and, now that a class had graduated, there was an opening on the first team. This team played championship games against club teams in Jackson City and other first school teams about the State. Basket-ball was a game of which Miss Hammersly herself particularly approved.

The rivalry for the post of honor on the first team waxed high during the first four weeks of the term. The first regular game of the season, with a team from the Jackson City Academy, was to be played on one of the Rivercliff courts.

The chums in Numbers Eighty and Eighty-one, Maude Grimshaw, who could be active if she so chose, Stella Price, and a girl named Pratt, were the contestants for the place of honor on the first team.

Between Beth and Molly it was just a zestful rivalry for first place; the chums were, of course, good natured about it. There was some acerbity between the others, perhaps. In the case of Maude, she naturally fought “tooth and nail,” as Molly said, and was as unpleasant about it as possible.

The physical instructor, Miss Crossleigh, and the other members of the first basket-ball team, decided by vote for the girl who was to make the team. Each candidate who was passed by Miss Crossleigh, was tried out in practice games before the last Saturday in September.

On that day Molly came to the breakfast table a little late, both flushed and excited.

"Well! it's all over, girls," she confided to the table in general.

"What's all over—the sky?" giggled one of her hearers.

"The contest for the first team. Miss Crossleigh has just written up the names on the gym board. It's all over but the shouting."

"Oh! who's got it?" cried two or three at once.

Maude stopped eating and flashed a look at Molly. "I'd like to know what you know about it?" she demanded.

"I tell you Miss Crossleigh has just written up the names of the girls who will play Jackson City next week."

"Who's the new one? Not you, Molly, I'll be bound," cried Stella Price.

Molly could no longer control her smiles. Yet she said, a bit ruefully:

"Not guilty! Poor lil' Molly wins not, of course. She never does."

"Who is it?" demanded Maude, eagerly.

"Why, Maude! who could it be?" drawled Molly, wickedly. "There was never but one girl of us that really had a chance from the start."

Maude's complacent and conscious expression was delightful.

"Of course, I knew——" she began, with a toss of her head, when Molly interposed with:

"We all knew! Hail to the chieftainess! Beth! get up and bow. *You're elected.*"

"*What?*" shrieked Maude.

"How horrid!" exclaimed Laura Hedden, loyally.

A general laugh went around the table. "Speech! Speech!" clamored the girls.

Beth got up, flushing, and bowed with mock solemnity. "I am overpowered," she said. "You must excuse me. Besides, I am hungry."

"Well! if that isn't the very meanest thing!" hissed Maude Grimshaw. "That pauper has no more right to the place than—than——"

"Pass the butter!" advised Mamie Dunn, springing the old joke on Maude.

Maude, however, was not to be so easily silenced on this occasion. She rose up haughtily, her usually colorless face ugly with splotches of red.

"Let me tell you—all you smarties," she said, greatly enraged—"that this has been a most un-

fairly conducted contest. You all know it. Success has not gone to the best player, but to one who is, in some mysterious way, momentarily popular. Perhaps it is out of pity for her poverty that Miss Baldwin has been given the place on the first team, a place that belongs to a better player."

"Yourself, for instance?" drawled Molly. "With two fumbles and three interferences to your credit when you were last tried out?"

"Not my fault!" snapped back Maude.

"Oh, hush, Grimshaw!" advised a senior. "You're making yourself ridiculous; don't you know that? And Miss Carroll is looking this way."

"Let Miss Carroll hear," hissed Maude. "All the teachers had better hear. We are supposed to be decently honest in this school; but all of us are not."

"Hear! hear!" interposed somebody, *sotto voce*. "Confession is good for the soul."

"You think you are smart!" flared up Maude, looking around without identifying the speaker. "But perhaps it would be just as well if some inquiry were made as to why this new member of the first basket-ball team came to be turned out of Severn Lodge and forbidden even to go there again. Oh! I know what I am talking about—and so does she."

With this last phrase spoken in a most insolent way, Maude stalked from the table. Molly jumped up to follow her, "spitting like a bad fire-cracker," as somebody said; but Beth pulled her back into her seat.

"Now Maude's exploded again," said Stella, wearily. "Don't follow her example please, Molly Granger."

"Pshaw! she is not worth worrying about, Miss Baldwin," declared another girl.

But a whisper went around the table. It had an echo, too, in Beth's heart:

"What did Maude mean about Severn Lodge?"

CHAPTER XXIV

THE TRAITOR'S BLOW

BETH really had her heart and mind so full these days, that there should not have been room for worry over anything that a girl like Maude Grimshaw could say. The fact remained, however, that Beth was disturbed by Maude's innuendo.

Molly had asked: "What could that nasty thing mean, Beth, about Mrs. Severn?"

"I don't know," her chum honestly replied. "I can't imagine."

"Humph! just some of her spleen, I guess. She's heard you weren't working there any more on Saturdays and so just made something up out of whole cloth."

So they passed it over. Molly evidently heard no more about it during the next week, for she did not broach the subject again to Beth. But the latter felt that there was a cabal of some nature against her among Maude's "Me toos."

Beth practised with the first basket-ball team every day, and Miss Hammersly herself came to

watch the play and pronounce judgment. She was very much pleased with the smooth work of the five and applauded vigorously.

The whole school took a deep interest in the practice games; but the general applause grew noticeably fainter day after day, when Beth chanced to make a good play. Molly Granger and a number of her close friends, who were frequently on the side lines together, cheered Beth to the echo. But they finally became quite alone in their applause.

Beth herself had noticed the coldness of her fellow-students before this. She discovered it in other ways besides the lack of applause on the basket-ball court.

A girl who had promised her some work did not bring it to Number Eighty and Beth asked her about it.

"Miss Rice, I can mark those handkerchiefs for you now, if you like," Beth said. "Shall I come for them, or will you bring them to me?"

The girl spoken to flushed and hesitated. "Oh—I—well—I've changed my mind, Miss Baldwin," she stammered. "I guess I won't have them done just now."

"Oh, dear me!" laughed Beth, "if it is a matter of a lack of the essential pin-money just now, I'll trust you. I have to do such work when I can, you

know, and often we girls have spent all our immediate allowances."

"No, Miss Baldwin. I don't want the handkerchiefs done at all," said Miss Rice, tartly. "I prize them rather highly—they were sent to me from Paris. I don't think I care to risk them out of my own possession."

Nothing could be plainer than this. Beth was aware that Miss Rice was frequently in Maude Grimshaw's company. The lesson to be drawn was obvious.

All the girls of Rivercliff were not followers of "Princess Fancyfoot." Yet it was plain enough before the day of the game between the school's first team and the one from Jackson City, that Beth was not a favorite on the basket-ball team.

Whether Miss Crossleigh, the instructor, noticed it or not, she said nothing. Teachers cannot always take note of girlish feuds and rivalries.

A match game between the teams of rival schools brought to the Rivercliff athletic field many friends of the girls. Miss Hammersly had had a grand stand erected to overlook both the basket-ball and tennis courts, which were inside the cinder path. The weather was fine, the sport was popular, and the field made a brilliant picture on this crisp October afternoon.

Beth's mates on the basket-ball team showed her

frank good fellowship—that was one good thing. Otherwise, she could not have played as brilliantly as she did that day. The opposition to her that developed among her own fellow-students as the game went on only served to spur her to greater efforts.

In the first half the Rivercliff team was out-matched. There was a weak spot in the home team, but not in Beth Baldwin's corner. Yet almost the whole school was unfriendly toward her.

"All ready?" demanded the referee, and at the signal the ball was thrown into play.

Although the play was fast and furious from the very start, at first neither side scored. Then the umpire halted the play with:

"Foul on Rivercliff for over guarding!"

It was really a shock to the school five. "Do get together, girls!" begged Maxine Laval, the captain.

But their opponents got the ball and shot it basketward. Right from the field the Jackson City Academy five made a basket. And following it—within a half minute—they made a second.

"Break it up, guards! Do!" groaned Maxine.

Maxine herself made a brilliant play the next moment, and her friends on the benches and side lines showed their approval wildly. And then a basket was made splendidly by Beth.

Silence. For a moment, dead silence. Then Molly led a weak and forlorn applause. But the snub of the little brunette beauty, who was playing so well and vigorously, was so plain that the entire audience marked it.

Whispering among the elders, laughter among the girls, followed the incident. The whistle called the half with the home five badly behind. The visitors scored six points over them.

In the dressing room allotted to the Rivercliff five, Miss Crossleigh thanked them for their work and encouraged them.

"There seems to be some schoolgirl foolishness afoot," the instructor added, rather sharply. "One of us seems to be unpopular——"

"Miss Crossleigh," said Beth, quickly, "if you think that I had better retire and let a substitute take my place——"

"No, no!" the other girls of the team cried.

"Why, Beth Baldwin!" Maxine said, warmly, "you have done better than any of us. Isn't that so, Miss Crossleigh?"

"I will not say that," said the lady, smiling. "You have each done your best, I believe, and I want you to keep at it. Show them that although they may win this game from us you are all good sports. Of course, Miss Baldwin will finish the game."

And cheered somewhat by this, when the whistle announced the game was on for the second half, Beth went out with renewed vigor. Almost at once she got another basket. This time there was a pronounced hiss from one group on the benches. Needless to say Maude Grimshaw was the central figure of that group.

But the friends of the visiting girls began to understand the opposition to Beth by her own party. They applauded Beth themselves, and when the game was over (and it was not such a bad beating the Rivercliff team received, after all, thanks to Beth's good playing), every member of the opposing team insisted upon shaking hands with the girl who had fought them the hardest.

Almost everybody was late to supper that evening; but notably the losing team in the afternoon's game, and Maude Grimshaw and several of her "Me toos." In fact, Maude herself did not appear at all, and Miss Carroll slipped into her place at table.

"That table would have just buzzed if Carroll hadn't sat there," Molly Granger announced, when the meal was over and the girls were trooping upstairs to the general recreation room on the second floor.

The elements of the game that afternoon were busily discussed; but as several of the teachers

were present right up to the time the half-past eight bell rang, when the girls retired to their rooms, any particular talk regarding Beth had to be postponed by either friends or enemies.

CHAPTER XXV

BEFORE THE JUDGMENT SEAT

As for Beth herself, when she left the table, Miss Carroll spoke to her:

"See Miss Hammersly in the office at once, Miss Baldwin. It is imperative."

"Yes, Miss Carroll," Beth said, and went to the interview with apparent calmness.

Miss Hammersly was sitting under the shaded light at her desk, making notes upon a tablet. As Beth entered, the school principal arose quickly so that the shadow fell across her face, while the girl stood in the full glare of the lamp.

"Beth!"

"Yes, Miss Hammersly."

"I have called you here upon a serious matter."

"Yes."

"Do you know the meaning of this afternoon's exhibition of disloyalty and bad taste on the athletic field?"

Beth did not dodge the issue. "I understand, Miss Hammersly," she said, "that some of the

girls say I am dishonest. It has something to do with Mrs. Severn. What it means, I do not know."

Beth's lips were quivering, but she spoke bravely. Miss Hammersly stared straight at her for fully a minute. She saw the black eyes dim, lose their sparkle, and overflow with slow tears that found their courses, one by one, down the girl's cheeks.

The principal of Rivercliff School was not given to sentiment—as a practice. But she suddenly came close to Beth and put both arms about her in a motherly way.

"My poor child!" she said. "You are much to be pitied, I believe. I know that you are maligned. You have no knowledge at all of what this exhibition against you on the part of your schoolmates means?"

"Not at all, Miss Hammersly."

"We will see Mrs. Severn together and find out the facts," declared the principal.

"Mrs. Severn!"

"Yes. Some of your schoolmates have got hold of something that evidently had its origin at Severn Lodge. It came by way of the back stairs, of course—from one servant to another. It is disgraceful enough," continued Miss Hammersly with indignation, "that any of my girls should lis-

ten to servants' gossip; and worse still that they should allow it to influence their minds against a fellow-student.

"We cannot call on Mrs. Severn to-night, Beth. She is a semi-invalid and probably retires early. But we will go to-morrow afternoon."

"Oh, Miss Hammersly! It is so kind of you——"

"No, Beth. I cannot claim any such virtue in the case. I must defend the characters of my pupils for my own sake—for the school's sake. And in this case, my dear, I will defend you for your sake; for I am sure you are guiltless of any intended wrong."

Miss Hammersly and Beth went together in an automobile the following afternoon to Mrs. Severn's home. It was true that, when they entered, the footman seemed to place himself before Beth as though to ward her from the stairs, while the ever-watchful foreign maid hissed from the head of the stairs:

"Miz Baldwig ees not to come up, Jeems!"

But Miss Hammersly handed her card to the footman, saying sternly:

"Announce me to your mistress. Give that card to nobody else!"

The maid, casting a malevolent glance at Beth, backed out of sight. The big footman started up

the stairs, the very calves of his legs in their silk stockings trembling in indignation. But the school principal and Beth were immediately ushered into the presence of the mistress of Severn Lodge.

Mr. Montague, upside down as usual, shrieked a greeting in his most appalling fashion. The gouty one threw a cushion at his cage; but possibly owing to nervousness, she missed it.

“Shut up, Mr. Dennis Montague!” she cried.

“Dennis Mudd! Dennis Mudd!” screamed the parrot. Then, soulfully:

“The noble Duke of York,
He had ten thousand men,
He marched them up a hill one day,
Then he marched them down—

Too-roo-lal-roo-lal-larry! Johnny come home to tea!”

After this long speech the creature was breathless, and the lady of the mansion and Miss Hammersly could converse. The former asked neither of her guests to sit down, nor did she, indeed, glance at Beth.

“I do not understand this call, Miss Hammersly!” said Mrs. Severn, haughtily.

“I propose to explain myself very quickly, Madam,” said the school principal, quite as

haughtily. "When you sent to inquire of me regarding Miss Baldwin last June, after she had gone home, why did you not explain your reason for so doing? Why leave me to find out this calumny against one of my pupils, Mrs. Severn, until now, and through such mean channels?"

"What do you mean, Miss Hammersly, by 'mean channels,' pray?" croaked Mrs. Severn.

"Pray! Pray, I say!" croaked the parrot, in a voice scarcely less harsh.

"Shut up, Mr. Montague!"

"Shut up yourself!" returned the parrot, who had now come out of the cage and was walking along the mopboard of the room, pecking at the carpet.

"I do not think I need explain," said Miss Hammersly. "Through your servants the story has reached my serving people, and, of course, some of the more thoughtless of my girls. Miss Baldwin does not know now of what you accuse her."

"She should be glad I did not send a policeman after her!" cried Mrs. Severn, in weak rage.

"You should be glad, Madam, that I do not institute suit for slander against you on Miss Baldwin's behalf—and that I certainly will do if you continue to repeat your accusation."

"Oh, Miss Hammersly!" begged Beth, in tears now. "Of what am I accused?"

"Of stealing a diamond sunburst. She says it is missing since the last Saturday you were here in June."

Beth's gaze flashed to the neck of Mrs. Severn's gown. The old-fashioned pin she usually wore was missing.

"Oh! that is awful!" the girl murmured.

"No, it is not," Miss Hammersly said sternly. "It is merely unjust—and actionable. I have come here to tell you, Mrs. Severn, that you must write Miss Baldwin an apology, stating that you have no evidence that she had anything to do with the disappearance of your pin. This disavowal I will read to my girls. And I will send home any one of them who dares repeat the calumny upon Miss Baldwin's character."

Mrs. Severn, very angry, tried to be dignified, while the parrot went into a spasm of laughter in the corner of the bay window. But Miss Hammersly had been managing people—and getting her own way with them, too—for twenty years. She and Beth finally left the house with just the paper the school principal had demanded.

On Monday morning after prayers, Miss Hammersly gave the entire school a lecture on the evils of gossip and read Mrs. Severn's written acknowledgment of the wrong she had done Beth. Maude Grimshaw was very much subdued just at this

time. If the story of the lost pin and the accusation against Beth was repeated, it was done so in secret, thereafter.

The wound, however, remained open in Beth's soul. It was hard for even such a sweet nature as her's to overlook and forgive the treatment she had received at the hands of many of her schoolmates.

CHAPTER XXVI

ROUNDING OUT ANOTHER YEAR

IT may have been well for Beth Baldwin's advancement in her studies and for her financial prosperity, that the foregoing incidents had taken place. It shut the young girl more within herself and left her mind freer for study and work.

Those girls who were sorry and ashamed because of countenancing a mean act, even to a slight degree, tried at first to shower favors upon the occupant of Number Eighty, South Wing; at least, they all brought her work for her needle. But Beth knew her friends now—there was no question of that. They were few, and they were loyal, but they took up very little of Beth's time.

As the term progressed she secured other and better paying occupation for her free hours, and outside of school. But she heard nothing more from Mrs. Ricardo Severn nor of the lost sunburst.

Molly and she sometimes talked about it. The mystery, if not the suspicion, still overhung Beth. She was inclined to believe that the foreign maid

might know more about the disappearance of the sunburst than anybody else.

"She may not have stolen it because she wished to profit financially by the deed," Beth said to Molly. "But for some reason she always showed her dislike for me, and she may have done this deliberately to ruin me in Mrs. Severn's estimation."

"I don't know who else would have done it—unless it was that parrot you tell about," Molly said, laughing shortly.

Beth did not go home for the Christmas holidays because of her outside work, and at Easter, the intermission was too short to make a visit to Hudsonvale worth while.

News from home continued to be encouraging throughout the school year. Mr. Baldwin steadily improved in health, for he worked out of doors. He never went back to the Locomotive Works, but the family managed very well, indeed. There was hope of something being done with one of his inventions. Larry Haven had an interest in that, and Beth knew that Larry had supplied the funds for the patent fees and other necessary expenses connected with the matter.

On her part, Beth was doing splendidly. Miss Hammersly was vastly pleased with her standing in her classes. From the time they had visited Mrs. Ricardo Severn—and Mr. Montague—to-

gether, Beth and the school principal had been very good friends, indeed. Miss Hammersly seldom displayed so much affection for any pupil as she did for Beth.

Molly was doing well, too, and at the close of the second year in June Beth stood first in her class and Molly was not far down on the roster.

"But it never *would* have happened, Bethesda, if it hadn't been for you. I was ashamed to be left so far behind a girl who had so much on her hands when I had so little. But I am afraid it has made me very serious-minded," and she shook her head gloomily.

"Oh, nonsense, Jolly Molly!" laughed Beth. "You will never be a 'grave and reverend seignior'—and because of more than the disbarment of sex. A *senior* you will be; but always a jolly one."

"Nay, nay, my child!" quoth Molly. "When I come back to Rivercliff next autumn, I shall begin signing myself, 'J. Molly Granger.' I shall abandon my full name, and let my jocundity be represented by an initial only."

When Beth went to Hambro that second summer, however, for a brief visit with Molly and the aunts, she could not descry much change in her chum.

The summer was a busy one and a happy one for Beth. Her mother had held together the cus-

tomers Beth had obtained the year previous. Indeed, there was a neat sign on the front door of the Bemis Street cottage, and almost daily carriages and automobiles from the better residential section of the town stopped before the house. Ella was learning to help in the work, too, and little Prissy was becoming a perfect housewife. The twins, Ferd and Fred, were sturdy youngsters, going to school and being helpful in vacation time in the garden. Marcus was a manly fellow and—whisper!—he had actually bought a safety razor!

That summer Beth found that she was more popular than ever in her home town. Mr. Lomax asked her to meet his class of girls who would graduate from the high school the next year, and tell them something about what it meant to attend a boarding school. It was at a lawn party, and a good many older people were present.

Beth did her best to inspire the girls with a desire to do as she had done. Some of them would have to follow her methods to a certain extent, for their parents were too poor to pay their full tuition at any school or seminary.

“I believe the prize is worth the work entailed, however,” Beth said, in the course of her simple address. “If I could not go back for my final year at Rivercliff I should feel well repaid for my struggle thus far. But if I am allowed to finish

my course, I know I shall be better able to face the world and make my own way in it than I possibly could do if I had been prepared by any other means.

“The business college course is cheap and quickly gained; but the classical and English courses in a properly conducted school which confers an academic degree fit one for a better and higher position in business or professional life.”

Rather to her chagrin, but to Ella's great delight, the county paper printed Beth's speech in part. The flyaway sister went around repeating extracts from it, and proclaiming to all who would listen that Beth was bound to be an orator.

“A lecturer, anyway,” she insisted. “Our Beth will soon adorn the platform. In spectacles and a cap and gown, she will lead her sisters in charges for women's rights, lecture on the noise nuisance, plead before legislatures for freedom from the trammels of fashion——

“By the way, B. B., Larry says that frock of yours is just stunning.”

“Oh, does he?” returned her sister, placidly.

“Yes. I think you are snubbing Larry.”

“I have no time for boys,” responded Beth.

“Boys! No less!”

“Larry is a boy to me,” Beth declared, in her very haughtiest way.

"I don't care," said Ella, mischievously. "He is beginning to come to me for comfort when you throw him down."

It really did seem as though Larry Haven was striving to show Beth that he had not lost his interest in her or in her career. When Beth first came home that second summer, Larry was frequently at the Baldwin cottage. Whether Beth actually snubbed him, or not, as Ella said, he disappeared soon after, going away for a long outing with Mrs. Haven; so the Baldwins did not see him again until Beth had gone back to Rivercliff in September.

Rather to Beth's surprise, Larry wrote to her soon after she reached school—something he had not done for fully a year and a half. The letter sounded just as though their old intimacy had never been broken, and that the young lawyer was still quite as much her friend and well-wisher as ever.

She was, for some time, undecided whether to answer or not, and how to answer. But finally she replied in a pleasant, brief letter. Larry's epistle was like himself—exuberant:

"The Mater lugged me around from one watering place to another this summer—there was no getting away from her, poor dear!—and kept me

at it so late that you had flitted from the home nest on Bemis Street when I got back to Hudsonvale and my clamoring clients. I never go away on a vacation without expecting to find the heaped-up bodies of exhausted and desperate clients before my office door in the Hudsonvale Block. However, all I found were several insistent roaches from the bakery downstairs and heaps of dust, for I declare, Devine had not been in to clean up for a month!

“What I started to tell you about, Beth, was a girl I met at Saratoga. Fact is, it was the second time I had met her. I am almost tempted to declare it was the third. I spoke to you once of Miss Emeline Freylinghausen. Do you remember the girl who passed me coming out of Rivercliff School when I was going in the day I called to see you? Do you remember her? You said she was a servant, just discharged.

“Well, if you could once see Miss Freylinghausen, you'd say she was the speaking image of that person—that maid-servant! I had met Miss Freylinghausen in New York; and now I have seen a good bit of her at Saratoga. She is an odd girl—frank, I should say, and rather blunt in speech—but not at all the sort of girl that one could put this question to: ‘Have you ever been a servant-maid?’ Ha! ha! Ho! ho! and likewise

He! he! Fancy asking that of one of the Freylinghausens of Philadelphia!

"Yet, to tell the truth, Beth, that was exactly what I was tempted to ask. Not particularly because Miss Freylinghausen looks so much like that discharged maid I saw at Rivercliff, but because the Philadelphia heiress has taken up what she calls a serious work in life. It's quite the fad, I believe, nowadays for girls like her to do social work and the like. She has a hobby, and has interested the Mater in it, too. At least, I hear that Miss Freylinghausen is to appear at Hudsonvale some time this coming winter to prance a little on her hobby-horse for the delectation of the Hudsonvale ladies."

A good deal more there was in the same strain in Larry's sprightly letter; and it was all interesting to Beth. But this about Miss Freylinghausen and her resemblance to Cynthia Fogg, was what impressed Beth the most; for she chanced to remember now that it was Maude Grimshaw who had first noticed that resemblance between Cynthia and the heiress to the Freylinghausen millions.

Beth had not heard from Cynthia since the year before. That odd girl seemed to have quite dropped out of her life; yet somehow Beth had a feeling that they would meet again. Madam

Hammersly had told Beth once that no holiday went by but that she received a card or some little remembrance from Cynthia; but an address was never added to the strange girl's signature.

As for Maude Grimshaw, she did not appear at Rivercliff at the opening of this fall semester. It was whispered that her marks had been so low the spring previous that she could not have gone on with her class without many conditions, and would have been dropped before Christmas.

So there passed out of Beth's school life a very unpleasant and annoying influence. Yet, who was to say that Maude Grimshaw's treatment of the girl from Hudsonvale had not been good discipline for the latter?

CHAPTER XXVII

THE ICE CARNIVAL

BETH entered her senior year in high feather and with her affairs at full sea. She had saved more than enough money to pay for her full year's tuition. There would be less time during her senior course to devote to the earning of money; but what she could accumulate these coming nine months would go toward the payment of that supposed loan of four hundred dollars that had always been a burden on her mind.

Beth had met Mrs. Euphemia Haven once the preceding summer, and all the time the girl was in Mrs. Haven's company, her cheeks burned as she thought that she was beholden to Larry's mother.

"If I ever owe anybody again, or use money borrowed from anybody, no matter who," Beth told Molly, who was her confidant; "it will be because I am lame in both feet, like Jonathan's son, because I have as many boils as Job, and am as bald as Elijah must have been."

"Goodness, Beth! don't say such dreadful

things," begged Molly. "And out of the Scriptures, too. It sounds irreverent."

Beth's standing in class naturally gave her a long lead for the presidency of the seniors. Not that mere scholarship counts high for that honored position; but Beth had been steadily growing in popularity with the students in general of Rivercliff School, and with her own classmates in particular.

Without Maude Grimshaw to form a cabal against her, there really was little opposition to Beth when "J. Molly Granger," as the jolly one signed her name to the typewritten notice on the board, launched her chum's boom. Laura Hedden, Izola Pratt, Miss Rice, and several others who had been Maude's most faithful "Me toos," failed to raise much of a barrier against the rising flood of Beth's popularity. Besides, they could not settle upon an opposing candidate.

Therefore, six weeks after the term opened, Beth was elected to the class presidency. The senior class entertained the other older pupils in the drawing rooms. There was music, and dancing, and——

"Real *men* for partners!" sighed Molly, ecstatically. "Think of it! We seniors may dance with the male visitors—if we are asked!"

Beth had a new dress—black and silver. Molly

said it was "a dream." And certainly her brunette chum did look lovely in it. Although Beth and Mrs. Baldwin had made it themselves, it was a gown with which any professional dressmaker might have been satisfied.

There was just one thing missing. Beth had told Mrs. Baldwin there would be when the frock was tried on before she left home. Great-grandmother Lomis' corals would have given just the touch needed to make Beth, as Ella declared, "fairly splendiferous."

But Mrs. Baldwin had not seemed to see it Beth's way. The latter felt that she was now old enough to wear the heirloom. She felt hurt that her mother did not get it for her; but she contented herself on the occasion of this first senior reception, by wearing a band of coral-hued velvet about her throat. Her dusky shoulders gleamed exquisitely under the black lace that a wealthy customer had given her; her silver-figured, short-waisted gown hung gracefully about her as she walked. She was all a-sparkle when, just as the music for the first dance struck up, she appeared before Miss Hammersly, who, with several of the teachers, was receiving.

"My dear Beth," said the principal, tapping Beth's bare arm with her fan, "I have a partner for you. He has been begging the honor and I

cannot refuse—although his name may cause you an unpleasant thought. But that is all over now, I hope.”

Beth looked startled for a moment. The very good looking young man beside the principal was quite unknown to her.

“Mr. Severn,” said Miss Hammersly, “Miss Baldwin. Mr. Severn is Mrs. Ricardo Severn’s nephew.”

“Oh! the nephew who renamed the parrot!” gasped the blushing Beth.

“Right!” cried the young fellow, his eyes twinkling. “Really, we, as a family, are insufferably snobbish. So I determined to save Mr. Montague from that sin.”

“Dennis Mudd!” laughed Beth. “Dear me! I think he hated me.”

“He does not love me,” confessed Mr. Severn, “though I did finish his education.”

“And that foreign person——”

“You mean Saronie, the maid?”

“Yes; she seemed fairly to hate me. I wonder why?”

“We have much in common,” declared the young man, “you and I, Miss Baldwin. Saronie does not fancy me. I think it is because Mrs. Ricardo, when she shuffles off this mortal coil, will have much personal property to give away.”

Beth found young Mr. Severn a very amusing person. She danced three times with him, and then refused him as a partner for the rest of the evening. "Why, you're as bad as Mr. Montague," she told him. "You want everything and everybody your own way."

The reception was an unqualified success, and Beth was established in the popularity of her class. Even the wealthiest and dressiest girls had to admit that "Baldwin shines with the best."

Beth was destined to see more of Roland Severn. Usually young men did not ruffle the sheltered waters of Rivercliff School life. They were looked upon by Miss Hammersly and the madam as pirate craft, and were warned off the shoals quite gallantly by the whole faculty of the school.

But this was the winter that the Nessing River froze over so solidly that all navigation as high up as Rivercliff ceased before the first day of December. There was no snow, and the surface of the broad stream was like glass. The girls of Rivercliff School were on the ice every hour they could spare from their studies.

The bend, between the landing and the point on this side of the river, was free of ice-boats at all times, for in rounding the point sailing in either direction, the scooters and larger craft had to make a wide detour.

This bend proved to be the best stretch of ice on the river, and Jackson City people came down, strung colored electric lamps along the shore, erected booths and shelters, and on moonlight evenings the scene at the foot of the bluff on which Rivercliff School stood was a gay one, indeed.

The ice carnival lasted several weeks, and attracted visitors from far and near. Miss Hammersly was very careful about allowing the girls, even the seniors, to go on the ice in the evening; never allowing more than ten to go together, and always with one of the teachers for chaperon.

It was on these occasions that Beth met Roland Severn. Beth always had Molly with her. The latter began to write her name with the letters F. W. after it.

"For pity's sake, Molly Granger! what do they mean?" asked somebody in Beth's hearing.

"Fifth Wheel," announced Molly, gravely.

"'Fifth Wheel?'"

"Yes. Don't you see how much use I am when we go skating? Mr. Severn looks at me, sometimes, as though I were something the cat had brought in."

But who could have carried tales of Roland Severn's attentions to Beth as far as Hudsonvale? After about a fortnight of this sport at the ice carnival a tall young man with light hair, a fur cap

and huge gloves, who could skate almost as well as the professional teacher who gave exhibitions each evening after nine o'clock, appeared.

"Larry Haven!" cried Beth, fairly falling into his arms to save herself from a tumble, she was so surprised.

Questions and answers volleyed from each. Larry claimed to have come up to Jackson City "on a case." Every one was well. He was going to stay at a hotel for several days and expected to have each evening free.

Molly Granger tapped Mr. Severn softly on the sleeve. "Come away, little Roland," she whispered. "That is a sure-enough lawyer-man who used to pull Beth to school on his sled. You and I are still school children. Come away from here—and I will weep with you."

Beth bore Larry off to Miss Carroll, who chanced to be with the party on this evening; and the young lawyer came to Rivercliff School by appointment, was welcomed by the madam, who graciously remembered him, and was introduced to Miss Hammersly herself.

Larry remained much in evidence until the school broke up for the Christmas and New Year holidays. But it cannot be said that Beth bestowed any great amount of attention upon him, after all. The other girls pronounced him "just dear."

Beth was in training for the skating races that the skating committee, with the help of Miss Crossleigh, of the school had arranged for. Skating had always been popular at Rivercliff; and now that it had gained such general approval there was not much else talked about outside of study hours and the classroom.

Beth, in her first winter at Rivercliff, had shown her superiority in skating over many of her classmates; but now she had a number of rivals. Both the long distance and short distance races were going to be hotly contested. As for the exhibitions of fancy skating, Beth did not participate in them at all. She saved her strength, skill and wind for the real work on the races.

Miss Hammersly lent her support to the affair, as she did to everything in the way of athletics that was of physical benefit to her girls.

The races were at night, for it was then that there could be the most brilliant display upon the ice. A thousand electric lamps, the power supplied from the trolley company's plant up the river, aided a cold and brilliant December moon in illuminating the icefield that night.

Other races had been held before, and hockey games and other sports; but nothing previously arranged drew so great a crowd as the Rivercliff School ice sports. The school was the most popu-

lar establishment in that part of the State, and largest. The sports drew the friends of the school for many miles around, as well as hundreds from Jackson City, and practically all of the hamlet at Rivercliff landing that could get to the riverside without the aid of crutches.

Larry had remained for this event. Indeed, it being but two days to the closing of the term, he had planned a surprise for Beth—and that surprise had been confided only to Miss Hammersly, for her permission had to be obtained.

First came the races, however; and that glorious night would long be remembered in the annals of Rivercliff School. "It will be sung in song and story," Molly Granger proclaimed, afterward.

"How can it be 'sung in story,' Granger?" demanded one carping critic.

"In recitative," responded Molly, quickly.

Molly herself was a contestant in several of the events of the evening. She was not a very rapid skater; but she was sure on her skates, and she had learned many fancy strokes. One of her best feats was when she and Stella Price waltzed very prettily together on the ice.

It was the fifty and the one hundred yard dashes, and the two-mile race around a measured oval on the ice, that held the deepest attention of the throng that had come to view these trials

of speed. The dashes were from a flying start, of course. In the fifty yard Beth was second; in the hundred yard she was first—by a good lead. Later, when the contestants for the two-mile race were started, she was one of the favorites.

There were twenty starters, and they were all good skaters. The little, dark, ugly girl, Laura Hedden, who had been such a friend of Maude Grimshaw, was next to Beth in the line.

Spitefulness breeds spitefulness. Laura could not have told why she "hated that Baldwin girl;" but she had been so well taught by the absent Maude that she considered Beth her particular enemy now.

As they got off, Laura's left skate clashed with Beth's right. Both girls might have been thrown; but Beth recovered herself instantly on the other foot and darted off—only a stroke behind the best of the starters. Laura began to shriek:

"Foul! Foul! Baldwin fouled me! 'Tisn't fair!"

As it chanced, Miss Crossleigh and one of the official starters had seen the accident.

"You are the one who fouled, Miss Hedden," said the instructor, tartly. "You may race or not as you please. I do not think it was intentional on your part."

But Laura had wasted so much time calling aloud that she was injured, it was useless for her to attempt the race. Most of the skaters were already half a lap away. But Laura found friends among the other girls and some in the crowd of spectators, to hold up her contention that she had been fouled by Beth Baldwin.

Luckily, Beth knew nothing about this at the time. In her short, close-fitting sweater and cap, with her scant skirt, her gloved hands clenched, she had shot away in the immediate wake of the other girls, scarcely noticing her clash of skates with Laura.

At the far turn on the first lap she "crossed the bows" of several of the other contestants, and took the inside of the course. She knew enough about fancy skating to take short turns without faltering, and in such a brief race as two miles she believed the struggle would be close all the way.

And it was. At the second turn (it was two laps to the mile), Beth was among the leaders—seven of the best skaters in the school. Every girl tried to do her best.

The end of the first mile saw Beth and Miss Rice elbow to elbow. There were others near; but the race was really between these two from this point to the end.

Sometimes Beth would forge a foot or two



THERE WAS A WHITE LINE BEFORE HER! IT WAS THE TAPE.
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ahead; sometimes Miss Rice would make a spurt.

It was grilling work. Beth could not shake off her rival and began to feel her own strength waning. She had to arouse all her energy and determination when she came into the home stretch, the last half lap of the two miles, for she was well spent.

The cheering and encouragement came to her ears faintly. Luckily, she could not hear what Laura Hedden and her supporters were saying.

It seemed to Beth as though all her strength had gone—as though her limbs below her knees were merely wooden props which she could barely push on.

She lost sight of the crowd; and the lights around the course, which were strung on iron pikes driven into the ice, seemed to stand still. She heard heavy breathing—seemingly at her very ear. Was it Rice? Or was another contestant overtaking her?

Then she realized that it was her own breathing she heard. Her lungs were pumping savagely. Only a well-trained body, untrammelled by improper dress, could have stood that strain.

There was a white line before her! It was the tape.

Where was Rice? Where——

She dashed against the tape, and the next mo-

ment Molly and Miss Crossleigh caught her. Miss Rice was six yards behind!

"One of the fastest two miles ever skated on this river, bar none, Miss Baldwin," the official scorer, the sporting editor of the *Jackson City Daily Mail*, announced. "That last half lap you made was a wonder."

But Beth's abundant success could not completely smother the objections of the small part of the school that was opposed to her. It was not the last spiteful exhibition of prejudice against Beth that ever raised its head at Rivercliff.

Now that she was breathing easily again and the pulse had stopped pounding in her ears, Beth could hear something besides applause. The congratulations of her friends did not entirely quench the criticisms of those who sided with Laura Hedden.

The latter was furious. The fact that Miss Crossleigh would pay no attention to her announcement of unjust treatment urged the stubborn and ill-natured girl to claim still greater injury than she had in the first place. Indeed, the grievance that she herself had manufactured against Beth had grown to mountainous proportions.

All the way up to the school, after the carnival broke up, Beth heard hints and innuendoes re-

garding the unfairness shown in the conduct of the two-mile race. At first she did not understand it; she only realized that, despite her high standing in her class and with most of the girls and the teachers, there were still those who considered her little less than the "forward pauper" that Maude Grimshaw had once called her.

Although Maude had left Rivercliff, her spirit had not been quenched among certain of the older girls. "The ill men do lives after them," is a trite and true saying. The bad influence Miss Grimshaw had gained over her "Me toos" still existed, and hatred of Beth was fostered by Laura Hedden and girls of her type.

In this incident of the race the little, dark, unpleasant girl had a personal reason for being angry with Beth. She was really a very good skater; and had she not stopped at the beginning of the race to wrangle over the "foul," she would have stood just as good a chance of winning as Beth.

"But who could win *anything* at this school when all the teachers are prejudiced in the favor of just one person?" Laura demanded loudly, as the crowd climbed the hilly street to the school.

"You are quite right, Laura," agreed another girl, who thought she had some cause for enmity to the president of the senior class.

"Oh, you can't beat that Beth Baldwin!" laughed a third, nastily. "What do you say, Rice? Was that race fairly won?"

Miss Rice thought she had reason for disliking Beth, too. It dated back to the time when she had so hurt and insulted the girl from Hudsonvale by refusing to trust her handkerchiefs in Beth's possession. Of course, when one has ill-treated another, unless one acknowledges his fault, the ill-feeling remains. Miss Rice had never owned up to her wrong attitude toward Beth.

And now that she had been beaten by her in this very close race, she was thoroughly disappointed and angry.

"You can't expect Miss Crossleigh to be fair when Miss Hammersly's pet is involved, can you?" scoffed Miss Rice. "Twice Beth Baldwin skated right in front of me. It would have been called a foul on the part of any other contestant."

Beth, who was within earshot, said nothing. She was thankful that Larry and the other boys had not been allowed to walk up from the ice with the Rivercliff girls.

Miss Crossleigh and the other teachers were well out of hearing, but Molly Granger was at hand.

"Cracky-me!" she blurted out. "What ever are you talking about, Rice? Don't you know that

every knock is a boost? You were beaten fairly enough, and you'll only make yourself the laughing stock of the whole school if you say such things. Of course Beth skated in front of you. Especially at the end of the race."

This caused some of the other girls to laugh; and, naturally, the "knockers" were not pleased.

"No matter what Beth Baldwin did, Molly Granger, *you'd* back her up," said Laura Hedden, spitefully.

"You bet I would!" cried the slangy Molly. "I'm one good little backer, *I* am! I'd back up Nero if I heard *you* running him down. I'd know for sure that there had been a mistake made in history."

"'R-r-rebecca! don't fight!'" sing-songed Mamie Dunn, through her nose. "You're as bad as the rest of them, Molly. Let it drop."

But Laura Hedden and her personal friends, as well as Miss Rice and her chums, had no intention of giving up their point of view.

There was a well-defined "party of the opposition" to the senior class president and to her supporters, organized during these few final days of the term. Beth Baldwin went home with the feeling that on her return she would have to face the active enmity of a not inconsiderable number of her classmates.

CHAPTER XXVIII

MISS FREYLINGHAUSEN

LARRY'S surprise included a novel way for Beth and a dozen of her girl friends to get home for the holidays. These girls, besides Beth and Molly, lived in the river towns strung along the Nessing between the school and Hudsonvale. Larry secured a huge sleigh in Jackson City and a team of well sharpened horses with a sober driver to take them down the river on the ice. Miss Hammersly approved of the party starting early in the morning so as to make Hudsonvale before night.

The girls could drop off at their several home towns, while Molly would remain over night with Beth and go on to Hambro—and the seven aunts—the next day. Larry was to sit on the driver's seat and act as courier for the party.

It was an exciting and novel ride, and all the girls pronounced it a lovely adventure. They thanked Beth as their hostess, for all seemed to take it for granted that had it not been for Beth, Larry Haven would not have done such a thing.

There was a crowd to see them off when the

the sleigh slid down upon the ice, and in it Molly saw Mr. Roland Severn. She beckoned to him to come close, and whispered:

“Grieve not, brave youth! There are other fish in the sea quite as good as those already hooked.”

“Thank you, Miss Granger. I am quite sure of it,” he returned, with gravity. “I shall be in Hambro before New Year. May I call?”

“Cracky-me!” Molly was startled into exclaiming. “I wasn’t looking upon myself in the light of a fish, nor do I wish to be so considered.”

But she had to admit to Beth that Mr. Severn was quick at repartee. “It isn’t often that anybody gets the best of lil’ Molly. I wonder if I could draw a portrait of him—as a cat, of course—or perhaps a fish!”

It was a gay and busy holiday time for Beth. The family seemed particularly glad to see her. And Beth found a new spirit of hopefulness in the little cottage.

Marcus had been taking a business course at an evening school for some time. Young as he was, he had been advanced by his employer to the typewriter and was drawing eight dollars a week. Mr. Baldwin seemed very cheerful, too, and Beth thought he seemed a hundred per cent. better.

Larry and she had been acting the part of very good friends for nearly a fortnight; but for two

days after her return home Beth did not see the young lawyer at all.

"Was he going to withdraw into his shell again?" she queried. She scarcely knew what to make of Larry in some of his moods; and she was old enough now to resent such conduct.

But on the third evening Larry appeared at the Bemis Street cottage, and evidently in high spirits. He brought from his mother a particular and written invitation for Beth to be present at an evening function at Mrs. Haven's, scheduled to occur in the week between Christmas and New Year.

"You ought, really, to have a new dress," Mrs. Baldwin said, all of a flutter. "Euphemia always has such nice people at her evening parties."

"Tempt me not!" laughed Beth. "I have been hobnobbing with the rich so long, that Mrs. Haven's dressiest affairs have no terrors for me. Besides, I can't afford it. Moreover, the black lace and silver is new here in Hudsonvale."

"Likewise," said Ella, with her head on one side like a saucy sparrow, "Larry has never seen her in that."

Beth drove her out of the room then; but it was for another reason. She asked, frankly: "Mamma Baldwin, don't you think I am old enough now to wear Great-grandmother Lomis' corals?"

Her mother fairly gasped. She sat down sud-

denly and looked up into her eldest daughter's face with almost a pleading expression in her own.

"My dear Beth!" she whispered.

"Mother dear! what is the matter?" demanded the girl, a little frightened by her mother's air.

"I—I shrink from telling you. Those beautiful corals! Been in the family so long! And you had been led to expect them!"

Mrs. Baldwin was actually sobbing. Her daughter put both arms around her and hugged her close.

"There, there, dear! Never mind! If you don't want me to wear them——"

"But I'd be glad to have you wear them, if——"

"If what?"

"If they were yours to wear!"

"What—what do you mean?" stammered Beth.

"They had to be sold, my child! I had to sell the heirloom that had been so long in our family. You will never be able to wear the corals again, dear Beth."

Beth actually swallowed something that seemed to choke her. "Oh, my dear!" she said. "I might have known you poor folks at home were having a worse time than you let selfish me know."

"No, no, Beth!" cried Mrs. Baldwin. "They

were sold before your father left the Works. They were sold to pay your first year's tuition!"

"*What?*" almost shouted Beth.

"Yes, my dear. Forgive me——"

"Forgive you?" cried the deliriously happy Beth, trying to dance her mother about the room.

"Why, darling little Mumsy! you have freed my heart of a great burden of woe! I'm glad to go to Mrs. Haven's party to-night——"

"What are you saying, child?"

"Oh, well! I can look everybody straight in the eye and tell each and every one—— Well! never mind! I am happy—*so* happy!"

"But, my dear child! Are you crazy? Your Great-grandmother's corals——"

"Goodness me, Mother mine!" interposed Beth. "What do you suppose I care about the old corals—really? This that you tell me lifts a load off my mind. Then you didn't borrow money to send me to Rivercliff?"

"No-o."

"And the four hundred dollars hasn't got to be paid back?"

"No-o."

"Well then! why not happiness instead of woe-begoneness?" cried the girl. "I am delighted. Only, Mother mine, I wish you had told me this long, long ago."

“Why—dear——”

“I should have felt so much happier,” declared Beth. “So very much happier.”

Another thing happened that day besides Mrs. Euphemia Haven’s reception. Beth received a letter from Madam Hammersly. The madam wrote rather a queer letter, containing this important question:

“Is Cynthia Fogg with you in your town? I have received from her a Christmas present—expressed direct from Hudsonvale—a very beautiful *lavalier*e that could not have cost less than ten pounds.” Madam Hammersly steadfastly refused to think in anything but English money.

It was plain to be seen that Madam Hammersly feared her one-time parlor maid had become possessed of the valuable trinket dishonestly.

“What do you suppose that can mean?” Beth asked her mother; but, of course, Mrs. Baldwin was quite as ignorant as Beth herself of the whereabouts of Cynthia Fogg.

Beth wondered if she ought to make a house-to-house canvass of Hudsonvale for the elusive Cynthia. And if the girl was in the village, why had she not been to the cottage on Bemis Street? Cynthia knew Beth’s address.

Beth went to the Haven house that evening with several interesting matters in her busy mind—and

she went again in a taxicab. Marcus paid for it out of his own pocket. He rode along with her, "so as to get his money's worth," he said.

To tell the truth, Beth was rather disappointed when she found it was not merely an evening dance—for she "adored balls," so she said. The larger dancing floor at Mrs. Haven's was littered with chairs and benches, and, at first, when the guests came down from the dressing rooms, they were officiously herded into the rows of seats by ushers.

Mrs. Haven addressed her guests in her very best platform style. Larry's mother was president of two clubs, vice-president of another, and principal speaker at most of their meetings. So she had pat the public speaker's manner.

"I have brought you together this evening, dear friends, to be first entertained in a rather novel way. Afterward we shall have dancing. I met not long ago a very bright young lady from Philadelphia, who interested me very much in a subject now coming largely before the public, and I felt the wish to have her come here to talk to us of Hudsonvale, who may be helped by her experience.

"The question of domestic service has of late years become of grave importance. This brave young lady—whose name you will all recognize, and whose social position you all know—had the

temerity to go forth and gain information at first hand regarding the real conditions of such service, and of the characters of the girls who enter into domestic service. I take great pleasure in introducing to you, ladies and gentlemen, Miss C. Emeline Freylinghausen, of Philadelphia, my guest for the holidays."

A lithe girl, in a perfect evening gown, her hair piled high on her head, a plentiful sprinkle of freckles across the bridge of her nose, and wonderfully compelling blue eyes, stepped forward and bowed. When she began to speak it was a pleasure to listen to her—whether or not one believed in her theories or cared about her subject.

Beth was seated far from the speaker and to one side. Was it——? Could it be——?

Beth heard the speaker's tongue arraign mistresses who ill-treated their servants or were careless of their comfort. Her biting sarcasm was just what one would expect from Cynthia Fogg's lips.

But, Miss Freylinghausen, of Philadelphia, the heiress to millions, to houses and lands; and Cynthia Fogg, of whose green hat with the purple feather which Molly had knocked overboard from the *Water Wagtail*, Beth still retained a very vivid memory——

"Why, it is impossible!" gasped Beth, aloud, and forgot to applaud when the little, earnest talk was over. She sat in her seat, unable to rise, or even think connectedly, when the talk had ended.

Suddenly, the charming figure came down from the dais and seized Beth in her arms.

"Well, Chicken Little! who told you the sky had fallen?" demanded Miss C. Emeline Freylinghausen, shaking Beth, playfully.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE "PERFECT NUMBER" IN AUNTS

BETH had something really wonderful to tell Molly Granger when the winter vacation was over and she met that young lady on the train bound for Rivercliff School.

And Molly listened in as rapt amazement as Beth had experienced when she listened to the public talk of "Miss Cynthia Emeline Fogg Freylinghausen," as Molly ever after insisted upon calling their mysterious friend.

"And cracky-me!" giggled Molly. "If only Maude Grimshaw could know this! She was such a close personal friend of the heiress of the Freylinghausen millions. Oh, my aunt! as Cynthia herself would say. In my case—oh, my seven aunts! And Bethesda! They are all coming to our graduation."

"Who are?" demanded the surprised, not to say startled, Beth. Molly did jump about so from one subject to another.

"My aunts. They have promised. Yea, verily, they have threatened. Do you suppose, if I tell

Miss Hammersly they are coming, that she will feel it necessary to limit us all to fewer friends on graduation day?"

But that fondly-looked-forward-to day still seemed a long, long way ahead to Beth and her class at Rivercliff School. First, much chatter and wonder had to be expressed over the discovery that Cynthia Fogg was a "millionairess"—Molly's designation, of course.

Madam Hammersly was really the most amazed person who ever wore a cap. She exclaimed to Beth once:

"Miss Baldwin, to think of my scolding that young lady so—and actually discharging her for incompetence!"

"But she was incompetent, wasn't she?" laughed Beth. "Whatever Cynthia learned about the theory of domestic service, she certainly did not learn much about the actual practice thereof."

"But—Miss Freylinghausen!" murmured the good lady, who had all the middle-class English-woman's awe for riches and position.

Cynthia, at Mrs. Haven's party, had been quite confidential with Beth. The latter learned that Cynthia had by no means started out with the intention of informing herself concerning the theory of domestic service. She was merely an idle, disappointed, rich girl, disgusted with her life.

She had actually run away from home—not from an institution—when the chums met her on the *Water Wagtail*. She was not then of age, and she had a guardian who had insisted on her going to Europe with his wife and daughters. It was he whom Cynthia (as Beth and Molly continued to call her) feared would follow her.

To hide her escapade the guardian announced that she had gone to Europe. Meanwhile, Cynthia was bothering the good madam at Rivercliff School.

“The dear thing!” she told Beth. “I shall always love and pity her, for I did make her so much trouble!”

“But my dear Miss Freylinghausen!” gasped Mrs. Haven, who was listening frankly to all this. “You do not mean to say that you were at that school with Beth?”

“Not in the literary department—in the domestic department,” laughed Cynthia. “Beth was really instrumental in getting me the job. And at that I could not keep it. I couldn’t suit Madam Hammersly—and I really tried, too. But Beth suited her. Beth showed herself to be the ‘better man of us two.’ ”

Miss Freylinghausen’s evident liking for Beth—her admiration for her, in fact—made its impression upon Mrs. Haven.

That lady's eyes were often fixed upon the brilliant beauty of her old friend's daughter during the remainder of the evening—and with a new expression in her own countenance.

But all this was "ancient history" now. Back at Rivercliff, Beth Baldwin had altogether too much of really vital importance to think of to be bothered by reflections upon either Larry's mother or Larry himself.

As she had feared, the girl from Hudsonvale returned to school to face pronounced opposition in her own class. It did not so much matter about the dislike expressed by girls in the lower grades; but it was in the power of Laura Hedden, Miss Rice, and a few others of the seniors, to make Beth's existence very unhappy indeed.

And the worst of it was, it did not seem to be a situation that Beth could control. She could not take affairs into her own hands, as she had on that long past occasion of the Red Masque. She could not withdraw herself now from the remainder of her class. Being its president, and a leader in all its activities, it would have been beneath her even to notice many of the slights and insults aimed at her. The sting of them was quite as sharp, however. This situation was harder to endure than any of Maude Grimshaw's old-time persecutions.

At every business meeting of the senior class (and these became frequent as time went on), the schism against Beth was shown to be stronger. It did not do for her to propose the simplest thing; at once some girl jumped up with an objection or a counter-proposal.

"Why," said the usually jolly Molly, quite seriously now, "I believe if we had to discuss right now whether 'two and two make four,' Hedden or Rice or somebody, would jump up and claim it didn't. What's the matter with you all, anyway?"

"Well, you're not going to have everything all your own way, Molly Granger, so there!" said one of the obstructionists.

"No," said another. "Too many things have been cut and dried for us. *We* want to have something to say about what the senior class does."

"Who's we?" demanded Molly, warmly.

"Point of order!" drawled one girl. "Has Miss Granger been called to the chair, *pro tem*?"

Beth began heartily to wish that Molly was chairman at these disorderly meetings—or somebody besides herself. When the opposition could not gain its point, very often the quarrelsome girls were so noisy that the session adjourned without having accomplished the object for which it had been called.

Of course, her inability to control the meet-

ings counted against Beth. Reports of them circulated through the school and quickly reached the ears of the teachers. Miss Hammersly would be the last to know about the friction in the senior class; but she must know in time, and she would then call the class president to account.

Long as the time seemed to June, the days passed only too swiftly. The senior class of Rivercliff considered itself, of course, quite a wonderful body of young ladies. And Miss Hammersly did all in her power to inspire them with the belief that the whole world lay open before them to be conquered.

Beth kept busily at work with both her books and her needle. She was piling up quite a little sum of money—there was a new object in view.

Mr. Baldwin was doing very well with one of his inventions, and a second one promised to make both him and Larry Haven moderately wealthy. The family was not likely to need her financial aid after all. When she began to teach, her salary would be her own.

And now that she had so much money saved, Beth wished to try to recover Great-grandmother Lomis' corals. She had learned from her mother who had the heirloom; she was sure Mrs. Haven never wore the corals; she desired very much to buy them back from Larry's mother.

For, after all, Beth was a real girl and loved jewelry and the like just as much as any other girl.

This hope, however, was not the first thought in her mind. She neglected none of her senior class tasks for the sake of earning more money. She had even passed a good deal of her work over to another girl in a lower class, who needed to help herself through school. The doctrine of independence was beginning to be established at Rivercliff School in spite of such girls as Laura Heddon.

Social affairs were always of more importance to the senior class than to any of the other girls. The members of the senior class being really the hostesses at the monthly “hop,” considerable time and thought had to be given by the social committee to these occasions.

Beth, as class president, was chairman of this social committee; but she saw so much opposition arrayed against her that she feared the good times of the other girls would be spoiled if she did not withdraw. Her act in doing this—with the excuse that she was too busy to fulfil the duties attached to the chairmanship—did not please either her own friends or the opposition.

“Say! what do you do that for?” Molly Granger demanded. “Want to ‘crab the film?’ We need you to suggest ideas—and carry ’em out,

too. Now, you just see! The hop this week will be a fizzle."

"Oh, be an optimist, honey," Beth said, laughing. "Look on the bright side."

"That's all right. I know how to be an optimist," Molly returned, though still resentfully. "It's like the old fellow with the two teeth."

"Who was he?" asked her chum.

"Why, this poor old chap could only eat the plainest kind of food, and couldn't read anything, or play anything, or make anything. Just the same he seemed pretty cheerful and thought this world a pretty fine place to live in.

"'Yes,' he said, 'I'm goin' on eighty-two. I've been bald-headed thirty years, a widower for twenty-five, had indigestion nearly all my life, can't hear unless folks holler at me, can't see to read, ain't reliable on my feet any more, and I've only got two teeth left—but, thank God, they hit!'

"That's an optimist," concluded jolly Molly. "But there's nothing very optimistic in the outlook for our evening parties if you back out, Bethesda. I can't see what you are thinking of."

Beth dared not tell her chum just what she really was thinking of. It seemed to Beth Baldwin that the only way to stop friction in the senior class was for her to resign as class president.

Larry Haven seemed to have considerable busi-

ness to see to for his clients at Jackson City or in the vicinity that spring. And he came frequently to Rivercliff to call. On the other hand, Mr. Roland Severn was quite a favorite with Miss Granger. One or the other, sometimes both, were at the senior receptions all those last months of Beth and Molly's stay at Rivercliff.

On the very evening to which Molly looked forward so apprehensively, both Larry and Roland Severn appeared as guests of the senior class. Beth had considered retiring to Number Eighty after supper and not coming down for the party at all; but she was glad she had not done this when she saw the boys. Larry would have been sure to make inquiries and that would have called attention to the trouble in the senior class.

That the opposition to Beth as president was really increasing, was plain to all the observant girls. If Beth chanced to pass certain groups the laughter and chatter ceased instantly. At other times scornful glances and sharp speeches were flung at the class president.

With two such gallants as Larry and Roland (for both hovered about Beth and Molly), neither of the girl chums could feel neglected. Indeed, jolly Molly would not have been neglected in any case, for she was popular with almost everybody, despite her partizanship in Beth's cause.

If there were any boys at these parties at all, they were sure to give Molly Granger plenty of attention. Her tongue was the smartest of all her class—and she could say funny and bright things without putting any sting into them.

Some of the other seniors were popular with the visitors, too; but not all. Miss Rice, for instance, although one of the best dressed girls in the school, was almost sure to be a wallflower. She danced now and then with some other girl; the remainder of the time she either sat alone, or joined some equally neglected group.

That is, unless Larry Haven or Roland Severn asked for the honor of being her partner. Always, if they were present, these young men each danced with Miss Rice at least once. There were, likewise, other wallflowers with whom these two danced.

Though a good skater, Miss Rice was not a good dancer. And she possessed no flow of small talk and few of the graces that are supposed to attract young men. Besides, she was downright homely.

Nevertheless, Miss Rice had a bright mind—too bright to believe, for a moment, that her own personal attractions caused the two young men to put themselves out solely for her pleasure.

Of course, as Miss Hammersly would not have

allowed any of her girls to dance continually with the same partners, Larry and Roland could not hover about Beth and Molly all the evening. But they could easily have found more attractive girls than the ones they often selected when Beth and Molly were dancing with other partners.

On this particular evening Miss Rice retired to Madam Hammersly's room to repair a small tear in the lace of her skirt. The door was not closed; but there was a heavy portière between the room and the hall and anybody outside would not have guessed the girl's nearness.

“Well, Severn, old boy, have you done your duty among the ‘overlooked ladies’ this evening?” asked a masculine voice.

“I should hope so,” was Roland's reply. “And twice with Miss Rice.”

“You've nothing on me there,” said Larry Haven. “I shouldn't want to displease Beth, but sometimes it's a bore to dance with these wall-flowers.”

“Now you've said it!” young Severn agreed, with feeling.

“But Beth says I can't come at all to these ‘shindigs’ if I don't help give the unpopular girls a good time. And she picks the ones I must dance with, too,” and Larry chuckled rather ruefully.

“She said as much to me,” Roland Severn ac-

knowledged. "She's an awfully thoughtful, kind-hearted girl."

"She's a dear," agreed Larry, warmly. "Beth was always just the best ever. Thinks about others more than she does of herself."

The two young men walked away. Miss Rice remained in the semi-darkness of the madam's room for some time—long enough to feel that her cheeks were cool again and that the tears were gone from her eyes.

The thoughtless words of the two careless young men served an unexpected purpose. For once good grew from evil—sweet from the bitter. Ill-tempered as Miss Rice had shown herself to be, she was not shallow like Laura Hedden and some of the others who were opposed to Beth Baldwin in school affairs.

She saw at once that Beth, without suspecting that Miss Rice or the other wallflowers would ever know about it, had used her influence with the two most popular young men attending the school dances to insure the neglected members of the senior class the pleasure of having male partners.

Of course, as a member of the social committee, it had been Beth's duty to see that all were made happy if possible; but Miss Rice well knew that it was something besides duty that had suggested to the class president this particular way of aiding

in the pleasure of the social occasion for all in the senior class.

To girls in general, and of the age of Beth's classmates, the attentions of young men are as pleasing and satisfactory as anything in life. It gives even an awkward girl more confidence in herself to be singled out as a dancing partner by young men.

The chums, however, really had little time for “boys,” as Molly scoffingly called them. “Too much to do. And seven aunts to see me duck from under the scholastic yoke,” added the jolly one.

Miss Rice's discovery, made as she mended her torn lace in the madam's room, bore fruit. She was really a serious-minded girl.

She could recall now many thoughtful and helpful things Beth Baldwin had proposed for the good of the senior class. Many of these suggestions Miss Rice, herself, and the Laura Hedden crowd had opposed with both vigor and venom.

In fully a dozen cases the awakened girl had to admit that Beth Baldwin's plans had proved wise. Her withdrawal now from the chairmanship of the social committee was likely to be a real catastrophe.

After all, Miss Rice was loyal to Rivercliff; and she believed that others of the obstructionists were, too. Was their opposition to the will of the

majority of the senior class—and especially to Beth Baldwin—going to be of any good in the end?

“Even if we make her resign the presidency,” she told some of her confidants the day following the evening party, “it will create a terrible row. And Miss Hammersly will be just as hurt as she can be.”

“Let her be!” snapped one of Laura Hedden’s particular friends. “What business has she to let a pauper come to Rivercliff, anyway?”

“Now, that’s all nonsense, and we know it,” said Miss Rice, boldly. “In the first place, it’s been awfully handy to have a girl like Beth Baldwin here to do mending and sewing and the like, for us lazy ones. I don’t like the girl, that’s all.”

“Then what are you fussing about her for?” demanded another of the party.

“Because I see we’re fighting the best interests of the class and the school. And for another thing,” added Miss Rice, turning a fiery red.

“What’s that?” was the general cry.

“Well—just because Beth Baldwin is a whole lot more decent and forgiving than I would ever be if I were in her place,” blurted out Miss Rice. “What do you think?”

Heatedly and baldly, she told of the discovery she had made the evening before. It was not an

easy thing for a girl to confess—that she was unattractive, a veritable wallflower. And some of these very girls she talked to were in that same class. But having spurred her courage up, Miss Rice went through with her confession.

“And that’s the sort of girl Baldwin is,” she concluded, rather breathlessly. “I know I shouldn’t have done it. I’m pretty sure there isn’t a girl here who would have so secretly heaped coals of fire on her enemy’s head.

“Come, now! let us be honest—let us be fair. I don’t like poverty-stricken girls, or girls who come to Rivercliff as Beth Baldwin did, any better than heretofore. But she has beaten me. I don’t mean only in that skating race. She has beaten me in *being decent!*”

“I admit that Miss Hammersly seems to favor her, and the teachers are always boosting Baldwin. But I guess there is good reason for their doing so. I have been acting the dog-in-the-manger part. Never again; I’m going to bury the hatchet right here and now.”

“Bury the hammer, I guess you mean, Rice,” giggled one of her hearers, nervously.

“All right. I’m going to stop knocking. Just as sure as you live, as Molly Granger says, ‘every knock is a boost.’ We might as well stop fighting Beth Baldwin.”

Of course, they did not all agree with the girl whose conscience had been awakened. Laura Hedden was by no means of the same type as Miss Rice. Laura managed to hold some of the opposition together.

But before the month rolled around and the date of another of the school parties approached, a paper was circulated in the senior class for signatures, asking Beth Baldwin to reconsider her resignation from the chairmanship of the social committee. The first signature on the paper was that of Miss Rice, followed by the names of several of the former "party of the opposition."

"So, 'all's well that ends well,' " quoted jolly Molly Granger, happily. "You've just *got* to get back into harness, Bethesda. The ranks of the enemy are broken. It just proves what I've always said, my dear: You are the most popular girl who ever came to school here at Rivercliff."

"I wonder!" murmured Beth.

"You wonder what?" questioned her chum.

"I wonder how Rice came to change so."

But unless Beth Baldwin chances to read this narrative of Rivercliff School, she is likely never to be enlightened regarding this particular mystery. And at this time there was so much else of moment going on that she had little leisure to give to it.

The days were being counted at last. Such a fluttering in the dove-cote as graduation drew nigh! Dresses to try on, last examinations to take, trips to the milliner and shoe stores, theses to write, conditions to make up, letters to write to friends and relatives, enclosing tickets to the formal exercises and invitations to the various receptions and teas.

“Seven tickets to Hambro,” groaned Molly. “I tried to get Miss Hammersly to have a booth, or private box, built for my aunts. But what do you suppose she said to me, girls?” groaned Molly.

“What did she say?” was the response.

“Do you suppose you are the only person who has aunts, Miss Granger?”

“Never mind, my dear,” said Stella. “Perhaps all of them won’t come to the exercises.”

“Not all come?” cried Molly. “That would be awful. Seven is the perfect number in aunts. I could not spare one of the dears. Why, if Aunt Celia, Aunt Catherine, Auntie Cora, Aunt Carrie, Aunt Charlotte, Aunt Cassie and Aunt Cyril did not appear at Rivercliff to see me graduate, I—I—— Well! I should not feel as though I were graduated, that’s all!”

All this only a day or two before the great occasion. Beth was taking home to one of her best customers the last piece of work she would do at

Rivercliff School. As she crossed the Boulevard she was suddenly conscious of an old fashioned family equipage, a pair of fat bay horses, a fat footman and a fatter coachman, which drew across her line of vision and stopped. And there was a fat brown hand, on which sparkled several diamonds, waving to her from the carriage window.

It was Mrs. Ricardo Severn. She beckoned Beth to come near.

CHAPTER XXX

VOCATIONAL

"My dear child! How well you are looking!" drawled Mrs. Severn, just as though she had seen Beth only the week before and that their intercourse had been quite calm and placid.

Beth did not know just what to say; so, as Ella would have remarked, "she said it with a vengeance!" She stood perfectly still.

"My nephew, Roland, keeps me posted regarding you, my dear," continued the lady.

"Ah—indeed? I have not seen Mr. Severn for a fortnight, I believe," said Beth, feeling vastly uncomfortable.

"Oh, my dear! Then you haven't heard the news," cried Mrs. Severn.

"What news?" asked Beth.

"About poor Mr. Montague. About my poor parrot," said the lady.

"I have heard nothing about the parrot—no," admitted Beth.

"Why, we took up that heavy carpet in my room ten days ago and what do you think?"

"Oh, Mrs. Severn!" exclaimed Beth, suddenly interested and excited. "Did you find——?"

"Ever so many things I had missed—yes," said the lady, complacently. "The poor dear had been taking and hiding things under the edge of the carpet, along the mopboard under the windows. That sunburst of mine was found right under the bay window. Wasn't that funny?"

Beth thought of the grief and shame the loss of the sunburst had caused her, and she could not, for the life of her, extract an iota of humor from the fact.

"But that was just like the wretched creature," went on Mrs. Severn. "Will you believe it? That parrot had deceived me for years and years. Quite twenty years I have owned him. But now I have sent him away for good."

And the selfish old woman drove away, leaving Beth something to be thankful for, but feeling that Mrs. Ricardo Severn was a very unfeeling person.

The graduation of Beth and her classmates was really a very pretty occasion; Miss Hammersly declared (as usual) that no finer class of girls had ever left her rooftree.

Rivercliff was crowded on that day, and the great central room of the gymnasium was used for the dance and reception at night. Of course, everybody was present—including the perfect num-

ber in aunts. Likewise, Mrs. Baldwin came as the guest of Mrs. Haven.

Really, to see and hear Mrs. Haven one might have thought that "our Beth" was her daughter instead of Priscilla Baldwin's oldest child.

"And do you remember, Priscilla," said Larry's mother, wiping her eyes when the blue-ribboned diplomas were given out, "how we planned, years and years ago, that my Larry and your eldest girl should marry?"

"That was a long time ago," said Mrs. Baldwin, rather primly.

"But they do make a wonderfully good looking couple together," whispered Mrs. Haven a little later, when Larry stood with a group of the girls, which included another of the graduation day guests—Miss Freylinghausen. Cynthia had one arm around Beth and another around Molly, and looked to be enjoying herself.

Before the dancing began that evening, Larry sent up word to Number Eighty where Beth had served tea, to ask that the occupant of that room would give him a few moments of her time. And Beth tripped down in her new evening frock in answer to the summons. Evidently, Larry had laid his plans with wit and judgment. He led her into the madam's room—and it was empty.

"See what I have for you to-night, Beth," he

said, eyeing her laughingly, yet admiringly. He opened the box he carried and displayed its contents.

"With the compliments and love," he said, his voice shaking a little, "of Mrs. Euphemia Haven—God bless her! Your Great-grandmother's corals, Beth. They are to be yours again. She never intended to keep them for herself, but wants you to have them back now to wear—and for your very own."

Beth looked at him—looked away—tried to say something, and Larry added, softly:

"You can't refuse them, Beth—you can't. You would quite break the Mater's heart, dear—and mine!"

"How long are you really going to teach school, Beth?" demanded Ella some weeks later, after Beth had been to the State capital and passed her examination before the school board.

"Two years at least, my dear."

"My goodness! do you suppose Larry will ever wait that long?"

"Larry will have to wait, my dear," said the elder sister, firmly. Then her eyes suddenly sparkled. "He must wait, at least, until he can accomplish one particular thing."

"What is that?" the flyaway sister demanded.

“Until he can afford to pay the cook’s wages out of his earnings as a ‘limb o’ the law.’ ”

It was about this time, too, in the lazy summer following Beth’s graduation that she received a letter from Molly Granger, in which was the following:

“So he agrees we are to wait till Captain John comes home to marry Aunt Carrie, and then we shall have a double wedding. At least two of ‘the Granger girls’ will not die old maids.

“I am awfully glad, Beth Baldwin, that you went to work for Mrs. Ricardo Severn. Otherwise, I am quite sure that I would never expect soon to sign myself, ‘Mrs. Roland Severn, née J. Molly Granger, no longer F. W.’ ”

“What’s the good, I want to know,” said Marcus Baldwin, one night, evidently having thought hard and long upon the problem, “for you girls to go in for the highbrow ed. and then get married right smack off?”

“Not marrying ‘right smack off!’ ” denied Ella, vigorously. “Our Beth is going to teach at least two years.”

“Well, that jolly girl isn’t.”

“She’s going to teach after she is married, and so is Mr. Severn,” laughed Beth, “unless Mrs. Ri-

cardo Severn remembers him very liberally indeed."

"Well, a whole lot of you higher-ed. girls do marry right off," repeated Marcus.

"And why not? We're better fitted for life, no matter what it brings to us, if we have had a good education. Oh," declared Beth, now quite grown up, "I am not sorry that I fulfilled my resolve."

THE END

SOMETHING ABOUT
AMY BELL MARLOWE
AND HER BOOKS FOR GIRLS

IN these days, when the printing presses are turning out so many books for girls that are good, bad and indifferent, it is refreshing to come upon the works of such a gifted authoress as Miss Amy Bell Marlowe, who is now under contract to write exclusively for Messrs. Grosset & Dunlap.

In many ways Miss Marlowe's books may be compared with those of Miss Alcott and Mrs. Meade, but all are thoroughly modern and wholly American in scene and action. Her plots, while never improbable, are exceedingly clever, and her girlish characters are as natural as they are interesting.

On the following pages will be found a list of Miss Marlowe's books. Every girl in our land ought to read these fresh and wholesome tales. They are to be found at all booksellers. Each volume is handsomely illustrated and bound in cloth, stamped in colors. Published by Grosset & Dunlap, New York. A free catalogue of Miss Marlowe's books may be had for the asking.

THE OLDEST OF FOUR

“ I DON'T see any way out! ”

It was Natalie's mother who said that, after the awful news had been received that Mr. Raymond had been lost in a shipwreck on the Atlantic. Natalie was the oldest of four children, and the family was left with but scant means for support.

“ I've got to do something—yes, I've just got to! ” Natalie said to herself, and what the brave girl did is well related in “ The Oldest of Four; Or, Natalie's Way Out. ” In this volume we find Natalie with a strong desire to become a writer. At first she contributes to a local paper, but soon she aspires to larger things, and comes in contact with the editor of a popular magazine. This man becomes her warm friend, and not only aids her in a literary way but also helps in a hunt for the missing Mr. Raymond.

Natalie has many ups and downs, and has to face more than one bitter disappointment. But she is a plucky girl through and through.

“ One of the brightest girls' stories ever penned, ” one well-known author has said of this book, and we agree with him. Natalie is a thoroughly lovable character, and one long to be remembered. Published as are all the Amy Bell Marlowe books, by Grosset & Dunlap, New York, and for sale by all booksellers. Ask your dealer to let you look the volume over.

THE GIRLS OF HILLCREST FARM

“WE’LL go to the old farm, and we’ll take boarders! We can fix the old place up, and, maybe, make money!”

The father of the two girls was broken down in health and a physician had recommended that he go to the country, where he could get plenty of fresh air and sunshine. An aunt owned an abandoned farm and she said the family could live on this and use the place as they pleased. It was great sport moving and getting settled, and the boarders offered one surprise after another. There was a mystery about the old farm, and a mystery concerning one of the boarders, and how the girls got to the bottom of affairs is told in detail in the story, which is called, “The Girls of Hillcrest Farm; Or, The Secret of the Rocks.”

It was great fun to move to the farm, and once the girls had the scare of their lives. And they attended a great “vendue” too.

“I just had to write that story—I couldn’t help it,” said Miss Marlowe, when she handed in the manuscript. “I knew just such a farm when I was a little girl, and oh! what fun I had there! And there was a mystery about that place, too!”

Published, like all the Marlowe books, by Grosset & Dunlap, New York, and for sale wherever good books are sold.

A LITTLE MISS NOBODY

“OH, she’s only a little nobody! Don’t have anything to do with her!”

How often poor Nancy Nelson heard those words, and how they cut her to the heart. And the saying was true, she *was* a nobody. She had no folks, and she did not know where she had come from. All she did know was that she was at a boarding school and that a lawyer paid her tuition bills and gave her a mite of spending money.

“I am going to find out who I am, and where I came from,” said Nancy to herself, one day, and what she did, and how it all ended, is absorbingly related in “A Little Miss Nobody; Or, With the Girls of Pinewood Hall.” Nancy made a warm friend of a poor office boy who worked for that lawyer, and this boy kept his eyes and ears open and learned many things.

The book tells much about boarding school life, of study and fun mixed, and of a great race on skates. Nancy made some friends as well as enemies, and on more than one occasion proved that she was “true blue” in the best meaning of that term.

Published by Grosset & Dunlap, New York, and for sale by booksellers everywhere. If you desire a catalogue of Amy Bell Marlowe books send to the publishers for it and it will come free.

THE GIRL FROM SUNSET RANCH

HELEN was very thoughtful as she rode along the trail from Sunset Ranch to the View. She had lost her father but a month before, and he had passed away with a stain on his name—a stain of many years' standing, as the girl had just found out.

"I am going to New York and I am going to clear his name!" she resolved, and just then she saw a young man dashing along, close to the edge of a cliff. Over he went, and Helen, with no thought of the danger to herself, went to the rescue.

Then the brave Western girl found herself set down at the Grand Central Terminal in New York City. She knew not which way to go or what to do. Her relatives, who thought she was poor and ignorant, had refused to even meet her. She had to fight her way along from the start, and how she did this, and won out, is well related in "The Girl from Sunset Ranch; Or, Alone in a Great City."

This is one of the finest of Amy Bell Marlowe's books, with its true-to-life scenes of the plains and mountains, and of the great metropolis. Helen is a girl all readers will love from the start.

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WYN'S CAMPING DAYS

"OH, girls, such news!" cried Wynifred Malory to her chums, one day. "We can go camping on Lake Honotonka! Isn't it grand!"

It certainly was, and the members of the Go-Ahead Club were delighted. Soon they set off, with their boy friends to keep them company in another camp not far away. Those boys played numerous tricks on the girls, and the girls retaliated, you may be sure. And then Wyn did a strange girl a favor, and learned how some ancient statues of rare value had been lost in the lake, and how the girl's father was accused of stealing them.

"We must do all we can for that girl," said Wyn. But this was not so easy, for the girl campers had many troubles of their own. They had canoe races, and one of them fell overboard and came close to drowning, and then came a big storm, and a nearby tree was struck by lightning.

"I used to love to go camping when a girl, and I love to go yet," said Miss Marlowe, in speaking of this tale, which is called, "Wyn's Camping Days; Or, The Outing of the Go-Ahead Club." "I think all girls ought to know the pleasures of summer life under canvas."

A book that ought to be in the hands of all girls. Issued by Grosset & Dunlap, New York, and for sale by booksellers everywhere.

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Or Stirring Cruise of the Motor Boat Gem.

One of the girls becomes the proud possessor of a motor boat and at once invites her club members to take a trip with her down the river to Rainbow Lake, a beautiful sheet of water lying between the mountains.

THE OUTDOOR GIRLS IN A MOTOR CAR

Or The Haunted Mansion of Shadow Valley.

One of the girls has learned to run a big motor car, and she invites the club to go on a tour with her, to visit some distant relatives. On the way they stop at a deserted mansion, said to be haunted and make a most surprising discovery.

THE OUTDOOR GIRLS IN A WINTER CAMP

Or Glorious Days on Skates and Ice Boats.

In this story, the scene is shifted to a winter season. The girls have some jolly times skating and ice boating, and visit a hunters' camp in the big woods.

THE OUTDOOR GIRLS IN FLORIDA

Or Wintering in the Sunny South.

The parents of one of the girls have bought an orange grove in Florida, and her companions are invited to visit the place. They do so, and take a trip into the wilds of the interior, where several unusual things happen.

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