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"TOSS IT OVER, PLEASE," SAID MADELINE

# BETTY WALES, JUNIOR

A STORY FOR GIRLS

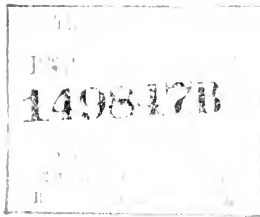
*B*MARGARET  
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"Betty Wales, Sophomore,"  
etc.

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*The Penn Publishing Company*

P H I L A D E L P H I A M C M V I



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Betty Wales, Junior

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## INTRODUCTION

GIRLS who have not followed the adventures of Betty Wales and her friends during their freshman and sophomore years at Harding College may enjoy a bit of an introduction to the circle, before beginning the story of their doings as juniors. Jolly, happy-go-lucky Katherine Kittredge; Rachel Morrison, as steady and dependable as Katherine was volatile; shy, sensitive Roberta Lewis; Eleanor Watson, beautiful, but not a general favorite; forlorn little Helen Adams, and Betty Wales were freshmen together at Mrs. Chapin's. Mary Brooks, the only sophomore in the house, did her best to make life a burden to them in the amusing but innocent fashion that hazing takes at Harding. The good times they all had together and Betty's trials with Helen Adams, who fell to her lot as roommate, and with Eleanor Watson, whom she admired for her cleverness and over whom she managed to exert a strong influence for good, are recounted in "Betty Wales, Freshman."

When they were sophomores most of the

Chapin House girls moved to the campus, where they were distributed among the various college dwelling-houses, there to find new interests and make new friends. Chief among the latter was Madeline Ayres, the girl from "Bohemia, New York," whose original and always artistic ideas for everything from political parades and vaudeville shows to the arrangement of a room and the soothing of an irate editor won her vast popularity. Another important addition was Dora Carlson—Eleanor Watson's freshman she was called, from her dog-like devotion to Eleanor. Dora and Betty between them, with some help from Madeline and some from Miss Ferris, a friend on the college faculty, kept Eleanor from utterly ruining her career at Harding. A story not her own that she printed in the college magazine made no end of trouble for Eleanor and her friends, but in spite of that the sophomore year was a merry one. Indeed I think that Betty Wales and her set entered upon their junior year with the firm conviction that you couldn't help having a good time at Harding—even if you tried.

MARGARET WARDE.

**BETTY WALES. JUNIOR**



# Betty Wales, Junior

## CHAPTER I

### THE FUN OF JUNIOR YEAR

“HELLO, Betty Wales. Please amuse me.”

Betty was sitting on the floor of her own long-coveted “single,” surrounded by a bewildering array of her possessions, which she had unpacked according to her own particular system of taking everything out at once, and now, as usual, she had no idea where to dispose of them. At the sound of the voice, the unwonted pucker of anxiety left her forehead, and she jumped up, scattering the photographs she had been sorting right and left, and made a rush for the newcomer.

“Oh, Mary Brooks! Maybe I’m not glad to see you. I’m—I think I’m homesick.”

Mary grinned cheerfully. “You ought to be used to it by this time—to the joys of being back on time, I mean. It’s I that have reasons

for feeling like a little lost lamb. Do you know, this is positively my first appearance at the regular opening functions."

"Really?" laughed Betty. "What's going to happen?"

"Nothing new, I hope," said Mary; "but Miss Stuart delicately hinted that the wrath of Jove would descend upon me if I didn't get here on time. Where's everybody?"

"I don't know," said Betty sadly. "Didn't you come on the eight-fifteen?"

"I did," returned Mary with decision. "Ever since I entered college I have heard about the joyousness of coming up on the eight-fifteen on an opening night. And now I get here on time for once, and the New York and the western trains are all fiendishly late. So I come up alone in my glory on that famous eight-fifteen, and instead of a gay and festive occasion such as I have been led to expect, I find an empty house—not a soul but you to talk to, and positively nothing doing. They seem to be all new girls on my corridor."

"I don't think you ought to refer to freshmen as an empty house," said Betty severely,



“and anyhow it serves you right for all the times you have cut over.”

“When did you come?” asked Mary, apparently considering that one topic had been pursued far enough. “You haven’t done all this”—she indicated the miscellaneous results of Betty’s unpacking by a sweeping gesture—“in just this one evening?”

“Rather not,” said Betty. “Mary, I’ve been here two whole days—not in the Belden of course, because it wasn’t open, but in Harding; and I think that if you hadn’t come just when you did, I should have—cried,” ended Betty, in a sudden burst of confidence.

“You poor thing!” said Mary sympathetically. “I suppose it was a freshman cousin or something.”

Betty nodded. “Lucile Merrifield. She’s a dear, and she said she didn’t need me one bit, but her mother and my mother settled it that I was to come. And of course Lucile was busy with her exams, and I didn’t have anything to do all day but sit around and think what a lovely summer I’d been having. And that horrid woman we stayed with thought I was the freshman and asked me right before

a whole tableful of them if I was homesick—just because Lucile happens to be tall and dignified, and her hair is straight.” Betty gave a vicious pull to the yellow curl that would escape from its companions and fall over her eyes.

Mary grinned sympathetically. “Too bad about your childish ringlets,” she said. “But I’ll bet your cousin isn’t a circumstance to mine—the eighth one from Wisconsin that came on for her examinations last June. Was yours the weeping kind?”

“Weeping!” repeated Betty, laughing at the idea of the stately Lucile dissolved in tears. “Not much. She was so calm and cool that I thought she must have flunked and was trying to cover it up. She had five examinations, Mary, and they might have been five afternoon teas for all she seemed to care; and she isn’t a dig or a prod, or anything of that kind, either. So I got worried and made her go all over the questions with me. As far as I could see, she did awfully well. Anyhow I don’t believe she can possibly have flunked.”

“What a good idea!” said Mary admiringly. “I’m afraid I didn’t take a serious enough

view of my responsibilities last spring. But then the eighth cousin was perfectly hopeless and it was a mercy to everybody concerned that she failed. She was the kind of person that would rather risk making a bad break than leave anything out. In her English exam. they asked her what a leviathan was,—it's mentioned in 'Paradise Lost,' you know,—and she said 'a country near Thrace.' I think myself that was her finish. It doesn't do to be so positive unless you know you're in the right."

"I don't believe it's ever best to be positive," said Betty sadly. "I was so positive that I wanted a single room, and now I've got one, and I'm missing Helen Chase Adams already."

"Oh, you'll like it when you're settled," Mary reassured her, glancing around the room. "Why do you have all the chiffonier drawers open at once?"

"They stick," explained Betty savagely, "every blessed one of them. I've got them all open now except the bottom one, but it took me almost an hour, and I'm not going to risk having to do it all over again. And al-

most every one of the hooks in the closet is broken, so I can't hang up my dresses; and look at the spots on that wall!"

Mary squinted near-sightedly at the black stains. "Jane Drew must have had a quarrel with one of her pictures and thrown an ink bottle at it," she said. "I wonder how she covered up the tragedy. I never noticed those spots last year."

"She must have had a very big picture," said Betty. "My biggest Gibson girl won't do it. And my desk won't go into that corner where Jane had hers."

"Number twenty-seven must have shrunk during the summer," said Mary. "I hope my palatial apartment hasn't lost any of its six by ten spaciousness."

There was a long pause. "Mary," began Betty at last, "are you tired or are you blue?"

"Blue," declared Mary savagely, "blue as a heron. (Did we ever find one in the Mary-bird club, Betty?) I wondered if you'd notice it. I hate being a senior. I know it's going to be perfectly deadly—this seeing the last of things. How do you like being a junior?"

Betty hesitated. "Mary, does it always last,—the fun of college? Did you ever know a girl who'd been very, very fond of it for two years to get tired of it all of a sudden?"

"Never," said Mary decidedly. "That's just what the girls I used to know at home are always asking me. 'Why do you stay on so long, Mary? Don't you get bored?' And when I try to explain, I suppose they think it all sounds very dull. I presume I should think so myself, if I hadn't been here to see. One year is a good deal like the ones before it,—the same friends, only a few more each year, the same nice little stunts, and almost the same things to try for,—but somehow each one is different and there's plenty of excitement all along the road. If you're afraid of outgrowing it, as you would a prep. school, you needn't be. College is too big to be outgrown. It has a new side ready for any new side that you can develop. I say, Betty."

"Yes?" inquired Betty absently. She was wondering how Mary had guessed that she had developed some new sides during the long vacation.

"I thought perhaps you'd like to know,

since you're so fond of Eleanor Watson. More or less about that affair of hers last year has leaked out during the summer."

"You mean ——" faltered Betty.

"I mean about the story she signed her name to in the 'Argus' and didn't exactly write. I don't know the details, except that you were mixed up in it somehow; but I think she did the very square thing when she resigned from Dramatic Club, and I mean to stand by her, and so does Laurie. Eleanor was on the train to-night, and some of the girls rather turned the cold shoulder. I thought—you might like to know right away how matters stood."

"Thank you," said Betty soberly, "but I don't believe she'll need me much now, Mary. I think she's learned how to help herself."

"That's lucky," said Mary easily. "Now Roberta Lewis doesn't seem to get one bit more independent. I'm afraid she's never going to be very happy here. She ought to go in hard for writing; I know she'd make a success of it."

"Tell her so," advised Betty. "She adores you, and now that you're on the 'Argus' staff

you certainly ought to be able to influence her.”

“I suppose I ought,” conceded Mary. “The trouble is I’ve never really seen much that she wrote except those valentine verses that she did for us in her freshman year, and she says those were mostly French translations. So when I tell her that I know she can write, she says I’m prejudiced and haven’t any good reason for thinking so. She hasn’t one bit of self-confidence.”

There was a thump and then a thud in the hall. A door banged, somebody shrieked, “Oh, Polly, you darling child!” and then Katherine Kittredge burst into Betty’s room like a whirlwind, dragging Roberta Lewis after her.

“We’re just this minute in,” she panted, “on a special that they sent up from the junction, because they couldn’t bear to have us sitting around the waiting-room down there breaking the ten o’clock rule. Roberta fairly insisted that I should come here first. How’s everything starting off?”

“I insisted!” repeated Roberta indignantly. “K. was in such a hurry to get here that she

wouldn't wait for a car, and there wasn't any carriage, and my suit case weighs a ton."

"Well, I carried it," retorted Katherine, fanning herself with the biggest Gibson girl. "And Mary, you should have seen the elegant Roberta, lugging my handsome telescope."

"Did you know that we'd voted a class-tax to buy you a sole-leather suit case lined with white satin?" inquired Mary Brooks. Katherine's battered canvas bag was a college joke.

"Glad to hear it, I'm sure," returned Katherine serenely. "Where's Rachel?"

"Coming," called a merry voice, and Rachel herself appeared in the doorway and was dragged in, amid great enthusiasm.

"When did you come, Rachel?" asked Betty, leading her to a seat of honor on the window-box.

"At four," said Rachel, "but I've been tutoring conditioned freshmen ever since."

"You poor thing!" sighed Mary.

"Not a bit," laughed Rachel. "My pocket-book is fairly bursting. Besides, they were dears, all of them. One took me to supper at Holmes's, so she could get more time for her math., and we talked cube root and binomial



theorem over the most delicious chicken salad."

Rachel was still economizing at the little white house around the corner, but she was too happy at finding herself back in Harding again to feel one bit of envy for the campus girls, who never had to worry over finances, or plan how to make both ends meet.

The four were still all talking at once when Madeline Ayres appeared.

"No room for under-class men," shouted Mary, brandishing a pillow.

"Toss it over, please," said Madeline, complacently, holding out one arm for the pillow and hugging Betty with the other. "I'll sit on it here by the door and keep them out. This is where the French I passed up last fall begins to count. I'm a junior now, if you please."

"Hear, hear!" cried Katherine. "Good for 19—! You always belonged to us in spirit, Madeline."

"Helen Adams has come. Let's go call on her," suggested Rachel, and they trooped off down the hall.

Their progress was slow, for out of almost

every door excited damsels swooped down upon them, wishing to shake hands all around and to talk about everything, from where you spent your summer to the new man who was going to teach English "Lit.," you know, and his courses would be just splendid because—and do you suppose we shall ever get our trunks?

Betty met them all with an enthusiasm which soon ceased to be feigned. The spirit of the place was contagious. It caught her up and swept her along until all her woes were forgotten or turned into merry jests.

"I'll lend you a real French poster to cover those spots," Madeline promised her, "and I can put up closet hooks. I took manual training one summer, and I own a hammer."

"Then let's go down town and buy the hooks," suggested some one, "and have ices on the way back."

"Oh, wait till to-morrow. Let's hunt up Eleanor Watson first."

"Where are the three B's?"

"Has any one seen Nita Reese?"

How the evening flew! Nobody in 19—unpacked. It was much better fun to wander in

gay exploring parties from one campus house to another, finding out who was back, and who had changed rooms, and hearing all the campus news. The reason why junior year is the nicest speedily became evident to Betty and her friends of 19—. By that time you know everybody and have found your place in the college world; but you are not yet weighed down by the responsibilities of seniority, nor oppressed by the nearness of the end.

When Betty returned to her disheveled apartment at ten o'clock, she found her Cousin Lucile sitting on the window-box in the dark, awaiting her arrival.

"My dear little freshman," she began in the most patronizing tone she could manage, "don't you know it's high time you were safe in bed?"

"Yes," said Lucile calmly, "but I had to consult you, Betty. I have a chance to get into this house. A Miss Reeve or Reed or something telegraphed the registrar that she was going to the Philippines to be married, and I can have her place. It's a double room, but ——"

"Not T. Reed?" cried Betty.

“I think her name was Theresa. Is her room ——”

Betty dashed into the hall. “Girls,” she cried to the avenue of open doors, “T. Reed’s going to be married to a Filipino—well, anyhow, in the Philippines.”

Then she returned to Lucile, leaving her bomb to take effect as it might. “It will be lovely to have you in the house,” she said, “and the campus is certainly the place to be. I wonder if Helen knows that T.’s not coming. If so, she must have had a telegram since I saw her.”

“But Betty,” began Lucile doubtfully, “I want to find out about Miss Reed’s room and her roommate.”

“Oh, they’re all right,” broke in Betty. “I had them last year. The closet is awfully small, but next year perhaps you can have a single.”

“But Betty,” persisted Lucile, “this is a serious matter to me. Are you sure I shall like her?”

“Come and see,” laughed Betty, starting for the door. “It’s ten now and you’ll be locked in, but as long as you’re here you may as well

stay with me to-night and see how we live on the campus. But then," she turned back to add, "it's not so important, Lucile,—your liking her or not. You can't help liking college, roommate or no roommate, closet-hooks or no closet-hooks. (I haven't any of those yet. That's why my room is in such a mess,—or at least it's one reason.)" She gave a long sigh of content. "Oh, Lucile, this is the grandest place, especially if you live up here on the campus."

Mary Brooks came through the hall just in time to catch Betty's last sentence.

"Why, Betty Wales," she said severely, "what do you mean by talking like that? You told me not two hours ago that you were horribly bored."

Betty laughed. "So I was," she said, "two hours ago. I was sure that all the fun was over."

"And the moral of that," said Mary, "is: Don't judge of the ball until it has opened. Introduce me to your cousin, please, and then both of you are elected to come and help me eat five pounds of caramels."

## CHAPTER II

### THE CLUB OF MERRY HEARTS

THEY were all in number 27 Belden, which, in spite of its small size, or perhaps because its small size made it seem particularly cozy, was their favorite rendezvous during junior year. "They" means the "clan," which had been developed from the "old guard" of freshman year by a few subtractions and several important additions. The three B's belonged, of course, and Madeline Ayres and Nita Reese. Mary Brooks was the privileged senior member. Rachel met with the clan when she could, but her conditioned freshmen took up most of her spare time, and in her few leisure moments what she liked best was a quiet talk with Betty, or a brisk tramp through the woods with Katherine or Roberta. Eleanor Watson had never really fitted in with the rest of Betty's friends, and now she was more of an outsider than ever. The story of her sophomore year had been circulated widely

among the influential girls at Harding. Only the bare facts had leaked out, and there was no proof of them; but Eleanor's previous career at Harding made it much easier to believe than to discredit such a story. Very few of the girls felt, as Mary Brooks did, that the resignation from Dramatic Club entitled Eleanor to any special consideration; and since young people are almost invariably cruel when they mean only to be just, Eleanor had had to brave both open scorn and veiled hostility. But she did not flinch. She was almost pathetically grateful to Mary and Marion Lawrence, to Miss Ferris, and to Rachel and Katherine, but she would not let Betty force her upon the rest of the clan.

"I'll come to see you when you're alone," she said, "but you must wait till I've proved to the others that I'm different. Of course they don't trust me or like me now. How could they?"

So Betty waited, sure that in the end Eleanor would win back the confidence that she had forfeited, and gain besides respect and love for the stronger, sweeter nature that she was developing.

It is odd how positions shift. Eleanor Watson had spoiled all the chances that had seemed so brilliant at the beginning of her college course, and Helen Adams, shy, awkward, unfriended little freshman, had become that envied and enviable personage, a "prominent girl." Betty had helped, and Madeline and Miss Mills, but Lucile, without trying to, had done more than any of them. She regarded her roommate in the light of a strange phenomenon, both amazing and amusing and absolutely unique in her experience of girls; and she spread this view of Helen widely among her freshman friends. And Helen blossomed out. She saw that at last the girls really liked her for herself, and enjoyed her quaint little fancies and original ideas about persons and places. And so, as Mary Brooks put it, she let herself go; she forgot to be sensitive and frightened and ill at ease, and before she knew it all her dreams were coming true. She was somebody "at last"; the class of 19— and the clan both wanted her and were proud of her.

So she was in "twenty-seven" that night, and Katherine, of course, and Roberta, who



was hardly sociable enough to be on the footing of regular membership in the clan, but who followed Mary to its gatherings as she would have followed her through fire and water if Mary had been bound that way.

Madeline Ayres was doing a French song, in a costume that she had improvised for the occasion out of a black silk scarf, a bunch of pink roses, and a peacock-feather fan. The song was so very slangy that no one but Madeline had much idea what it meant; but the rhythm and Madeline's pantomime were delicious, and though she sang all the verses and composed several new impromptu ones, her audience still clamored for more. When she finally declared that she had "positively finished" and they might as well stop teasing first as last, Babbie arose gravely and gave an imitation of a nervous little girl speaking "Mary had a little lamb." Babbie had never done a "stunt" before, and the delight of her friends in this new accomplishment was unbounded.

"And now let's have the rabbit," said Mary Brooks, when the applause had died away. "It's getting late and we don't want to be

too hurried. We can have more stunts later if there's any time."

"The rabbit!" repeated Betty in mystified tones. "Whoever said anything about a rabbit?"

"I did," confessed Katherine bravely. "That is, I told Mary that we didn't have a thing fit to eat for supper at the Westcott, and that I thought perhaps ——"

"All right," said Betty, laughing, "but it can't be a rabbit, because I haven't any cheese. Will tea do?"

"Bob's got cheese," announced Babe. "Last time we had a rabbit party we forgot about cheese till we had lighted the chafing-dish. So we sent Bob for it, and she bought five pounds."

"Well," Bob defended herself, "there were piles of people there, and I knew that five quarts of ice-cream isn't any too much for a spread, so I thought ——"

"Hurry now, Bob," ordered Mary, selecting an ulster from the pile in the corner, and hustling the rebellious Bob into it and out the door.

"I think it's rather hard on Bob to have to

help me give a party, just because K. happens to be hungry," said Betty.

"I'm ravenous too," announced Rachel.

"So am I," added Madeline, "and so are we all. Have you plenty of crackers, Betty?"

"I think so," said Betty, tugging at the lowest drawer of the chiffonier. "I keep them in here because it shuts so tight that the mice don't smell them."

"And other thieves cannot break through and borrow," murmured Katherine, applying her basket-ball arm to the refractory drawer.

Bob presently returned with the cheese, and the rabbit was well under way, when Nita Reese spied a new pin on Helen's stock. "What's that, Helen?" she asked.

"Philosophical Club," announced Helen proudly. "I was taken in last Saturday."

Mary Brooks reached over Roberta's shoulder and unceremoniously helped herself to the pin. "It's awfully pretty," she said. "What does it mean?"

Helen explained, and the pin, which was the emblem of a new and very learned Harding society, went around the circle.

"Oh, dear," sighed Babe, when it reached

her, "I wish I could be a prod. in something! I shall never go into Dramatic Club or Clio, because Babbie's in one and Bob's in the other, and they think two of us is enough to take. I couldn't possibly get into any of the learned societies, like this one, and I'm not musical, so I can't belong to the Glee or Banjo Clubs. I've lost my class-pin, and I shan't have another till I'm an 'alum.' Besides everybody can wear the alumnae pin, so who cares for that?" Babe's long plaint ended in a dolorous sigh.

"Poor Babe!" laughed Betty. "Why don't you B's have a pin of your own? Three B's would make a lovely monogram."

Babe shook her head. "No, because when I came back to visit after I'm out nobody would know what it meant. I want to belong to something that will keep on always, and amount to something." Babe tumbled back on the couch with a vehemence that upset the alcohol bottle, and sent its contents streaming over Betty's desk.

When the dripping papers had been laid out to dry and order was once more restored, the silent Roberta electrified the assembly by mak-

ing a suggestion. "I think it would be lots of fun for those of us who are here to organize a society. We could have a pin, and when we leave we could pass the society down to a crowd in one of the lower classes."

"Hear! Hear!" cried Babe wildly.

"Well, you mustn't count me in," said Mary Brooks. "I've spent all my November allowance already, and besides, I hate pins. The pretty ones get lost the first thing, and the homely ones just lie around till they're too tarnished to wear. Anyway, I have six now, or I should have if they weren't mostly lost—or lent," concluded Mary, smiling absently as she thought of the whereabouts of some of the absentees.

Babe and Roberta looked crestfallen at Mary's dash of cold water, and Betty hastened to the rescue. "I think it would be lovely to have a society," she said. "Why not have it fixed so that whoever wants the pin can have it, and those who don't care for it or can't afford it, like the penniless Miss Brooks, can belong just the same?"

"You might make the ones who don't wear pins officers," suggested Madeline.

"Happy thought," agreed Mary. "But then, of course, you'd want me for president anyway, because I'm the only senior."

"No reason at all," said Katherine, severely. "You've been holding the whip-hand over us ever since we were freshmen. All the same I move that the secretary be instructed to cast a unanimous ballot for the penniless Miss Brooks."

"But there isn't any secretary," objected matter-of-fact Helen.

"Madeline can be secretary," suggested Babbie, "because she's had experience."

"All right," agreed Madeline, complacently. "Only I won't write any reports, because nobody ever wants to hear them and I object to making a bore of myself."

"Good point," said Katherine. "Madame President, I move that in the—what's going to be the name of this organization, girls? Well, anyhow, I move that the secretary be instructed to write no reports."

"I think motions are just as much of a bore as reports," declared Babbie. "Let's not have any of those either."

"Then how can we do any business?" asked Helen.

"Perhaps we shan't have any to do," suggested Betty. "But does anybody object to names? Because it does seem as if we needed a name."

No one objected to naming the organization, and the president announced that she awaited suggestions. The assembly was lost in deep thought.

"Don't you think," said Betty at last, "that the name you give a society depends a good deal on what kind of society it is? Don't you think we ought to decide on the object first?"

"Oh, but I detest objects," broke in Madeline, hastily. "If you're going to have an object I shall really have to resign."

"But Madeline," protested Betty, "we must have that, you know. What's the use of a club without one?"

"Gives me a chance to wear a pin," answered Babe promptly.

"Don't you think," ventured Roberta timidly, "that 'The Merry Hearts' would be a good name for us?"

“Splendid! Fine! Just the thing!” chorused everybody at once.

“Now Betty Wales,” shouted Madeline in triumph, as soon as she could be heard above the din, “can’t you see that an object isn’t at all necessary? ‘The Merry Hearts’ needn’t do a thing but enjoy themselves.”

“Well then, that’s an object, isn’t it?” retorted Helen, rushing gallantly to Betty’s defense. “Having a good time is an object just as much as sending missionaries to China.”

“I suppose it is,” confessed Madeline, resignedly. “Anyhow, I can’t hope to win an argument against the prod. of the logic class and a member of Philosophical, so I give up.”

“Well, I don’t know anything about Logic,” said Babe, “but I’m sure that this is just the name we want. Everybody knows that we have the best time going. And when we go we can pass the society on to the jolliest crowd that’s left.”

“But don’t you think,” began Katherine, dubiously, “that it’s rather silly for us to have a society just for fun? We’re called ‘The Clan’ now, you know. We see one another



all the time, and we couldn't possibly have more fun than we do as it is."

"Oh, but it will be so much stunter this new way," demurred Bob.

Betty had been listening to the discussion rather absently, wanting to make a suggestion and wondering how the girls would receive it. She had not forgotten her last evening with Dorothy King, nor Dorothy's parting injunction. "See that everybody has a fair chance and a good time," Dorothy had said, and Betty had been trying to do it. But Harding was a big college, and there were so many other things to attend to. If only the clan would help! Katherine's speech gave her her opportunity, and she seized it eagerly.

"Oh, girls," she said, "don't you think it would be nice for 'The Merry Hearts' to try to make other people have a good time too? As K. says, we have as much fun as we possibly can now; and so many girls don't have any. Don't you think it would be nice to try to make more 'Merry Hearts' in Harding?"

Most of the clan looked doubtful, and Babe's smooth forehead was puckered into a

frown of disapproval. "Anybody can have a good time here if they try," she asserted ungrammatically.

"No, they can't," said Helen quickly. "Some of them don't know how."

"Then they ought to learn," declared Madeline. "In Bohemian New York, everybody has good times."

"But Madeline," broke in Nita Reese solemnly, "I know a sophomore who's never been to a house dance or play or to an open meeting of one of the societies. What do you think of that?"

"I should think you'd better ask her to the next Belden House play," laughed Katherine.

"Nevertheless," Madeline took her up, "she may be just as happy as you are, Nita. A person isn't really and truly happy until she's learned that it's not what you have, or what you do, that counts, nor even your friends, but just yourself; and you can make of yourself just about what you choose to. That's the spirit of Bohemia, and if Betty wants 'The Merry Hearts' to encourage it here, why, I'm with her."

"Girls," called Mary Brooks, rapping for order with the chafing-dish spoon, "I foresee that this discussion isn't coming out anywhere, and besides, the rules of the society prevent our putting the question to vote. So I shall settle it in accordance with the policy of 'The Merry Hearts.' Whoever likes Betty's idea can act upon it. The rest needn't. Only I want to say this," went on Mary quickly. "I've found out lately that you can have plenty of fun when you're doing things for other people. I never used to think so, but there was the Student's Aid Fair last year, for instance. I never had more fun out of anything, and yet it helped a lot of girls to stay in college. I think it would be fine for 'The Merry Hearts' to get up something like that this year, don't you?"

"Capital! Great! The very thing!" chorused "The Merry Hearts."

"Oh, that's right in our line," conceded Babe. "But I didn't think Betty meant having fairs and things. I thought she meant being nice to freaks."

Everybody laughed.

"I did mean something more like that,

Babe," Betty explained. "But I think Mary's idea is lovely too."

"Well, why can't we do both?" asked Katherine.

"We certainly can," declared Mary. "One comes under the wording of the name just as much as the other, though I fancy that Betty's idea is more useful. The anti-snob spirit is certainly needed in this college, and I hope 'The Merry Hearts' will show a lot of it. Now I appoint Babe and Roberta pin committee, and Madeline special lecturer on the Bohemian spirit. You can write it up for the 'Argus' too, Madeline. I'm always wanting essays for my department. And now I'm happy to say that the next business of this meeting is to eat up the rabbit."

## CHAPTER III

### THE BEGINNING OF GEORGIA AMES

IT was a breathless Indian summer day. Every window in number ten Main Building was open, but there was never a breeze to stir the heavy air or break the spell of delicious languor that hung over the class in "English Essayists of the Nineteenth Century." The new associate professor in English had the course. His name was John Elliot Eaton, after which he could write several mystic combinations of letters, indicating his high rank in the world of scholarship. He was lecturing this hot morning in his rapid, jerky fashion that made note-taking almost an impossibility. He did not seem to mind the weather in the least; if anything he talked faster and more eloquently than usual. Presently he came to a sudden halt, and glancing ominously at the clock made a dreaded announcement.

"You will write, please, for the remaining

ten minutes, on the topic previously assigned. I will finish what I had to say at the next recitation."

The class in English Essayists drew a deep sigh and set to work.

Dr. John Elliot Eaton was as brilliant as reports had foretold when the term opened. He was also young and handsome, and he had charming manners, though he seldom let his classes know it. Generally he sat before them as cold, relentless, and impersonal as an icicle; and the minute the gong sounded the close of the hour he became, if possible, colder and more impenetrable than before. Even Babbie Hildreth, who was supposed to be going through college "on her smile," found it impossible to "jolly" Dr. Eaton. Why he chose to be so unbending, no one knew. One party declared that he was afraid of girls, and trying to hide it; another said that he was a woman-hater, and didn't intend to be bored by the attentions of susceptible damsels. Why, in the latter case, he was teaching at Harding, was not evident. His riding horse, his clothes, and his air of athletic, care-free well-being indicated that he was not dependent on an as-

sociate professor's salary. Altogether he furnished an interesting subject for research. But there was one drawback ; it was impossible to know him at all outside of his classes, and there he was devoted to ten-minute tests. His pupils hoped that he would speedily outgrow this taste,—it was quite evident that he was doing his first teaching. Meanwhile they endured stoically, and loftily informed their jeering friends, who had not elected English Essayists, that the really interesting courses were never “snaps” ; and besides there was one fine thing about Dr. Eaton. He almost never called the roll, and he was a perfect gentleman about cuts.

Madeline Ayres lounged comfortably on the back row and watched her companions struggling to express their opinions on “the topic previously assigned.” It happened to be the characteristics of Matthew Arnold. Madeline had exhausted the subject in five illegible lines, written in half as many minutes. She folded and signed her paper, and leaned forward to see how the girls on the row in front of her were progressing. Babe was chewing her pencil busily. Helen Adams was on her

second page and—yes, she had actually divided her work into paragraphs! Madeline shrugged her shoulders, in token of her scorn for such foolishness, and looked at the clock. Then she glanced at the platform where Dr. Eaton sat, wearing his cold, slightly bored expression, and not showing the slightest interest in the spectacle before him.

Madeline Ayres differed from the majority in finding Dr. Eaton dull. His blasé air irritated, instead of interesting her, and she longed to startle him out of it, in spite of himself. Now she would try to do it. Lazily she reached out a long arm for the sheet of paper which Helen Adams had been hoarding against a possible emergency, and meeting Helen's glance of protest with a pathetically beseeching gesture, she went to work again, as if her life depended upon filling that sheet before the gong struck.

"I have forgotten the exact wording of the topic," wrote Madeline slowly, in a painstaking backhand that she resorted to in times of stress, "but 'Matthew Arnold and the Ten Minute Test' occurs to me as an interesting point of departure. How would Matthew



Arnold view a ten minute exposition of his characteristic qualities by a class of young ladies (most of them deep-dyed Philistines)? I fancy he would say ——”

Madeline had made her point and turned several neat sentences before the “remaining ten minutes” was exhausted. She folded her second sheet as she had her first, paused an instant before writing “Georgia Ames” on the outside, and giving both the papers to Babe to hand in, went out by the back door. Half an hour later she had forgotten all about Dr. Eaton in a heated pursuit of grasshoppers on the back campus. Biology was Madeline’s newest hobby.

She was late for English Essayists the next morning. The class had been called to order and Professor Eaton was beginning to read something to them. Madeline dropped into a seat near the door, found the place in her note-book, and shook her fountain-pen into working-order, before she realized that he was reading Georgia Ames’s remarks upon “Matthew Arnold and the Ten Minute Test,” with evident liking for Georgia’s ideas. Some of the class got the point of the theme, and more

did not. Madeline smiled inanely for the benefit of her neighbors, and wondered if the professor would try to pick out Georgia Ames. Apparently he had not even noticed the signature; for when he came to the end of the theme, he looked at it curiously, consulted his roll, and added the new name at the end of the list. Then, with a scathing comment upon the deadly commonplaceness of the other themes, he opened his portfolio and continued his unfinished lecture.

Madeline took notes in a leisurely fashion and wondered if it was her duty to go up at the end of the hour and claim Georgia Ames's contribution. She had already accomplished her object, by striking a spark of enthusiasm out of the blasé Dr. Eaton; but she decided that it would be just as well to wait a little before giving her explanation. Georgia Ames might prove a valuable ally in some other time of need. Madeline lost the thread of the lecture as she considered the vast possibilities of a second self.

She brought the subject up at luncheon, without mentioning Georgia.

"She could do the things you never have

time to," she explained, "and the things you hate, or can't do well."

"I shouldn't care to be your second self," said Mary Brooks. "You'd make a perfect drudge of her,—keep her mending stockings and doing errands all her days. You might as well hire a maid."

"That's a good point," admitted Madeline; "but I should take care not to abuse her. She would be a very fascinating person, I assure you. You see, not really being anybody she could do just as she pleased, without caring what people thought of her."

"How lovely!" exclaimed Roberta. "Then she could say all the things you want to but don't dare, and believe all the things that you want to, only you are afraid people will think you're crazy."

"I'm afraid that if Madeline's second self would be a drudge, yours would be a freak, Roberta," said Mary.

"Oh, no," answered Roberta, "she would just be delightfully clever and original."

"Well," said Betty, who, not being at all imaginative, had listened to the discussion in wondering silence, "for my part I'm sure one

self is as much as I want to manage. Think of planning a Saturday afternoon for two people, or making out two schedules of studies!"

"I've thought of all that," said Madeline, passing her plate for more dessert, "but I should have my second self vanish when she wasn't needed, or when things were getting too complicated."

"Evidently second-selves are going to be Madeline's next fad," said Mary with a sigh of tolerance. "Prepare to see her catching grasshoppers with a ghostly double beside her." She turned to Madeline. "You do get the funniest notions. What put this idea into your head?"

"Oh, it just blew in," said Madeline lazily. "Then it sprouted, and now I'm very curious to see how tall it will grow." With which lucid explanation she sauntered off to the library.

She was really getting very much interested in Georgia Ames, but, as she was also very much interested in a number of other things, and as Georgia obviously would keep until she was wanted, Madeline was in no haste to push her forward.

That day's recitation in English Essayists had been the last of the week, and it was the third recitation of the following week before the class had any more written work. Madeline finished hers with her usual promptness, and then, having nothing else to do, wrote a paper for Georgia Ames, not because she had anything particular to say, but on the principle that Georgia, being on the professor's roll, would better be doing her work.

That night the Belden House gave its annual dance in the gym. It was still Indian summer weather and the moon was full. Madeline, who did not share the enthusiasm of most Harding girls for man-less dances, arranged her program with a view to frequent intervals of moonlight and solitude on the back campus. She danced the first number with one of her guests, and then strolled out to enjoy numbers two, three and four, which were blanks. She found a belated hammock, sole relic of the joys of spring-time, swinging under the yellowing apple-trees, and lay back in it, listening to the music that floated out, soft and sweet, from the gaily lighted gym., and enjoying that de-

licious sense of evaded responsibility which only the true Bohemian, without even the vestige of a New England conscience, can experience.

The orchestra had finished number two, which was a martial two-step, and begun upon three, a rippling, swinging waltz, when Madeline's attention was attracted by the grotesque antics of a girl who was sitting, or crouching, on the edge of a circle of light cast by the electric lamp in front of the Hilton House. Madeline watched her strange gestures for a moment, until something in the huddled shape suggested Bob Parker, and assured that all Bob's performances were interesting, Madeline left her hammock and went over to investigate. The shape proved to be Bob, but a nearer view gave no more clue to her strange behavior.

"Bob," demanded Madeline, "what in the world are you doing?"

Bob, who appeared to be absolutely engrossed in her odd pursuit, looked up as Madeline spoke and surveyed her calmly. "It's quite evident what you're doing," she said severely. "You're catching your death

of cold in that low dress, and you're cutting your own house dance. Did you hear Nita Reese inquiring for me?"

"No," said Madeline, sweetly, "but she told me that she was pleased to death to have one less guest to bother with."

"I know she never said that," retorted Bob, quite unmoved. "Nita's always so polite. I hope she thought it though, but anyhow I couldn't go. I went riding this afternoon and the horse ran away."

"Did he spill you off on this spot, and have you been here ever since?" asked Madeline.

"Have I been here ever since?" repeated Bob indignantly. "He spilled me four miles from here, my friend, and I walked home and sent an exploring expedition after the horse, and dressed, and had dinner down town and came here afterward. How's that for strenuousness?"

"Well"—Madeline reverted to her original inquiry—"what are you doing now?"

"Oh, yes," said Bob, cheerfully, "you did ask that. I—wait a minute, Madeline. There he is again." Bob was off to the opposite end of the lighted space. "Why, I'm making

more 'Merry Hearts,'” she explained, returning and sitting down again at Madeline’s feet. “You know the Hilton House has a family of tame toads that live under the front steps. Well, I’m teaching them not to hop across the sidewalks, so they won’t be accidentally stepped on and come to untimely ends. They’re learning fast, too.”

“Lovely thought,” laughed Madeline. “Couldn’t you find any sad hearts around here but toads?”

“Grasshoppers,” said Bob, promptly, “but they’re about gone now, poor things. Next spring I’m going to have a grasshopper class in high jumping. It’s a shame the way they let you zoölogy fiends catch them for easy victims.”

“Bob,” said Madeline, admiringly, “you are certainly a genius. I was thinking to-day that ‘The Merry Hearts’ needed a boom. We haven’t done anything so far except organize.” Madeline swirled suddenly into the darkness. “At the next meeting I believe I shall propose a new member—just to liven things up a bit.”

Bob shrugged her shoulders, frowning. “If



it's Eleanor Watson, I don't want her," she said. "I know Betty does and Betty's a dear, and what she says goes with the B's. We're going to be nice to the freaks, but we don't want Eleanor Watson."

"Don't worry," laughed Madeline. "It's not Eleanor. It's quite a different person, Bob,—quite one of your sort."

The music from the gym stopped suddenly, and Madeline consulted her card. "Let me see—two, three, four. Yes, the next is five, and I have it with an adoring freshman. Good-bye, Bob,—and please don't black-ball my new member."

## CHAPTER IV

### GEORGIA WIDENS HER SPHERE

QUITE by accident Roberta Lewis was the first person to whom Madeline confided the story of Georgia Ames. Roberta happened to pass through the hall just as Madeline came back from getting some corrected English themes, among them two of Georgia's, with very flattering comments from Dr. Eaton; and finding the story too good to keep, she called Roberta in to share it. She could not have chosen a more appreciative confidante.

"I never heard anything so nice," declared Roberta, eagerly. "How did you ever think of doing it?"

Madeline gave a characteristic shrug of indifference. "Oh, I just happened to."

"And doesn't any one else know about her?"

"No one else."

"What a lovely secret to be in! Are you ever going to tell Dr. Eaton?"

“Perhaps I may some time, or I may let it run along until midyears. Of course he’s bound to find out then that there’s no such person, for he’ll have to send his lists to the registrar’s office and there’s no fooling Miss Stuart. I thought it might be amusing to keep quiet till then, and see how he’d take it.”

Roberta looked disappointed. “Then Georgia Ames can only live till midyears. Well,” she added, brightening, “there’s a lot of time left before that, and, since she can’t live long, you must make her live fast, Madeline. Why, I can think of hundreds of lovely things you might do with her!”

“I know it,” said Madeline. “She certainly has splendid possibilities. Don’t you remember our talk about second selves? But you see I’ve rather lost interest in her, because I’m so dreadfully busy. Betty was right about second selves being more bother than help. I really haven’t the leisure to manage Georgia.”

“Oh, dear, what a splendid time you must have!” sighed Roberta. “I can’t imagine being too busy to manage a second self.”

Madeline laughed. "Oh, I'm not so particularly lucky," she said, "except in being born easily amused. That's one of the advantages of being born in Bohemia. But I'm afraid I'm fickle. It's always 'the last the best' with me, and just now 'the last' is mushrooms. I'm studying them with Miss Stevens,—the new botany assistant, you know,—and they're fascinating, not to mention their being very good to eat. I'm going to give a mushroom party next week for 'The Merry Hearts.' I'd thought of turning Georgia over to them, too."

"What fun!" laughed Roberta. "You mean you're going to let her join and be one of us?"

Madeline nodded. "If Bob Parker doesn't black-ball her. Bob's rather exclusive."

"Oh, but she'll never black-ball Georgia," declared Roberta, earnestly. "Such a distinguished—what class does she belong to, Madeline?"

Madeline considered. "Freshman, I should say, with a little work passed up, so as to account for her taking some upper-class studies. If she weren't a freshman she'd seem like a

nonentity, wouldn't she, as she isn't known at all yet?"

"And as a matter of fact," laughed Roberta, "she's as far as possible from being a non-entity. She's the prod. who's succeeded in exciting the wonderful Dr. Eaton. And in general she's very literary."

"Very," agreed Madeline gravely. "In fact pen and paper are the very essence of her being."

"Madeline," asked Roberta after a little pause, "are you going to let 'The Merry Hearts' use Georgia themselves, or are you just going to tell them about her? Because I should like to use her once before you've told the others. I've thought of a lovely way, only, if Mary Brooks knew about her, it wouldn't work."

"Go ahead," said Madeline briefly. "If I've invented something that can be used to tease Mary Brooks, I shall feel like a public benefactor. Georgia is yours till further notice."

A day or two later Betty, Madeline, Katherine and Helen were in Roberta's room eating fudge and discussing the forthcoming

junior elections. Rachel Morrison was being discussed for class president, and the question before the house was: Should her friends push her now or should they advise keeping her for the greater honor of the senior presidency? It was a difficult question, and not half the pros and cons had been set forth when Mary Brooks knocked on the door.

"Roberta," she said, surveying the assembly with stern disapproval, "are you having a fudge party?"

"This isn't a party," corrected Katherine. "It's only a political meeting."

"I see," said Mary, appropriating the Morris chair and the fudge pan. "What's up?"

The girls explained.

"Don't save her," advised Mary. "Don't save any one. It's dangerous. Just look at me; I've been saved for president—ever since freshman year. I wasn't quite dignified enough then, and I wasn't quite pretty enough for sophomore year. Junior year I didn't want it, because chairman of the prom. committee is so much more fun; and now it's decreed that I must manage the senior play."

"And the 'Argus,'" added Betty. "I

shouldn't think you'd been saved, Mary. I should think you'd been pretty thoroughly used up."

"Well, put it as you like," said Mary modestly. "I've done quite a bit of work in my time, I suppose. But your speaking of the 'Argus,' Betty, reminds me of something. Do any of you know a girl named Georgia Ames?"

"Never heard of her," said Katherine promptly.

"Nor I," added Betty.

"Nor I," chimed in Helen, who prided herself on knowing everybody that no one else knew. "Which class is she?"

Mary shook her head. "I haven't the least idea."

Madeline was sitting on the couch between Roberta and Betty. At a violent nudge from Roberta she came out of a brown study and entered the conversation. "What did you say, Mary?" she asked.

Mary repeated her question.

"Oh, I know her," said Madeline, with a fine assumption of indifference. "She's a freshman, I believe."

"Yes, she is," chimed in Roberta, following

Madeline's lead. "I remember the name now."

"But doesn't she take some upper-class work, Roberta?" asked Madeline, elaborately avoiding Roberta's eye. "I'm sure she's in something with me."

"English Essayists, isn't it?" suggested Roberta cautiously.

"Oh, no, it can't be that," objected Betty. "I'm in your division, and I know every girl in the class. I should have noticed her."

"Perhaps she cuts a lot," suggested Mary. "They say Dr. Eaton never calls the roll."

"She couldn't do that with all the ten-minute tests," argued Betty. "He doesn't generally call the roll, but he's liable to spring one of those tests any time, so it's not safe to cut very much."

"Georgia Ames doesn't cut," said Madeline decidedly, "and if she isn't in 'Essayists' she must be in some other junior English course. Just the other day when I was getting back my themes I noticed two of hers in the junior box."

"You did!" exclaimed Helen Adams eagerly. "How funny! Because I met you





"GEORGIA AMES DOESN'T CUT," SAID MADELINE

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just as you were going off with your papers, and when I looked only mine and Betty's were left in the pile."

"Then probably I mixed them with some other class's," said Madeline coolly. "I'm awfully careless when I go to get papers. I'll look them up and give them to her."

"She'll be more than glad to get them, I guess," ventured Roberta, "because Professor Eaton puts such nice things on her work. I saw one of her ten-minute themes, and the comment was awfully flattering,—all about clever phrasing and original thought."

"It was!" said Mary, sitting up suddenly and surrendering the fudge-pan to Betty. "I'm so relieved! My department in the 'Argus' isn't half made up for this month, and perhaps she'll help me out."

"How did you hear of her?" asked Helen curiously. She was very much interested in the workings of the "Argus," board, though she would not have admitted it, even to Betty.

"Oh, I didn't hear of her," answered Mary. "She put a theme on the bulletin board for me. You know the grand new policy of the

'Argus' is to solicit as little material as possible, but to ask people to send things to us, instead. Have you seen our big new sign on the societies' bulletin board? It was Miss Mills's idea. She thought it would bring out a lot of new talent, and make the 'Argus' more representative and democratic. It's a splendid theory, but about this time in the month, when the printer is clamoring for copy, we have to drop our theories and apply to the same old standbys. It's queer how the people who want to write are generally just the people who can't."

"But apparently there are exceptions," objected Betty. "Miss Ames—is that her name?—wants to write, or else she wouldn't have sent you her theme; and she can write, or Dr. Eaton wouldn't think so. I suppose you know that he's awfully hard to suit."

"Well, I hope I can use her kind contribution," said Mary, rising. "The note she sent with it was rather silly, I thought."

On her way to dinner Madeline overtook Mary on the stairs. "How was it?" she inquired.

"How was what?" asked Mary.

“Georgia’s theme.”

“It was hopeless—perfectly hopeless,” declared Mary savagely. “How Dr. Eaton can see anything in her work is more than I can understand. Oh, dear, you know her, don’t you? I hope she isn’t a particular friend.”

“Oh, no,” laughed Madeline, “only a sort of protégée. Besides, what is the use of mincing matters? I hope you’ll tell her frankly what you think of her literary aspirations.”

“I’ve already written to her,” explained Mary, “and I’m afraid I wasn’t exactly frank. Don’t you think it’s easy to make a mistake in such matters, when you don’t know the girl? She might be timid and easily discouraged——”

“She isn’t,” put in Madeline.

“Well, anyhow she may not be a good judge of her own work, and may have sent me the worst when she meant to send the best. So I just told her that her contribution didn’t exactly meet our needs. It was poetry, Madeline. Fancy a ‘Song of Sleep’ by a freshman! I said I was sorry, but we had a lot of verse on hand (we have, you know, but it’s all Marion Lustig’s, and we can’t run her

in every single month), and I advised her to try prose next time. I said I thought it would suit her style better, and that I hoped to hear from her again soon."

"Very sweet," said Madeline, "but I have an idea that Georgia may see through it."

"Oh, no, she won't," declared Mary. "You have no idea how easy it is to take people in, especially freshmen. By the way, Madeline, where does Miss Ames live?"

Madeline hesitated. "Why, I really don't know," she said. "Where do freshmen live this year? She's in one of the big off-campus houses, I suppose. You'd better ask Roberta."

But Roberta hadn't the least idea where Miss Ames lived. "I know her awfully well," she said, "because she's about the best friend of a friend of mine; but I haven't got around to call yet. Perhaps I could find out for you, Mary."

"Oh, it's no matter," Mary assured her. "I can just put the bundle on the bulletin board with her class on it; but I thought it would look friendly and interested to put on the address."

“Georgia wouldn’t care a bit about that,” declared Roberta. “She never notices little things. She’s rather dense, I think.”

“You do?” interposed Madeline indignantly. “Now I’ve found her quite the reverse,—and very interesting,—the little I’ve seen of her.”

“Well, she can’t write,” said Mary with decision, and being extremely near-sighted she missed the rapturous exchange of glances that passed between the two conspirators.

A week later “The Merry Hearts” were in Betty’s room, celebrating Rachel’s election to the class presidency. They had taken Mary’s advice and decided to let senior year shift for itself. Mary had sent word that she couldn’t get around until late in the evening. Her own sketch department in the “Argus” was made up, but the literary editor still needed a “semi-heavy” (which is the Harding editors’ slang for a light essay); and, in return for many similar favors, Mary had joined her in a house-to-house canvas for an available argumentative or a Carlyle paper. It was nine o’clock when she arrived at the presidential spread.

“Did you find it?” asked Betty, taking her wraps.

Mary nodded. “Such as it is. I wanted to give up and use a story, but Nora said it wouldn’t do at all; every exchange from Boston to San Francisco would have an article about the frothy foam that the Harding ‘Argus’ was printing. Roberta, you know you can write. Why don’t you do us some essays? They are a lot easier to write than stories. You just have to look up your subject and think of a clever beginning and a few sketchy sentences that Dr. Eaton would call suggestive because they don’t mean anything in particular. I can’t see why more of the literary crowd doesn’t go in for essays.”

“You ought to have recommended essays to Georgia Ames,” said Madeline, with a polite smile in Roberta’s direction. Roberta had told her a day or two before that Georgia had “tried prose,” but she had not heard the result of the second venture.

“Recommended essays to Georgia Ames!” repeated Mary wearily. “No, Madeline, I don’t believe she could even do an essay. I



ought to have taken your advice and told her plainly that she couldn't write."

"Has she bobbed up again?" asked Katherineine.

"Yes, with a story—novelette you might call it, for it's desperately long. I brought it with me, so that Madeline and Roberta can see what atrocities their clever young friend is guilty of."

Sudden terror froze Roberta into speechless immobility, and she sank helplessly back against the couch pillows, while Madeline, shrieking with glee, demanded the whereabouts of the manuscript, and drew it triumphantly from Mary's ulster pocket.

"Why not read it aloud?" asked Katherineine. "It isn't time to eat yet, and we've congratulated Rachel until she's tired."

"Great idea!" assented Babe. "I love footless stories. Bob always reads me the ones she writes."

"Does Bob write stories?" cried Katherineine. "I say, Bob ——"

"You wretch," cried Bob, falling upon her accuser with the violence born of much basket-

ball practice. "Footless stories indeed! You'll never hear another."

In the heat of the fray it was some time before "The Merry Hearts" discovered that a double battle was going on in their midst. While Bob pummeled Babe, Roberta was frantically trying to wrench Georgia's story from Madeline's firm grasp.

"What in the world are you doing, Roberta?" demanded Mary. "You can read it to us, if you'd rather. I know Madeline's voice is bad."

"I think it's a shame," cried Roberta hotly, blushing and making strange gestures in Madeline's direction.

"What's a shame?" asked Betty in perplexity.

"Why—why—reading my—reading Georgia's story aloud and—laughing at it." Roberta looked ready to cry.

"I think so too," declared Betty, uncomprehending but sympathetic. "How she would feel if she knew! Truly, Mary, I don't wonder that people don't contribute to the 'Argus,' if you editors show their themes around like this."

“You’re right, Betty,” said Mary soberly, looking really troubled and reaching for the manuscript. “It was very thoughtless of me to consent to such a thing, and I’m heartily ashamed. Girls, will you please promise not to mention this to any one? And Betty, this isn’t the way the editors treat the unsolicited contributions. Nora Carleton is lovely about them, trying to see good in them all, going to call on some of the girls, and asking Miss Mills and Miss Raymond to try to give them a start. Oh, it’s not the ‘Argus’ editors who act this way; it’s just horrid, thoughtless me.” Mary’s rare fit of contrition had taken a serious hold upon her.

But Madeline had suffered too much from Mary to have any mercy upon her now.

“Don’t be sentimental, Mary,” she said, “and give me back that paper. I won’t read it aloud—honor bright.”

Mary shook her head. “No, and”—her voice quivered—“I don’t think you ought to have asked, Madeline.”

“Don’t you?” asked Madeline coolly. “Well, I presume I haven’t a very high code of honor, but, leaving that aside for the

moment, I know Georgia, and I'm sure that she'd be pleased and proud to have one of her stories read aloud at a select gathering of juniors like this. And as for my seeing it, I've seen every word that Georgia has written this year excepting this story and the poem she sent you before."

"Well then," began Mary, obviously weakened by Madeline's calm argument, "I suppose there wouldn't be any great harm in your reading it. But you'd better wait and let her show it to you herself."

"Yes, indeed," agreed Roberta, finding her voice again. She would almost as soon have had her story read aloud as subjected to Madeline's cool, merciless laughter. "I think the meanest thing of all is to show a girl's best friends how silly she is," concluded Roberta fiercely.

"Roberta," said Madeline with mock solemnity, "aren't you forgetting what Georgia owes to me?"

Roberta's sense of justice was very strong. She hesitated an instant, then submitted to the propriety of Madeline's claim. "Yes, Madeline," she said, "I forgot. I know—that

is, it's all right for Madeline to see it; Mary. I shouldn't say so if I weren't sure."

Madeline retired triumphantly to a corner with the manuscript, of which she meant to read just enough to tease Roberta about later; and Betty, who felt that the presidential spread was being too much engrossed with the affairs of an obscure freshman, turned the thoughts of "The Merry Hearts" into safer channels.

But Mary's pensive melancholy persisted, in spite of Katherine's raillery and Roberta's kindly attentions. Mary took much satisfaction in being what she called "a scholar and a gentleman." She was very proud of her place on the "Argus" board, and even prouder of the consideration paid her by her "little friends," as she dubbed the rest of "The Merry Hearts." Now she felt that she had forfeited their respect, and at the same time played false to the trust which an "Argus" editorship involved. She did no justice to the creamy marsh-mallow fudge, took no part in the gay banter that gives the Harding spread its peculiar charm. And Roberta watched her with growing compunction. Mary was her idol. She had meant to win

her point, but she had never contemplated hurting Mary's feelings. She stood it as long as she could, then strolled casually over to Madeline's corner, and the two held a whispered conference.

Madeline listened, laughed, and swept the story into a neat pile. With it in one hand and arm in arm with Roberta, she advanced to Mary's seat.

"Allow me," she said with a low bow, "to present you with this rejected manuscript (which, by the way, Roberta, is stunningly good in spots), and also with a busted bubble, namely, Roberta Lewis's literary career."

"Yes," put in Roberta eagerly. "Now I hope you'll stop telling me to write. That's my story, and the 'Song of Sleep' was mine too."

"Really!" Mary's surprise fairly overwhelmed her. "I—I can't believe it."

"So it wasn't any matter about your offering to let us read it. That is, I mean I deserved to have you," added Roberta, cheerfully intent on making her sacrifice complete.

"Here Roberta, be careful," cried Madeline. "You're letting her off too easily. Come on, girls, and help me to rub it in."

“The Merry Hearts” did not cease to “rub it in” on all occasions, convenient or otherwise, as long as Mary stayed at Harding College.

## CHAPTER V

### GEORGIA BECOMES A "MERRY HEART"

It was a Saturday night in late October, and Madeline Ayres was giving "The Merry Hearts" their long promised and much anticipated mushroom party. Madeline's room was really no larger than Betty's, but much experience of living in trunks and tiny apartments had given her a really marvelous skill in the art of making the small appear the larger space. Her wash-stand was hidden in the closet. There also was the steamer-trunk, which, with a bed box that slid neatly under the couch, took the place of a bulky chiffonier. The litter of small bric-a-brac,—of dance and dinner cards and other miscellaneous souvenirs of good times or journeys,—that fill the room of the average college girl to overflowing, had no place at all in Madeline's scheme of life. There were a few pictures—several small water color landscapes, gifts of her father's artist friends, a black and white reproduction



of a famous painter's conception of the college girl, with a dainty pen-and-ink sketch done by the great man himself on the wide gold mat, and a little Japanese print of Fuji-yama in a curiously carved sandal-wood frame. The couch cover she had brought from Bagdad herself, and the one tall green vase bore the imprint of a famous French potter. As Betty Wales said once with a sigh, it was easy enough for Madeline to leave out the "footless little things," when she had such lovely big ones.

So there was plenty of space in Madeline's room for giving an elaborate spread, and most elaborate was the mushroom party that she had provided for "The Merry Hearts." Babbie Hildreth's stunning chafing dish, with the four copper rabbits standing on their hind legs and looking inquiringly over the edge of the pan, occupied the place of honor on the tea-table. Babbie's chafing-dish was the envy of the whole college. She had bought it with the money that her mother had sent for the term's wages of the maid that Babbie was still supposed to be keeping. It represented much self-denial in the matter of riding-horses and

suppers at Cuyler's, which were Babbie's favorite methods of disposing of the maid's stipend; but, as Bob said, it was worth a few rides and a good deal of starvation on campus fare to be known as the owner of the swellest chafing-dish in Harding.

Babbie's chafing-dish was cooking the cream sauce for the "inky drippers," so Madeline explained to her ignorant guests. "They're called that because they all turn to ink when they're old."

"Not at all pretty of them, I should say," announced Katherine, surveying the plateful of dainty, gray-brown morsels doubtfully. "I don't think I shall eat any 'inky drippers.'"

"Then you'll miss the very best course," warned Madeline. "Wait till you see them done in cream, on the toast that Mary-in-the-kitchen is going to bring up for us. They're much better than creamed oysters. They're going to be your meat course."

Madeline's own chafing-dish, placed on one corner of her desk, was also lighted.

"And is this the first course?" asked Rachel, peeping inquisitively under the cover. "Why, it looks like oyster soup!"

“It is,—oyster-mushroom soup,” said Madeline, “and it’s the first course. Next come the ‘inky drippers’—excuse me, K., we can call them *coprinus*, if you like that name better—and then two entrées, giant puff-balls fried in batter, and meadow mushrooms broiled in butter and their own juice.”

“Um!” sighed Mary joyously. “Doesn’t it sound inviting? Think of eating an all-mushroom, four-course supper! Isn’t this elegance for you?”

“Think of the indigestion we’ll get,” put in Babbie, who was curled up on the window-seat, industriously slicing puff-balls into the pan of another borrowed chafing-dish.

“Indigestion!” repeated Babe. “I don’t mind that, but suppose Madeline’s made a mistake about her dippers of ink—is that their name, Madeline?—and we all die of poisoning. Does any one know of a grudge Madeline has against me?”

“No. Why?” asked Rachel.

“Because,” announced Babe proudly, “she might be poisoning us off the way Nero did his friends. He used to give banquets, and of course everybody had to eat whatever came

along, including mushrooms; and when they got home they died."

"Hear the prodigy of learning!" declaimed Bob. "I'm proud of you, Baby. Did you read up mushrooms in the encyclopædia?"

"Not much," said Babe. "I never read for fun. I studied up Nero for a nine o'clock history class Monday morning."

"Well, you haven't any of Nero's kind of mushroom, have you, Madeline?" asked Katherine.

"You'll know about that to-morrow," cut in Babe. "It takes twenty-four hours to make sure."

"And meanwhile," laughed Madeline, "you can live in hope. The soup is ready. Betty, will you bring the bouillon cups? They're tea-cups at present, and you'd better dust them off."

The soup was delicious; so were the "inky drippers." Katherine's prejudices went down after the first taste. When the last morsel of meadow-mushroom had been disposed of, she heaved a deep sigh and voiced the sentiments of the whole party.

"Well, of course I hope these aren't the

Nero brand, but if I am ever poisoned I want the stuff that does it to taste as good as this."

"And now," said Mary briskly, "while we are waiting to find out about that, I think we'd better have a business meeting of 'The Merry Hearts.' I don't know of any business myself, and I don't see how we can transact any, with our peculiar rules and regulations; but Madeline and Roberta have been casting base insinuations on my fitness for the exalted office I hold, and I am going to show them how beautifully I could have presided over the Congress of these United States, if I'd only been a man."

"We're waiting to see you do it," said Madeline placidly. "I haven't written a report, and nobody can make a motion, but if you'll please recognize me, Madame President——"

"Is it against the rules to give me a chance to call the meeting to order first?" inquired Mary with great dignity. "Now, Miss Ayres, if 'The Merry Hearts' will please come to order, you may have the floor."

"All right," said Madeline. "I'm in no hurry at all, only I wanted to ask the girls

how they feel about taking in some new members,—or one new member at least.”

There was a dead silence. Each of “The Merry Hearts” thought instantly of Eleanor Watson, the only one of the Chapin House crowd who was not a member of the club. Though few of them knew the whole story of her sophomore year, they all understood the opposition of the B’s and Nita, and wondered why Madeline should care to defy it. Katherine Kittredge went a step further than the rest in her conjectures. Remembering how Betty had stood by Eleanor and how eager she was for the rest of the clan to know and like her too, she decided instantly that Betty, having won Madeline to her view, had persuaded her to suggest Eleanor for membership. She looked at Betty and utterly misinterpreted her distressed expression. For Betty, like the rest, thought that Madeline meant to propose Eleanor and was sure that her doing so just then was mistaken kindness. Katherine’s championship of Eleanor hitherto had been on Betty’s account, and now it was for Betty’s sake that she broke the hostile silence.

“Is there a rule against discussions, Mary?”

she began, with an attempt at ease and hilarity. "I suppose we are all waiting because we are afraid you will call us down with one of your grand regulations. But seriously, Madeline, I'm sure this silence doesn't mean opposition to your idea. It merely indicates deep thought. You see we are so fond of one another, and we feel so complete and nicely fixed just as we are, that we can't grasp your point. Tell us why you think we need a new member."

"Well," said Madeline, smiling reassuringly at Betty, who still looked greatly troubled, "I don't know that we exactly need any more members than we have. It's quite obvious that, if we're to meet here and in Betty's room, we can't enlarge our boundaries very much. But of course there are some awfully jolly girls at Harding who aren't in this crowd. There was, for example, me,—before you took me in."

"Well," broke in Babe impatiently, "can't you hurry up and tell us whom you want."

"You told me it wasn't ——" began Bob, and stopped short, blushing violently and hoping no one had understood. But fortunately

several people had, and the atmosphere grew suddenly less tense.

“Don’t you think, Babe,” asked Madeline, “that it’s rather hard on my friend,—for of course she is a friend of mine,—to make me tell her name before we’ve decided whether or not we want any one else in ‘The Merry Hearts’? If she’s sure to be turned down, why, there’s no use in dragging her name in at all.”

“Very good point,” said Katherine, wondering if she could possibly have been mistaken and in a great hurry to find out the truth; “but I’m sure we can settle it quickly enough. If we could find any one that we liked as much as we do Madeline Ayres,—the same jolly good sort——”

“My second self, for instance, if she ever enters Harding,” interpolated Madeline smilingly.

“You peacock!” laughed Rachel, glad to see that Madeline felt no embarrassment over the strained situation. “Well, then, it’s decided, without being moved and seconded, that we may sometime make additions to our society. Isn’t that right, girls?”



"The Merry Hearts" agreed rather half-heartedly.

"All right, Madeline," said Babe. "Now fire away. What's her name?"

"I presume you won't want her," said Madeline calmly, "but if there's any hope—it's Georgia Ames, a freshman friend of mine."

There was another dead silence, but this one was less oppressive. As long as Madeline had not proposed Eleanor Watson, they all felt less embarrassed. As for Georgia Ames, nobody but Roberta and Mary remembered anything about her, and Mary's recollection was only a vague feeling that she had heard the name before. As soon as she had found out that "Georgia Ames" was Roberta, she had lost all interest in the name; and the rest had not noticed it at all, supposing naturally that it had no significance except as Roberta's *nom de plume*. Roberta and Madeline had observed this indifference to Georgia's personality, and had agreed between themselves to keep silent until the right time came for Georgia's introduction to "The Merry Hearts."

It was Betty who finally ended the second long pause.

“What a nice name!” she said, with a glad little sigh of relief. “I don’t know her even by sight, Madeline. Tell us all about her.”

“Haven’t any of you heard of her?” asked Madeline, with an effective stare of surprise.

“I have,” answered Roberta solemnly. “She is a very remarkable freshman, Betty, and I don’t see why you shouldn’t have met her, for she takes a good deal of upper-class work,— ‘English Essayists’ for one thing. Dr. Eaton says that her written work is fine. I saw one of her ten-minute tests, and the comment——”

There was a shout of laughter from Mary, in which the rest of “The Merry Hearts” joined, one after another, as each saw the joke, or thought she saw it. Roberta stared at them in what seemed to be wondering, reproachful silence.

“Roberta,” said Mary, when she could speak for laughing, “how many mysterious freshmen do you and Madeline know, who take ‘English Essayists’ and get fulsome compliments from Dr. Eaton? This is the second one we’ve heard of lately. Is this one a joke too?”

“Why, Mary Brooks,” cried Helen all at

once, "this isn't the second one we've heard of. It's the first. That is, I mean they are both the same. Don't you remember that Roberta signed 'Georgia Ames' to those things she sent to the 'Argus'?"

There was a hubbub of exclamations and questions, and it was some time before Madeline could tell the story of how Georgia began in Dr. Eaton's class, and of her subsequent career there and as contributor to the "Argus."

"You see," she concluded, "I've proved my point, that a second self is sure to be interesting. But I've also proved Betty's, that it's a great deal of trouble to keep one up. I really haven't time between now and midyears to develop Georgia's full possibilities, and so I thought 'The Merry Hearts' might like to use her."

"Madame President," said Rachel, "I move—I mean, will you please instruct the secretary to cast a unanimous ballot for Georgia Ames as a member in good and regular standing of 'The Merry Hearts.'"

"Madame President," added Katherine, "will you please instruct the secretary to indite a formal note of thanks to Miss Made-

line Ayres for giving us such a fine mushroom party ——”

“Better wait till to-morrow, so you can be sure they were all fine,” murmured Babe.

“And also for hunting up such a valuable new member,” went on Katherine.

When the president had carried out these instructions, Betty Wales, being a strictly unimaginative person, ventured a question. “I don’t exactly understand what we’re to do with Georgia Ames,” she said. “Are we just to have the honor of belonging to the same club with her, or are we to use her as Roberta did, or what?”

“Oh, use her by all means,” said Madeline generously. “She is spoiling to be used.”

“But we must be careful not to tell any one else about her,” cautioned Rachel. “If too many people know who she is, she will be spoiled.”

“What kind of girl is she supposed to be?” asked Helen.

“Literary,” explained Roberta, “and clever and—what else, Madeline?”

“Oh, that remains to be discovered,” said Madeline with a shrug. “See what you can

make of her. But whatever you make of her," she added, "be sure that you keep Dr. Eaton interested. The cream of the joke, you know, will be seeing what he says when Miss Stuart confides to him how he's been fooled."

"Maybe you'll never know what he said," suggested Bob.

"Oh, yes, we shall," declared Mary. "Betty can ask her. Betty and she have been great friends ever since that time when she didn't meet Betty at the station. By the way, Betty Wales, how is it that you always manage to get the things you want?"

"I don't," laughed Betty.

"Oh, yes, you do," insisted Mary. "You said the word and 'The Merry Hearts' turned philanthropic. There was Bob and the Hilton House toads, and this morning I caught Babe being nice to that queer Miss Ray on the way out of chapel."

"As if I wasn't always nice to everybody," muttered Babe shamefacedly.

"What I want to know"—Mary went on—"is how you do it. It would be very useful to me in my business if I could wind people around my little finger the way you can."

“Please don’t be silly,” protested Betty, blushing happily. She would have liked to think that she had an influence over her friends, but she couldn’t believe it. She was only “little Betty Wales,” who was not noted for anything in particular, and was always being taken for a freshman.

“Let’s call her the ‘Power Behind the Throne,’ ” said Madeline. “That’s what she is, and she gets the things she wants because she never teases for them the way you do, President Brooks.”

“Many thanks for the hint, Secretary Ayres,” said Mary affably. “I am now requested by our hostess to announce that she would like her dishes washed before ten o’clock. I must go this minute, but the rest of you ——”

“Bar the door!” shouted Bob, “and hold her tight! She’s got to help this time, for once.”

Whereupon the business meeting of “The Merry Hearts” adjourned suddenly and in some disorder.

## CHAPTER VI

### A TOUCH OF STYLE AND SOME OTHER TOUCHES

“THE Merry Hearts” lost no time in arranging the details of what Babbie called Georgia’s coming-out party. Various methods of bringing her to public notice were discussed, but it was finally decided that each “Merry Heart” should do whatever her individual taste and inclination suggested, only each must add some touch, however slight, to the sum total of Georgia’s achievements, report what she had done at the next ensuing meeting of the society, and be very careful not to divulge the secret of Georgia’s personality to any outsider.

Then the fun began. It was curious to see how each girl’s personality came out in the way she manipulated Madeline’s second self. The B’s, as was to be expected, contributed touches of style. Babbie immediately ordered a card plate for Georgia, with a hundred cards engraved according to the latest decree of fash-

ion. Watching her opportunity she slipped one under the door of a Westcott House senior who made a specialty of cultivating freshman friendships. The mystified senior inquired busily for two days without eliciting any definite information as to the identity of her caller, and Georgia's name became very familiar to the Westcott House girls.

A day or two later a huge box of violets arrived by special messenger for Miss Georgia Ames. The parlor-maid was new to the ways of the house (this Bob had counted upon in ordering the flowers), and without looking at the name on the box, she laid it on the table in the front hall. There it stayed all day, stared at and sighed over by envious passers-by, who easily guessed the character of its contents and lamented that, having been sent to the wrong address, a bunch of violets as big as this one must hide its sweetness under a bushel.

After dinner, while the girls lingered in the hall and parlors, as was their custom, Bob engaged in conversation the senior who had been the recipient of Babbie's card and carelessly led her toward the hall table.



“Violets!” she exclaimed, as if she had spied the box for the first time. “Whom do you suppose they’re for?”

The senior, who was accustomed to being deluged with flowers by her freshman admirers, hastened up to the table. “Georgia Ames,” she read. “Why, how funny! That’s the girl who called on me the other day, and I haven’t been able to find out who she is or where she lives. But she certainly doesn’t live in this house. Isn’t it a perfect shame to have those violets wasted?”

“Yes,” agreed Bob, who intended to creep down and confiscate the box after ten. “But what can we do about it?”

The senior considered a moment, and then her face brightened. “Why, find out who sent them, of course,” she said, “and telephone her to send an A. D. T. boy after them.”

“Of course,” said Bob, who knew well that there was no card inside the box. The string was badly knotted, and Bob insisted upon untying it with the greatest care, so that it could be replaced later. With her fingers on the last knot she paused and looked up at the senior anxiously. “You don’t think it’s

wrong," she said, "to look at the card in another person's box of flowers?"

"Of course not, under the circumstances," said the senior acidly. "It's only doing as you'd be done by."

"That depends on the card, I should say," murmured Bob under cover of the rustling paper. A moment later she looked up smilingly. "We're not so bad after all," she said. "There isn't any card. Do you suppose Miss Ames is engaged or only awfully popular? Anonymous flowers mean one thing or the other, don't they?"

"I suppose so, but we can telephone to the florist," said the senior eagerly. "I really must find out her address, you know. She's almost sure to be interesting, or she wouldn't be getting such stunning violets."

Bob had covered her trail well. The florist replied that the order had been brought in by a messenger boy, the name and address written on a card. Had he still the card? Yes, but the address was very illegible. It looked more like Westcott House than anything else. He was sorry, but there seemed to be no way of locating Miss Ames.

Bob, waiting to hear the result of the conversation from the senior's own lips, was joined by Roberta, who had come over to the Westcott on an errand, and together they listened to the senior's story.

"Well, I'm sure you've done your best," Roberta assured her. "It's a shame to waste the violets. Why don't you take them, since she's a friend of yours—or an acquaintance any way? I'm sure you've fairly earned them."

The senior looked doubtfully at Bob, who was glaring stonily at Roberta. "Yes, take them by all means," said Bob sweetly. "Oh, no, I don't want any. A bunch like that costs three dollars and eighty cents, if you care to know."

As the senior mounted the stairs with her treasure, Bob turned wrathfully upon Roberta. "You're a base traitor," she said, "and I shall get even with you sooner or later. But I guess I had my money's worth in spite of you," she added with a grin. "Isn't Georgia the best ever?"

The senior spread the story of the violets widely among her circle of friends. She even

declared her intention of going to the registrar for Georgia's address; but there were a great many other freshmen in the entering class that year, and she never went.

Nita's "touch" stirred up the whole Hilton House, and caused Nita herself endless trouble. The picture post-card fad was at its height and Nita was making a collection. Writing to thank an aunt who had sent her a number of foreign cards, she bethought herself of Georgia, and added a postscript. "A lot of the girls here are making collections of cards. Some day when you have time do send one to Georgia Ames (address, Harding College, Harding). She is always doing me favors."

The aunt responded promptly, and as there was no Georgia Ames in Harding, at least according to the postal register, the card went to the Hilton, with "Try Georgiana Arms," written across it. The aunt had unfortunately seen fit to indite an explanatory line or two below the picture, and Georgiana Arms read it. "My niece, Nita Reese," wrote the aunt, "begs me to send you this card in token of the many favors you have done her. I

need not say that my niece's friends are mine."

Georgiana Arms, who had barely a speaking acquaintance with Nita, realized that the card could not be meant for her, and seeing Nita in the library soon after, she took it out of her philosophy note-book, where she had stored it for safekeeping, and asked Nita for the right address.

Nita was fairly caught. She had meant to create an interest in Georgia, but she had not considered the possibility of having to explain her own interest in the elusive freshman. She read the post-card slowly, trying to gain time and evolve some way of escape, and finally passed it back to Miss Arms. "There isn't any such girl in college as far as I know," she said.

"That's exactly what the mail-man told me," answered Miss Arms. "But I thought—why, your aunt says you asked her to send this Miss Ames a post-card. I don't understand ——"

"There's some mistake," Nita equivocated.

"You mean she isn't your aunt?" demanded Miss Arms.

“Oh, she’s my aunt, fast enough,” laughed Nita, “but she misunderstood about this Georgia Ames.”

“I see,” said Miss Arms doubtfully. “Well, do you want the card?”

“Oh, no,” said Nita politely, though the card was a beauty. “Keep it by all means.”

Miss Arms looked hard at it. “You’re quite sure it doesn’t belong to any one?”

“Perfectly,” Nita assured her. “My aunt—well, she’s a trifle eccentric, you see.”

“I see,” said Miss Arms, and this time she spoke with great positiveness. She confided to a group of her particular friends a little later that she had always wondered why Nita Reese was so funny about some things, and now she had found out. There was insanity in the family,—“Eccentricity, she calls it,” explained Miss Arms, and then told the story of the post-card. One of her friends lived at the Westcott, and consequently knew about Georgia’s violets. There were exciting comparisons, and Georgia’s boom grew amazingly.

Two days later Miss Arms’s theory of the situation, already shaken by the violet story,

received a fatal blow. It was proved to her full satisfaction that Georgia Ames was no figment of an "eccentric" aunt's imagination. She existed and she went to Harding. Mary Brooks had been to New York to see her father and mother off for a winter in Italy, and she sent Georgia a note, written on Waldorf-Astoria paper and signed "Mary." Miss Arms opened it before she noticed the address, and read it through in growing bewilderment. Then she looked again at the envelope, and saw Georgia Ames's name. She consulted Nita, who disclaimed any particular interest in the matter.

"Didn't I tell you that my aunt was mistaken?" she asked. "You can't expect me to know all the 'Marys' who stay at the Waldorf. It does seem to me that the name Georgia Ames is on Dr. Eaton's English Essayists roll, but I've never even seen the girl."

Dr. Eaton was by no means neglected by "The Merry Hearts." Babe, sacrificing her prettiest handkerchief to the cause, marked it carefully with indelible ink, and as she passed out of her English recitation dropped it carelessly on the professor's desk. From a

dark corner of the hall she watched him pick it up, look at the mark, and consult Jean Eastman, who was the last person to leave the class that morning, about its owner.

Jean evidently assured him that there was no such person in the class, for he presently took out his roll-call and pointed out the last name on the list. Jean looked amazed, and Babe heard her asking the girls in front of her if they knew any Georgia Ames who carried handkerchiefs with real lace on them and took English Essayists.

But it was Helen Chase Adams who made the crowning hit, as far as Dr. Eaton was concerned. Unfortunately for his classes, Dr. Eaton did not tire of the ten-minute test. He still resorted to it with unbecoming frequency, and his students were obliged to endure as best they might his remarkable zest for extracting information. So Helen conceived the idea of having Georgia's mother remonstrate with him on the score of danger to her daughter's health.

"It was great fun composing it," Helen explained to Betty, "though I did feel a little like a forger. But I don't suppose there is



any Mrs. Erasmus J. Ames in the world. Do you think Dr. Eaton will answer it?"

"Oh, yes," said Betty eagerly. "He's very punctilious about little things, I've noticed. But how can you get the answer? What address did you give?"

"Just Harding. I wrote as if I was visiting Georgia. Let's go to the office and inquire for Mrs. Erasmus J. Ames's mail."

Sure enough, Dr. Eaton's answer was waiting. Helen read it to "The Merry Hearts" that evening.

"MY DEAR MRS. AMES :

"While I appreciate your interest in your daughter's college work and also in her health, permit me to say that I think you over-estimate the nervous strain imposed by the necessity for producing a brief written exercise. Your daughter's work is so brilliant and likewise so spontaneous that I feel sure you need not be anxious about her. I regret her recent absence from the class on my own account as well as on hers. I remain, madam,

"Most respectfully,

"JOHN ELLIOT EATON."

"Now," said Madeline, "how is that for

subtle flattery and sugar-coated sarcasm? 'Madam, you are a goose, but you have a clever daughter,'—that's what he virtually says. How I detest that man!"

"You're too hard on him, Madeline," laughed Rachel. "Consider what he says about your work."

"Georgia's, you mean," corrected Madeline. "He never puts good comments on my own themes. He is like all the rest of the faculty; once get him interested, as Georgia did with her Matthew Arnold theories, and you are safe from conditions forever after."

"What does he mean about her 'recent absence'?" asked Helen.

"Exactly what I want to know," said Madeline. "Haven't you girls been handing in her ten-minute tests?"

"Of course we haven't," said Betty. "That is your 'touch.' You began it, and we couldn't keep it up even if we wanted to. We can't any of us write one decent theme in ten minutes, to say nothing to doing two."

"Well, then," began Madeline grudgingly, "I suppose I must attend to Georgia's written

work. But I consider that it's putting a great deal off on me."

"Wasn't she yours to begin with?" demanded Mary. "Aren't you getting all the fun of what we do for her, and won't she always be known in Harding history as your second self?"

Madeline smiled genially. "There's something in that, perhaps," she said. "I do certainly like the way you're bringing her out. Before she joined 'The Merry Hearts' she was just clever and literary. Now she has style and social position."

"And a real lace handkerchief," murmured Babe, "that Dr. Eaton never took to the 'Lost and Found' place, so I could get it back."

"And a three-dollar-and-eighty-cent-bunch of violets," added Bob, with a wrathful glance at Roberta.

"I wish you hadn't named her father Erasmus J.," said Madeline. "Still there's nothing positively unpleasant about Erasmus J., and I rather like the idea of her having a fussy, stupid little mother."

"How many more weeks to midyears?" asked Rachel.

“Five to Christmas,” said Betty, who always counted the days from the beginning of each term to the nearest vacation.

“Well, we must make the most of them,” said Mary briskly. “We shall be dreadfully busy between Christmas and midyears.”

“You don’t think,” inquired Helen doubtfully, “that it’s wrong to sign Georgia’s name or her mother’s to papers or letters?”

“No,” said Mary decidedly, “I don’t; that is, if we only use her for fun, and are careful not to let her do any harm to any one. As long as she is just a gloriously big joke, I’m sure she’s all right.”

With which presidential decision “The Merry Hearts” wisely rested satisfied.

## CHAPTER VII

### “THE MERRY HEARTS” FIND WORK TO DO

BETTY WALES found out about her, of course. As Betty said mournfully to Mary Brooks, it was rather a shame when she never, never cried herself, and hated dreadfully to see any one else cry, that she should be the one who was forever running into something of the sort. There had been Helen Adams, Emily Davis and Eleanor, and now there was Dora Carlson, the very last person that you would suspect of wearing her heart on her sleeve.

She was working in the college library one afternoon, reading up for a Lit. paper, so she whispered in answer to Betty's friendly inquiry. Betty explained that she had come to do the very same thing, and sat down across the table from Dora in the English Literature alcove. She noticed at once that Dora looked very sober for such a cheerful little person, but she attributed this to the Lit. paper, which, in Betty's eyes, was a very “sobering”

circumstance. A little later she glanced up from her book and smiled across at Dora just in time to catch her wiping away a big tear. Betty bent low over her book again, blushing for Dora and for herself, the unwilling witness of Dora's weakness. What could be the matter, she wondered. Dora had been so happy during her freshman year, although she had had none of the things that the average freshman considers essential to happiness—neither a pretty room nor a pleasant boarding-place, nor congenial friends, nor popularity, nor prominence of any sort. She had had nothing but Eleanor Watson, and that had been enough for her. Now she had even more of Eleanor than before, for the gentler, sweeter side that Eleanor was developing helped her to give more of herself to her friends; and besides that she was up near the campus, in the pretty room that Eleanor had helped pay for. There were pleasant girls at the new boarding-place, most of them freshmen probably, but that didn't matter, so long as they were the right sort. Suppose they weren't the right sort?

“That's probably it,” Betty decided swiftly.

“They haven’t been nice to her, and she’s feeling bad about it. But it isn’t like her to give up and cry. Oh, how I wish she’d stop!”

But Dora did not stop. Presently the big tears were falling too fast for any furtive wiping-away to conceal them. The English Literature alcove was a comparatively secluded spot, but at any moment some one might invade its privacy. Betty endured as long as she could. Then she leaned across the table.

“Could—couldn’t you stop long enough so that you can go out?” she whispered. “It isn’t far to the door, and then we could go to walk or—or—something nice, and perhaps you’d feel better.”

Dora thanked her with a bright little smile that shone out, rainbow-like, from behind the falling tears. And presently she had “stopped long enough” to go out. Betty returned Dora’s book and her own to the librarian, and escaped the importunate demands of Nita Reese, who wanted to know how much she had read and why she was stopping before her time was up.

“For you’ll not get a chance at that book

again. It's engaged for every single hour," she said.

"You take it now, please, Nita dear, and let me have it your hour—and let me go now. I can't wait to explain." And Betty hurried into the hall.

There Dora was waiting for her, composed and very apologetic. "I'm extremely sorry that I cried," she began in her funny little matter-of-fact way. "I could see that it made you very nervous. It does me too, and I never thought I should be guilty of such childish behavior. But you see, I—I——" Her voice broke, and her lip quivered dangerously.

"Oh, don't mind that now. Please—please try to think of something else," begged Betty, in desperate fear of a second shower. "I'll tell you what we'll do," she added hastily. "We'll go down to Cuyler's and have an ice, or a hot chocolate, if you'd rather."

"I just love ice cream," said Dora eagerly. "We have it every Sunday for dinner, just as they do on the campus, and I always look forward to Sunday dinners, I assure you."

"Do you like your boarding-place?" asked



Betty tentatively, hoping to divert Dora's mind from her trouble and at the same time get a clue to its cause.

"Yes, indeed!" answered Dora eagerly. "Mrs. Tait and the girls are lovely, and my room is just like a little nest up among the elm branches. We don't have many elms near my home, and so I appreciate them more here, I suppose." She smiled gaily up at Betty, then suddenly her face clouded and she lapsed into sombre silence.

While they ate their ices at the cozy little table for two in Cuyler's tea-room, Dora kept showing the same quick change of mood. One minute she was smilingly responsive to Betty's questions; the next she had withdrawn again into her shell, giving no hint of what had frightened her back.

When they had finished, Betty lingered, smoothing her gloves with exaggerated care and wondering if it was safe now to venture on a direct question. The short afternoon had flown away. A maid was turning on the lights, and through the window Betty could see that it was almost dark outside.

“It will be better to ask out there,” she decided. “Then if she should cry ——”

But Dora did not cry. She answered Betty’s questions in her most matter-of-fact fashion. It was not the girls; they had been more than kind. It was nothing at Harding; it was the way things had turned out at home. Her father had hurt his hand in a harvesting machine. There had been heavy doctor’s bills, and while he was still helpless a barn, stored with the fall crops of hay and potatoes, had burned to the ground. So he could not afford to keep Dora at Harding any longer. A letter had come that morning. Perhaps next year she could come back, but at present there was nothing to hope for.

“And I don’t think I shall ever come back,” said Dora sadly. “I can have a place now in the school of our district, and I guess that is what I was meant for. I guess I aimed too high.”

“Oh, no, you didn’t,” Betty assured her. She had been thinking fast. She knew from Rachel some of the ways of economizing at Harding. Dora’s tuition was paid for half the

year, and there must be some way of providing for the board.

"Would you mind earning some money?" she asked, "by tutoring or—or—waiting on table?"

"I would do anything, even to scrubbing floors, if I could stay," said Dora solemnly. "But you see"—she hesitated—"there is Eleanor——"

"Well?" Betty waited

"She is paying part of my board, so that I can be up nearer the campus. If I should move to a cheaper place or go to work, she would have to know."

"Well, why shouldn't she know? You ought to have told her straight off. I know she will keep on giving you the money, and it will help along a lot."

"Oh, no," said Dora quickly. "I couldn't take it. It would be just like breaking a will. The money was given to me for a special purpose, and I can't use it for anything else."

"You absurd child!" laughed Betty. "But perhaps you won't have to move out of Eleanor's room. The off-campus houses are

all wanting waitresses. Wouldn't Mrs. Tait let you earn something in that way?"

"Yes," said Dora, "I think she would. She needs a waitress right now, and there is a little room up on the attic floor that would be a lot cheaper than mine. But I couldn't pay even for that—and I should have to tell Eleanor."

"Of course you'll tell her," said Betty gaily. "It would hurt her feelings dreadfully if she knew that you had told me and not her, when she's so particularly fond of you. Tell her why you can't take the money any longer, and I'm sure she'll understand how you feel." They had reached the campus gate, and Betty caught Dora's arm and pulled her in. "Come and tell her now. There's plenty of time before dinner, and you'll feel better to have it over. While you are there, I'll go and see Rachel about your getting tutoring to do. May I?"

Dora consented gratefully and they parted at the Hilton House steps.

The minute she had finished dinner, Betty hurried over to Eleanor's room. Dora had told her story and Eleanor took exactly the

view of it that Betty had foreseen, and had almost prevailed upon Dora to keep her weekly contribution toward the price of the attic room.

“I told her that I couldn’t possibly move back into my extra-priced room now,” Eleanor said, “and that if she didn’t take the money, I should certainly burn it up, and be very much hurt besides. I think she’ll take it, and it seems that Mrs. Tait, guessing how things were, has hinted at her acting as waitress. It is so hard to get regular maids that the boarding-houses are all clamoring for college girls to help them out. So we may consider that as settled too.”

“But there won’t be nearly enough even then,” said Betty, consulting the account that Rachel had made out for her. “Rachel knows just how much is paid for that sort of work, and about how much tutoring Dora can safely depend upon, and—oh, there’s your money that she didn’t count.”

Eleanor named the sum.

“But even with that added, there’s not enough. Rachel said she ought to have at least a hundred more, that was absolutely

safe and sure. It's dreadful how much it costs just to live!" said Betty sadly.

"Well, how about the Harding Aid Society?" asked Eleanor. "Won't they help?"

Betty shook her head. "I told Mary Brooks that a sophomore I knew needed help, and she said they had already had calls for more money than they can possibly raise this year. If only that old barn had burned sooner!"

There was a pause, then Eleanor spoke hesitatingly. "Didn't you tell me—it's not my affair—but didn't you say that your new society—'The Merry Hearts'—was going to give an entertainment for the Harding Aid. Why not do it for Dora instead?"

Betty gave a little cry of delight. "What a fine idea! I was a stupid not to think of it myself. I'll go straight back and tell Mary. Eleanor, you're a brick!"

With her hand on the door she remembered something and turned back. "You'll help, of course, Eleanor. We shan't forget that it was your idea, and we'll carry it out just as you want us to."

But Eleanor shook her head. "No," she said, "it was 'The Merry Hearts' idea. I only amended it a little, and I could never carry it out. Please tell them that I donate the amendment to them gladly, if they like it. Run along, Betty dear."

And Betty, after a moment's hesitation, ran along. Mary approved of course, and at a brief business meeting of "The Merry Hearts," held just before ten, it was formally decided to carry out Eleanor's suggestion.

"And we must do it soon," said Babe. "She ought to go right home if she's got to go at all, so she can begin teaching in that school. If she waits, she might lose the chance. Fancy teaching a district school all your life!"

"Turn your fancy to something more useful," advised Bob. "What kind of a show shall we have?"

"Something Japanese," answered Roberta promptly. She was the only one of the clan who read the newspapers. "Every one is interested in Japan now, and it will be new here, too."

"The Merry Hearts" approved this sug-

gestion, and as the lights were going out in the halls, Mary summarily appointed Roberta costume and decoration committee, Madeline, Katherine and the B's committee on "stunts," Helen and Nita committee on general arrangements, and Betty and Rachel committee to see the matron about using the parlors, and the registrar about permission to give the entertainment and a date for holding it. Then the meeting adjourned at a run, for the Belden House matron had taken a sudden fancy for walking through the upper halls on the stroke of ten.

The matron gave her consent at once. The registrar hesitated a little, but when she found that "The Merry Hearts" could get on with only four days for preparation, and when she had read the list of members, all of whom but Betty and Babe were among Harding's very best students, she, too, consented, and furthermore bought ten ten-cent admission tickets, paying for them with a bill that made Betty fairly dance with delight.

Everything else went on in the same pleasant fashion. The costume committee was flooded



with offers of real Japanese kimonos and a bewildering collection of fans, screens, silk scarfs, pottery, and china for decorating. Two days before the fête, Madeline had a letter from her father, in which he spoke of a bewitching little Japanese lady, herself an artist, who was sitting as model for a friend of his. Madeline consulted the rest of her committee and sent off a long telegram (*charges collect*), asking for the loan of the Japanese lady for the afternoon of the tea. The answer was favorable, and the committee on arrangements missed their luncheon in order to make an entirely new set of posters. From that moment the success of the tea was assured.

But if the Japanese lady's tea-making and flower arranging were the drawing cards, there were plenty of other attractions. Admission tickets gave the guests entry to the house parlors, where the Japanese lady and four excellent American imitations, arrayed in genuine kimonos, dispensed tea and wafers, and made themselves as entertaining as possible while they described the surpassing charms of the "side-shows" to be found further down

the hall. The three girls who had rooms on the ground floor had generously contributed the use of their quarters. In one a Japanese soothsayer told fortunes in delicious broken English. In another a worker of magic made flowers grow, and produced strange sleight-of-hand effects with swords, coins and little paper balloons. But decidedly the star performance of the afternoon was the third "side-show," a Japanese one-act play. This was Madeline's idea. The rest of the "stunt" committee had been very doubtful about the wisdom of attempting it, and they were amazed and delighted when it proved to be the success of the afternoon. To begin with, Madeline had aroused their doubts by being so mysterious about the play. When Babe asked where she got it and what it was about, she answered that she "had it," and that it was like a good many other plays,—about nothing in particular. She was definite, however, about one thing. There were two characters, and she would play one and Roberta the other. When Roberta flatly refused to take part, Madeline reminded her that she had not yet "paid up" for the loan of Georgia



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Ames, and calmly appointed an hour for the first rehearsal.

"But we haven't looked at our parts," Roberta protested. "There's no time to learn them either. You must give up the play, Madeline; it's impossible to have it on such short notice."

"Come over this afternoon, and if you can't learn your part perfectly in ten minutes we'll give it up," Madeline promised, and the committee, knowing that Roberta learned slowly, supposed that would be the end of the matter. But after the first rehearsal Roberta was as enthusiastic as Madeline, and the rest of the committee, sure that their combined tastes might be trusted, neither interfered nor asked troublesome questions.

The first audience of the afternoon was surprised and somewhat bewildered to find that the play was not only Japanese in setting, but was also written in Japanese. At least it certainly was not English that the two actors were speaking. There was a great deal of bowing and fanning and tea-drinking, a very expressive pantomime, and a fascinating stage-setting. But what particularly interested the

audience was the remarkable linguistic ability displayed by the two actors.

“I knew Madeline Ayres could talk Choctaw and Arabic and everything else under the sun,” said Christy Mason, as she passed out. “But Roberta Lewis doesn’t go in for languages. She’s rather poor in French, and she hasn’t had any German since she entered.”

“Perhaps Japanese is easy,” suggested some one.

“Oh, no!” said Christy decidedly. “All those Oriental languages are awfully hard. I have a cousin who is attached to the legation at—well, I forget just where he is, but it’s somewhere in Japan, and he told me——”

“Hurry up, please,” called the doorkeeper. “There’s a crowd outside waiting to come in.”

Christy Mason opened her purse and handed the ticket-taker a second admission fee. “I’m going to stay and see it again,” she announced. “Perhaps I can pick up an expression or two. My cousin has leave at Christmas, and it would be such fun to spring them on him.”

At the end of the second performance Christy started to rejoin her friends in a state of great excitement. She stopped by

the end of the stage to tell her strange news to an incoming party. "Be sure to stay for two performances," she advised. "They give two entirely different plays. It's perfectly wonderful. Isn't it, Professor Jones?" She appealed to the botany professor who was also waiting to pass out.

"Very wonderful indeed," agreed Professor Jones. "I didn't suppose there was a girl in college who could speak Japanese with such ease and fluency."

They were standing close by the screens which hid the stage and the actors. At the conclusion of Professor Jones's remark there came from behind the scenes a chuckle, followed an instant later by Roberta's characteristic and unmistakable titter. Christy looked hard at the screens, frowned, pulled out her purse and cheerfully paid a third admission. "I want to see if they do more than two plays," she explained, choosing a seat in the exact middle of the front row.

The third play was not the same as the first, though it was quite like it. Christy listened attentively. She heard some of the phrases that she remembered, but they did

not come in at the same places. At the close of the performance she slipped in between the screens and caught the performers laughing wildly in each other's arms.

"I've found you out," she announced blandly. "I've stayed through three of these one-act Japanese plays of yours, and you're impostors. You don't know two words of Japanese between you."

"You're mistaken, Christy," said Madeline. "We know at least a dozen that our little Japanese friend taught us, though I won't vouch for our pronunciation. Wasn't Professor Jones lovely?"

"Yes," said Christy briefly, "but tell me, how do you ever manage it?"

"Oh, it's easy enough," returned Madeline. "I've been to the Chinese theatre a lot and that helped, because most people don't know that the two languages are as the poles apart. Then we've both seen 'The Darling of the Gods,' and Roberta is fine at inventing gibberish."

"And at getting it off with a sober face," added Christy.

"That's why I allowed her to take part in



my one-act Japanese play—or series of plays, I should say. It gets too monotonous, doing nonsense over and over in the same way, so we change.”

“And get caught,” finished Christy, making ready to depart. “But I won’t tell. I’m going to try to make Professor Eaton come in here.”

But Professor Eaton, though he had cheerfully bought tickets galore for the tea, did not patronize it in person.

“It doesn’t matter though,” said Madeline. “He’s got Georgia, and she’s going to be a handful when she gets started.”

The Japanese tea was not only a social triumph, but it also scored a great financial success. “The Merry Hearts” had decided beforehand that any surplus beyond the hundred dollars needed for Dora should be turned over to the general fund of the Harding Aid Society; and though they had not hoped for any such surplus, the secretary who was summarily appointed treasurer when the need for one arose, was able to make out a generous check in favor of the Aid Society.

The next question was how most tactfully to give the rest of the money to Dora. After some discussion it had been decided not to tell her about the object of the tea, lest she be made uncomfortable or be disappointed over its possible failure. So the posters had explained that it was "for a good cause connected with the Harding Aid," and no one but "The Merry Hearts," Eleanor, the Belden House matron and Miss Stuart knew any more than that. As Madeline put it, when an entertainment is good enough so that you really want to go, you don't bother much about the good cause. The Japanese tea had been decidedly of this popular character, and "The Merry Hearts" were not troubled with questions. As for Dora, Betty told her that she had consulted Rachel and was making plans, which she would explain about in a few days. Meanwhile she advised Dora to write her father how matters stood, and get his permission to stay if the finances could be provided.

"There'll be no trouble about his permission," Dora had said eagerly. "He appreciates the value of an education because he hasn't

any. Isn't it queer how we always appreciate the things we haven't?"

Then Betty had warned her that of course "the plans" might not come out as they both hoped, and had spent the week dodging Dora, whose anxious, eager little face was so pathetic when you could not answer the question it put to you.

But now it was settled beyond a doubt that Dora Carlson could have her sophomore year at Harding. The minute the proceeds of the tea had been counted, Betty flew to the telephone and told Mrs. Tait the good news, promising that Dora should have the details the next morning. Then the club considered how to present their gift, so that it should be most welcome.

"We could just give the money to the Aid Society, and let them tell her what they chose about it," suggested Katherine.

"I object," said Bob. "That method lets Madeline out of writing the note to Miss Carlson. She doesn't write any reports as it is, and we can't have a secretary just for ornament."

"There's another thing," added Mary.

“The Aid Society would have to let her know it was a special gift, otherwise girls who applied for help earlier than she would feel that they were being unfairly treated. So there we are again.”

“Why does any one think she mightn’t like to take the money from us?” asked Babe.

“Just because girls in her position are likely to be very sensitive,” explained Mary. “And most of us are almost strangers to her.”

“Then why not try to be friends?” demanded Helen Adams quickly. “Why not ask her to be a ‘Merry Heart’? She’ll be too busy to meet with us very often, but I think it would please her and show her that we really like her and aren’t just giving her the money because we are sorry for her.”

“And she’s certainly the merriest-hearted person I ever saw,” added Betty eagerly.

The B’s exchanged glances and then Babbie spoke for the three. “If it would please her, let’s do it.”

So Madeline wrote the note, and Betty delivered it just after chapel the next morning, while the rest of the club lingered ostenta-

tiously in corners of the hall to watch its reception. This was all that could have been desired, and "The Merry Hearts" never regretted their action. Dora was even busier than Rachel and could very seldom come to the gay evening gatherings, but she wore her pin, a Christmas present from Bob, as proudly as if it had been a Victoria cross; and, next to her friendship with Eleanor, the dearest memory she took away with her from Harding was her membership in "The Merry Hearts."

## CHAPTER VIII

### DR. EATON FINDS HIMSELF MISTAKEN

THERE were only five seniors at the Belden, —a state of affairs by no means without its compensations for the juniors who lived in the same house. There are decided advantages, connected with second helpings of ice cream and the possibility of having hot toast for breakfast, enjoyed by the girl who sits at the head of a table at meal times. This is ordinarily a senior privilege, but Mary Brooks was disqualified because she was never by any chance on time to serve breakfast, and another of the five spent all her Sundays with friends in town, and so was too irregular at meals to take her turn. One can easily get too much of even a good thing, and the other three, not caring for the continuous responsibility of being “heads,” gave up their places every second month to the juniors, who crowed over their classmates in other houses where seniors were more numerous or more tenacious of

their rights. And this was not all. If the matron or the house-teacher wanted to entertain the senior contingent, it was often easier to ask with them the juniors in the house than to select a few seniors from outside to make up a party of the right dimensions.

So the Belden House juniors were not at all surprised and very much pleased to find that Mrs. Kent and Miss Andrews had decided to ask them to the annual house faculty-party, to which usually only the seniors were invited. Roberta Lewis, to be sure, being shy by nature and new to campus life, declared that she could not and would not go, and laid elaborate plans for having a headache or a sprained ankle. But even Roberta put aside her fears and resolved to venture down with Mary, when it was announced that the ice cream was to be chocolate parfait, and that the blasé Dr. Eaton had overpowered every one by sending an acceptance,—instead of his usual stereotyped regrets,—to the Belden House faculty-party.

“Do you suppose he’ll say anything about Georgia?” asked Roberta eagerly, as she helped Mary to dress.

“I’m sure I don’t know,” answered Mary

absently, patting a refractory lock of hair into place, "but I don't much care what he talks about, so long as he talks to me. You juniors needn't think you can monopolize him just because you take his work."

"You always monopolize Dr. Hinsdale," retorted Madeline, who was waiting, so she said, to go down-stairs under Mary's protecting wing. "At the last Dramatic Club reception he didn't so much as speak to any one else."

"Well, neither did I, for that matter," said Mary thoughtfully, "so why don't you say he monopolized me? It sounds very much better." She gave a final glance into the mirror. "I shan't let Dr. Eaton monopolize me," she added as she went out, "but I shan't let him monopolize any one else either."

Mary was a great favorite with most of the faculty, for the simple reason that she stood not at all in awe of them, but chattered on to the learned Miss Ferris or the dignified Professor Lawrence just as spontaneously as if they had been Harvard freshmen or members of the clan. Mrs. Kent was a great admirer of Mary's social gifts, and knowing that her



supply of small talk never failed her, she seized upon her the minute she appeared and turned her over to the new German professor, who was stranded in a corner, looking sadly at the gay groups around him and wishing himself and his scant knowledge of English safe back in the Fatherland. Mary put him at his ease immediately, for her German was a trifle worse than his English ; and in trying to set her right and supply the words she could not remember he forgot his own mistakes. He was soon cozily ensconced in a nook under the stairs, eating chocolate parfait and trying to understand why he must not ask a young lady's permission "to hold her a few moments after the class." Mary, for her part, was so absorbed in her efforts to explain the subtle difference between hold and keep that she had entirely forgotten Dr. Eaton, and she and her escort were probably the only persons in the room who did not stop talking to stare at him when he came in. Mrs. Kent looked anxiously around for Mary to take this distressingly haughty young man off her hands, but the stairs screened her and her German, and Mrs. Kent flew to Betty Wales, who was

having a beautiful time talking to her beloved Miss Ferris.

“Come, child,” she said, “and amuse the melancholy Dane. You girls all seemed to be delighted because he was coming, but for my part I can’t see why. I’ll take care of Miss Ferris, but I can’t and won’t talk to him any longer.”

So Betty rose obediently and was duly presented to Dr. Eaton, who to her astonishment came immediately out of his melancholy and received the introduction with evident pleasure. He smiled his rare smile as he shook hands, and when Betty asked him if he wanted an ice he seized two from a passing waitress in a summary fashion that bespoke much experience with afternoon teas. It couldn’t be that he was a woman-hater, Betty decided.

“I wish I could find you a seat,” he said, glancing down the long hall. “Ah, I have it! Is that little room off there forbidden territory?” As the little room was Mrs. Kent’s parlor, which was always opened for house teas, Betty led the way there and sat down, wondering why in the world Dr. Eaton had “wanted to meet her for a long time,” and

what in the world they should find to talk about.

Dr. Eaton settled the second question easily enough. "Well," he began, drawing a chair nearer to the one that Betty had chosen, "has your mother gone?"

"Yes," answered Betty in amazement, "she went to-day." (Mrs. Wales and the smallest sister had started that morning for Chicago.) "But how, please, did you know anything about my mother?"

"I had a note from her," answered Dr. Eaton calmly, "so I knew that she had been here; and as it was some little time ago, I naturally concluded that she might have left. It really wasn't difficult."

Betty stared at him in utter bewilderment and blushing confusion. Her mother had never been to Harding. And what could she have written about to Dr. Eaton? Ever since her father's famous telegram to the registrar at the beginning of her freshman year, Betty had lived in dread of some similar breach of college etiquette on the part of her parents. Now it had come. Her mother had probably asked Dr. Eaton to give shorter lessons.

She faced the issue boldly. "I didn't know that mother had written you," she said. "What did she want?"

"She thinks that ten-minute tests are spoiling your constitution," answered Dr. Eaton gravely.

"Oh, dear!" Betty's chagrin was comical. "That's exactly like her. Isn't it queer that mothers and fathers can't understand that a college is different from a boarding-school?"

"Very queer," agreed Dr. Eaton, smiling again. "So you didn't put her up to writing the letter?"

"Of course not," said Betty indignantly.

"Oh, I knew you didn't do it on your own account," Dr. Eaton assured her. "It's easy to see that ten-minute tests don't bother you; but I thought you might have been working for your friends."

Betty looked hard at Dr. Eaton to see if he was laughing at her. "What do you mean by saying that writing isn't hard for me?" she demanded at last. "It's very hard indeed, and I do it very badly. I know, for you've told me so on almost every paper."

"I've told you so on almost every paper?" repeated Dr. Eaton uncomprehendingly.

All at once an explanation of their conversation at cross-purposes flashed across Betty. "Dr. Eaton," she said, "you must have confused me with some one else. Who do you think I am?"

"You are Miss Georgia Ames," announced Dr. Eaton with calm conviction.

"Oh, no, I'm not," gasped Betty, and then, as the absurdity of the situation struck her, she was overcome by laughter.

"I beg your pardon," she said, when she could speak, "but you can't imagine how funny it is that I should be taken for Georgia Ames. If you only knew me, and—and—Georgia, you'd appreciate the joke."

"Very likely I should," assented Professor Eaton genially. "As it is, I'm very much puzzled. In class I have always supposed that you were Miss Ames, and just now, when Mrs. Kent introduced me, I was sure she said Ames."

"Wales and Ames do sound a little alike," admitted Betty, "but that's the only similarity between us." Then she laughed again. "It's

too bad that you can't meet Georgia, when you've wanted to so long. But she doesn't live in this house."

"No?" said Dr. Eaton absently. "But what puzzles me is to think who she can be,—if she really isn't you. What does she look like, Miss Wales?"

Betty hesitated. "Why, she—she's very good-looking," she stammered, "fine-looking, I mean, and she—she dresses very well indeed. She always carries handkerchiefs with real lace on them," finished Betty swiftly.

"That just reminds me," remarked Dr. Eaton, setting his ice-cream plate on the table with a thud. "I have a handkerchief that belongs to her in one of my pockets this minute. It had lace on it, too. She dropped it one day in my classroom and I picked it up to give to the janitor and then forgot all about it. I mustn't fail to return it to-morrow."

"Do," advised Betty, trying hard to keep sober. "She might want it."

"But you haven't told me much about her looks," pursued Dr. Eaton. "Is she tall or short?"

"She—why, she's medium, I should

think," invented Betty hastily. "Really, Dr. Eaton, I never noticed her particularly." Just then Betty's eyes fell on Roberta, who was standing alone near the door of Mrs. Kent's room. "Wait a minute," she commanded, "and I'll get Roberta Lewis. She knows Georgia pretty well, and she's very good at description. I know I'm particularly bad at it, for you've said so repeatedly yourself."

Roberta was overwhelmed by the idea of having to talk to Dr. Eaton, but she came in perforce, and stayed long enough to describe Georgia in detail and with considerable picturesqueness.

Dr. Eaton listened intently. "It's odd," he said, "I can't place Miss Ames at all—but then my classes are very large."

"Is she an especially interesting girl?" asked Betty, squeezing Roberta's hand.

"She writes extremely well," answered Dr. Eaton stiffly, and the subject was dropped.

"I suppose," Betty explained, telling the story to "The Merry Hearts" that evening, "he realized all of a sudden that he oughtn't to be discussing her so frankly with us. Of course he shouldn't, if she was a real person."

“You don’t think he suspects anything?” asked Rachel.

“No, indeed,” declared Betty. “He was just as serious as could be, wasn’t he, Roberta?”

“It’s funny to me that the girls don’t any of them see through her,” said Katherine.

“Therein,” declared Madeline proudly, “lies the merit of the idea. Second selves are not common enough to be suspected.”

“I only hope,” put in Betty, “that Dr. Eaton will remember whose mother it was that wrote the foolish letter. Helen’s ‘touch’ seems to have impressed him more than anything else.”

“Don’t you think,” said Madeline, “that several of you are neglecting your duties to Georgia? Betty, you haven’t done anything yet.”

“Haven’t I?” exclaimed Betty in great indignation. “Didn’t I have to impersonate her for at least ten minutes, and then endure Dr. Eaton’s disappointment when he found that I wasn’t Georgia after all?”

“And Mary was her first victim,” said Katherine, “if you count that.”



"I certainly do," Madeline assured her, smiling engagingly at the president.

"How about you, Rachel?" went on Katherine. "Have you contributed anything to the spreading of Georgia's fame?"

"Indeed I have," declared Rachel. "I sent her an invitation to Clio Club's open meeting, when I wanted it dreadfully for some one else."

"And she sent you a note of thanks, and attended the meeting in the person of her better half," said Madeline.

"Then I am the only delinquent," sighed Katherine, "and I promised to do something startling before long."

Her opportunity came that very evening. On her way home to the Westcott she met little Alice Waite, in great distress because she had two men on her hands for the Glee Club Concert.

"I asked one of them away back last summer," Alice explained, "and he was coming, but last week he found that he couldn't, so I asked the other. To-day the first one telegraphed that he should be here after all, and the second one wrote that he should be delighted to come. It's dreadfully stupid, en-

tertaining two men who are strangers to each other, and it's so late that all the girls I know have men of their own. Have you one, K.?"

"No," said Katherine, "I'm happy to say that I haven't. Men frighten me to death."

"Oh, do take one of mine," begged Alice.

Katherine was obdurate. "I love you, gentle Alice, but not to that extent," she said. Then she had a sudden inspiration, and recklessly she made use of it. "But I know a girl who'll take your extra man," she went on. "She's a freshman, but she's awfully clever and amusing. Her name is Georgia Ames."

"Oh, I've heard of her," cried Alice eagerly. "I was over at the Westcott the night some lovely violets were sent there for her by mistake. She must be awfully popular. How do you know she hasn't a man of her own?"

"Because I do," said Katherine sturdily.

"But I don't know her," objected Alice.

"Well, I do. I'll explain and I promise you that it will be all right. If Georgia takes your man he'll have the time of his life."

"But she—she wouldn't care which man she had?" asked Alice anxiously.

"Indeed she will care," teased Katherine. "She will prefer the one you don't want."

"Then it's all settled," cried Alice. "You see it is dreadfully awkward because——"

"I see," Katherine cut her short. "There was a little quarrel, but now it's made up, and Man Number Two is very much in the way."

Alice blushed and laughed, but did not deny it. "You must take me to call on Miss Ames," she said. "But first please explain what I want, and be sure to tell her that I have splendid seats for her. I shall write Tom to-night that he's going with a regular belle."

"Say anything you like about her," encouraged Katherine. "You can't exaggerate when you're praising Georgia."

Next day she sought out Rachel. "I'm in a fix," she explained. "I've boosted Georgia too hard. All the rest of you tell your little tales and then find a hole to crawl out of. But as far as I can see, I've got to produce my Georgia."

"Oh, no," said Rachel, when she had heard the whole story. "Have her send Alice a

note to say that she has been called away from college for the week."

"And take the man myself?" asked Katherine. "Not by any means."

Rachel considered. "Of course it would be against the rules of the game to leave Alice in the lurch, but perhaps Betty will take him. I heard her say that her concert man had broken his collar-bone and couldn't come."

So Georgia wrote Alice that she had been having bad headaches, for which her doctor prescribed a week of rest on a farm outside Harding. She was extremely sorry to miss the concert, but her dear friend Betty Wales had promised to help Alice out in her stead.

Alice hurried straight over to Betty to say how glad she was. "I'd a lot rather have you take Tom," she declared. "I was worried about Miss Ames. Lots of people seem to know about her, but no one really knows her except you and Katherine. I think she must be just a little queer, and Tom hates queerness."

"Well, she is a little bit queer," admitted Betty, trying hard not to laugh.

“There’s just one thing——” Alice puckered her smooth forehead as she tried to settle it. “Betty,” she ventured at last, “now tell me honestly, do you mind if I slur over your name and let Tom Alison think it’s Ames, if he wants to? You see I had to explain that I wasn’t going to take him to the concert myself, and it was a little awkward; so I told him what a fine girl he was going with,—how pretty and popular she was, and all that. It just fits you, Betty, and it does seem as if I couldn’t write it all over and think of new things to say.”

“Oh, Alice,” laughed Betty, “it’s too absurd. You see—oh, if you knew Georgia you wouldn’t suggest such a thing.”

“You mean she is the kind that wouldn’t like it?” asked Alice anxiously. “But couldn’t you explain it to her, Betty? Tell her how busy I am, and how I hate to write notes, and how I praised her to Tom until I haven’t any adjectives left. Couldn’t you?”

Betty considered, still laughing with a heartiness that puzzled Alice. “Why, perhaps I could,” she said at last. “Georgia is awfully good-natured. I think she would

understand, and of course my feelings don't count at all, so long as Mr. Alison has some one to take him to the concert."

Next day, after consulting the rest of "The Merry Hearts," Betty told Alice that Georgia understood, and so it happened that Tom Alison went back to Yale the day after the concert singing the praises of Miss Georgia Ames to all who would listen to his rapturous eulogies. Inquiries about her came back to Harding from brothers, cousins and friends at Yale. Also Mr. Tom Alison sent a box of Huyler's to Miss Ames at the Belden, accompanying it with an invitation to the Yale prom.

Betty took the note and the candy over to Alice. "See what you've done," she said, with a face that was sober, all but the eyes. "Of course I can't keep them. They belong to the real Georgia—the one you wrote the note about. You must take them to her."

"Oh, Betty, I couldn't," said Alice in great distress. "She would have to acknowledge them somehow, and that means that she would have to explain to Tom."

"You mean you would have to," said Betty

severely. "Well, which is worse—for you to explain or for me to? If I answered, I should have to tell him how it was just as much. I know a lot of Yale men, and I can't go to the prom. as Georgia Ames."

"But you can decline," suggested Alice desperately.

"Do you think it's quite fair to make me do that?" inquired Betty judicially. "Of course, when he finds out, he may not want to take me; but I think he'll see the joke. Oh, Alice, it's too delicious! There isn't any Georgia Ames."

"What?" gasped Alice.

"Why,—you mustn't tell a soul, but I've got to make you understand,—she's only Madeline Ayres's second self."

"Madeline's what?" asked Alice.

Betty repeated. "Well, that's what Madeline calls her. She's a fictitious person, you know. Madeline invented her, and we have had lots of fun making people believe she was real."

"But—why—she gets letters and violets and notes on the bulletin board," protested Alice.

“Yes, and she makes calls and drops handkerchiefs and takes English Essayists,” added Betty, “but you see this is how we manage her.” She explained the methods of “The Merry Hearts” and the bewilderment of Dr. Eaton. “So this isn’t the first time that I’ve been Georgia,” she concluded. “Now do you think Mr. Alison will forgive me? Because he says in his note that he’s coming to call next Wednesday, and I might try to explain then, instead of writing.”

Needless to say, Mr. Alison forgave the fair conspirators. More than that, he was delighted with Georgia and promised to make her fairly famous at Yale. He had just received a composite picture of his sister’s crowd at school, and he got Betty to write “Georgia Ames” and the date on the back of it. The composite Georgia was a very pretty girl, and the slightly blurred effect was artistic and at the same time decidedly suggestive of Georgia’s elusive personality. Mr. Alison promised to send for more copies of Georgia’s picture for distribution among “The Merry Hearts.”

He was all the more interested because it seemed that Dr. Eaton was a friend of his



older brother William, and Tom insisted upon having all the details of Georgia's career in "English Essayists" in order that he might write to William, who was surveying a railroad route in Arizona, all about the joke on his old chum.

Betty had not been particularly interested in Georgia until the day of the faculty tea. Her interview with Dr. Eaton then and the subsequent adventure with Alice and Tom Alison aroused her imagination, and she entered into the plans for Georgia's future as eagerly as Mary or Roberta. Even now, however, Mary accused her of being interested, not in Georgia, but in Dr. Eaton. To be sure Mary's theory was largely founded on envy. She had thoroughly enjoyed the faculty tea, but she had not succeeded in meeting Dr. Eaton, who had left as soon as he finished his conversation with Betty. He had walked home with Ethel Hale, as Betty knew, because she had been bidding Ethel good-bye at the door, when he came up and, saying he believed they went the same way, asked permission to walk along with her.

"Thank you,—it's not at all necessary,"

Ethel had said, "but do as you wish." Dr. Eaton had looked hurt, Betty thought, but he went out with Ethel nevertheless.

"I don't see why Ethel doesn't like him," Betty reflected. "I think he's awfully nice, when he tries to be. And Ethel isn't a blue-stocking like some of the women on the faculty. She likes men and good times just as well as we girls do."

## CHAPTER IX

### DR. EATON GROWS MAJESTIC

BETTY had not violated a promise in telling Alice Waite and Tom Alison about Georgia. The joke was really getting too good to keep, and Madeline had suggested that, as Georgia had not much longer to live, her friends and promoters should let the cat out of the bag by inches, being careful, however, to keep Dr. Eaton in the dark until the very last minute. So probably half the ten o'clock class in English Essayists had heard about Georgia, and nudged their neighbors excitedly when, one morning in late December, Dr. Eaton announced that he wished to see Miss Ames for a moment at the close of the hour.

"The Merry Hearts," most of whom were in the ten o'clock division, exchanged swift glances, and then tried to conceal their amusement or embarrassment in various characteristic fashions. Madeline and Roberta, each wearing an expression of lamb-like innocence, stared

inquiringly at Dr. Eaton. Bob stuffed her handkerchief into her mouth to keep from laughing out loud. Helen studied her notebook with an air of intense absorption. Babe, Babbie and Betty played with their fountain pens and tried vainly not to look ill at ease. The rest of the class, however, made no particular effort not to look interested, and Dr. Eaton, in spite of his impersonal attitude toward his young charges, must have detected something unusual in the air.

Nobody knew how he had settled the question of Georgia's identity since the day of the Belden House tea. Either he had lost interest in her, and had not taken the trouble to pick her out of the class; or else he had failed to do so and was too proud to ask any more questions. All "The Merry Hearts" knew was the fact of his having finally given Georgia's handkerchief to the janitor, who had in turn surrendered it to Babe, after a long argument in which he flatly declared that there was "somethin' crooked somewhar and he'd hold her responsible if that there Miss Ames ever turned up to bother him."

And now Dr. Eaton had requested Georgia

to wait after class! While "The Merry Hearts" were still frantically racking their brains for a way of turning the situation to account, he launched another question.

"Is Miss Ames present this morning?"

"No, she isn't," answered Madeline Ayres promptly. "She's ill, I presume. Shall I take the message to her?"

"Thank you, I will write a note," answered Dr. Eaton in his most icy manner.

"Oh, very well," returned Madeline cheerfully. "It will amount to the same thing. I mean I will see that she gets the note."

Dr. Eaton's lecture was even more brilliant than usual, but it is doubtful if the initiated half of the ten o'clock division in English Essayists knew any more about the genius of Thomas Carlyle at its close than they had at its commencement. The question before the house was: What did Dr. Eaton want of Georgia Ames, and would her sponsors be able to save her life until after midyears, as they had planned?

At the close of the hour "The Merry Hearts" hunted up their president and gathered in an excited group outside the library door.

"I shall be late to astronomy and Jane Ellis will get the only decent telescope to see sun-spots with," announced Katherine Kit-tredge, "but I don't care. What in the world do you suppose he wants of Georgia?"

"Never mind that now," interposed Mary hastily. "The point is to get the note before some of the girls who know the secret grab it for their memory books. Which hour can you watch the bulletin board, K.?"

"Twelve to one," answered Katherine briskly, starting after her favorite telescope.

"And Betty is going to take half of this hour. Can you take the rest, Roberta?"

Roberta nodded.

"And I will cut lunch, because I am going down-town for breakfast now, and I shan't really need any more food at one. That covers the time till two, and the rest of you can arrange about the afternoon later. Now run for your classes."

Whether intentionally or otherwise, Dr. Eaton led "The Merry Hearts" a tedious chase. Twelve and one came and went, and still no note appeared on the faculty bulletin board, though Dr. Eaton was in his office,

liable to emerge at any unguarded moment. At one he went off to lunch, but Mary kept her tryst all the same, because he might come back unexpectedly early. From two to three Babbie sat disconsolately on the stairs, where Dr. Eaton would not notice her—and where it was too dark to read or study. At three Nita came on duty. At three-thirty Rachel took her place and kept it until five, because Babe and Babbie forgot their hours and appeared then, together with Helen Adams. Helen had just sent the two B's away, because they were so noisy that they would certainly attract attention, when Dr. Eaton swung down the hall straight past his office door, posted a note on the faculty bulletin, and strode off, whistling jovially.

“How much nicer he seems when he thinks nobody is around,” Helen reflected, as, barely waiting until he was out of sight, she seized the note and hurried over to twenty-seven, Belden.

Betty, Madeline and Mary were already there, drinking tea and talking over Georgia's predicament. Madeline demanded the privilege of reading the note first.

“Just what I was afraid of,” she said, glancing rapidly through it and passing it to Mary. “But I couldn’t help it. The rest of you were ready enough to make the frills for Georgia, but you left all the plain sewing to me, and of course I couldn’t manage it.”

“What’s the trouble?” demanded Betty.

“Georgia is held up for cutting too much,” explained Madeline. “In other words she hasn’t handed in her ten-minute tests very regularly. You see I omitted a few when I thought the rest of you were doing them, and last week and the week before I hadn’t studied at all, and I simply couldn’t bluff for two. So I did my best for Madeline Ayres and let Georgia Ames shift for herself, poor thing!”

“Listen, girls. Isn’t this lovely?” cried Mary, who had finished the note. “I deeply regret the necessity of asking you to explain your many absences from English Essayists. I need not say that your work has been unusually satisfactory; but you know the Harding rule about cuts, doubtless better than I. Miss Stuart assures me that it is ironclad, and therefore I am left no choice but to hope that



your absences have some good excuse—and that you have not lost interest in the course.

“ ‘ Most respectfully,

“ ‘ JOHN ELLIOT EATON.’ ”

“ Fishing for a compliment, isn't he? ” said Madeline scornfully. “ Well, we can give him one, I suppose ; but if Georgia is to go on one of you must shoulder her ten-minute tests from now to midyears. I am really too busy to read the topics, and if I invented for two I should certainly be caught.”

“ Oh, Madeline,” said Roberta sadly, “ you know perfectly well that the rest of us can't do papers for two.”

There was a discouraged silence. “ How about Rachel? ” asked Mary at last. “ She is awfully clever.”

“ She doesn't take Essayists though,” said Bob, who had come in with the other B's in the course of the letter-reading.

“ Then,” said Roberta sadly, “ Georgia must die.”

“ Oh, no,” cried Betty, “ she mustn't die just now, when she's going on so splendidly at Yale—and before her pictures have come, too.

Could we—oh, dear!” Then, with sudden inspiration, “Couldn’t we have her leave college instead?”

“Of course,” cried Babbie excitedly. “She leaves for her health. That would explain her cutting. She can stay out over midyears and come back some time in the spring, when we have more time to play with her.”

“Oh, I’m so glad she hasn’t got to miss spring term,” said Helen, with a little sigh. Helen still took her pleasures very seriously.

“Shall I write the note?” asked Madeline, appropriating Betty’s desk. “And shall I have her say what is the matter with her, or where she is going?”

“We’d better have her go off a good long way,” suggested Bob, “or Dr. Eaton might think of following her—if he’s really as interested as Betty thought he was.”

“Oh, I know just what to do,” cried Babe. “Have her catch pneumonia from that window that he’s always opening right on to me in English Essayists. Then she could go out west somewhere to strengthen her lungs. Where do people go to strengthen their lungs?”

“Arizona, don’t they?” answered Mary doubtfully. “Anyhow say Arizona, Madeline. It sounds so nice and stunty and far off.”

While Betty made fresh tea for the late comers, Madeline wrote her note. “Dear Dr. Eaton”—it began :

“I was rather surprised to get a complaint from you about my cuts. I do not think my name can be in the right place on your roll, for I have listened carefully and I never hear it called. Some one said to-day that she thought it was down at the very end of the list. If so, I never noticed it and that probably explains most of the cuts.”

Madeline paused. “Isn’t that rather lovely? You know he hasn’t called the roll but once since he came.”

“It’s beautiful,” said Mary breathlessly. “Go on.”

“As for the very recent absences,” Madeline continued, “I am sure you must have heard how ill I have been. You remember the cold Wednesday we had two weeks ago? I sat right beside the open window in English Essays, and that night I came down with pneumonia. I am much better now—quite

out of danger, the doctor says,—but he insists on my trying a warmer climate this winter. So I am off for Arizona to-morrow. I shall be very sorry to leave Harding, particularly your classes. I find the lectures anything but dull.

“ Hoping to return to my work soon, I am  
Sincerely yours,  
“ GEORGIA AMES.”

“ That is great,” declared Katherine, when Madeline had finished.

Madeline laughed. “ If you think so, you might be the one to give it to him.”

“ Very well,” agreed Katherine. “ I’ll hand it to him before class to-morrow. Then after class you can inquire whether he got it all right.”

“ Yes,” said Madeline, “ and Roberta can inquire too. Then next day Betty can linger on the way out and ask if he doesn’t think it is a pity about Georgia.”

“ And I shall sit near the window that day,” put in Babbie eagerly, “ and ask him to have it opened, if he doesn’t open it of his own accord. And Babe can shiver and cough,

and then we'll watch him slam it down hard in memory of his dear Georgia."

Dr. Eaton rose to the bait with almost annoying readiness. Apparently he found nothing strange in the remarkable solicitude of Georgia's friends. He lectured patiently in a stuffy room, or opened the window a crack and cautioned the whole class to let him know the instant they felt a draught. Furthermore he rearranged his roll in exact alphabetical order, and called it scrupulously at the beginning of each recitation. "The Merry Hearts" found these developments so amusing that they regretted having packed Georgia off in such desperate haste.

"We might just as well have let her come to class once more, to hear one last lecture," said Rachel sadly. "It would have been risky, but everything Georgia does is that."

"Couldn't we do it still?" asked Mary.

"No," said Bob decidedly, "we can't. I told Dr. Eaton only this morning that Georgia had got to Arizona. He asked me where she was going to stay, and I said that she was going to try Tombstone for a while anyway."

"He'll see through that," said Babbie scornfully. "That's too silly even for Georgia."

"See through what?" inquired Babe loftily. "I suppose you think there isn't any such place as Tombstone, do you? But I looked it up on a map, and there is, and furthermore I've got several other beautiful names ready in case Georgia doesn't care for Tombstone."

"Well, as soon as we get back after Christmas, you'd better give us her itinerary," advised Mary. "We don't want to slip up on a little thing like the geography of Arizona, when we've got her safely through everything else."

"I wish I was safely through my packing," grumbled Katherine.

"And I wish I was safely home," added Betty. "Just think! If it wasn't for that one class of Dr. Eaton's to-morrow I could start to-night."

"As long as you've got to stay," suggested Madeline, "be sure and talk to him a little about Georgia. We don't want him to forget her during the Christmas vacation."

"All right, I will," Betty promised. "I'll tell him that her mother has gone out to

spend Christmas with her. He'll be so nice and sympathetic and he'll say, 'Now I'm glad of that. Fancy spending your Christmas alone in a place called Tombstone!' I love to hear him say 'fancy.'"

The next morning Betty arrived at the station hot and breathless, barely in time for the eleven-thirty train to the junction.

"Save me a seat, Madeline," she panted, "with you and Mary and Roberta. I've got something to tell you; but first I've got to check my trunk.

"Well, what do you think Dr. Eaton did?" she began indignantly when she was finally seated beside her three friends, with the B's and Nita just across the aisle. "I told him that Mrs. Erasmus J.—of course I didn't call her that—had gone out to Tombstone, and he was positively frigid. He just said, 'Indeed!' and went on looking out the window. I was bound to make him take an interest, so I told him that she was dreadfully worried about Georgia, and he only said 'Indeed!' again. Then I happened to remember that I had her picture with me. Tom sent them to-day, and I was carrying Mary's to her. So I said,

‘Dr. Eaton, you asked me once how Georgia looked. I’ve just got her picture. Should you like to see it?’ And he said, ‘Oh, don’t trouble, Miss Wales. I hope you will have a delightful vacation.’ Now what do you make of that?”

“Plain as day,” said Mary calmly. “Some disagreeable person has told him that Georgia is a fake, and he’s naturally huffy.”

“Oh, nobody would do that,” protested Roberta. “Every one who knows about Georgia knows that Dr. Eaton is the particular victim who isn’t to be told.”

“Perhaps some stupid let it out by mistake,” suggested Madeline, “or may be some of the faculty got hold of it and didn’t approve.”

“But I should think he’d be a little amused,” said Betty sadly, “and he didn’t show the least little speck of amusement. Of course I suppose he has a right to be annoyed at our freshness. We have been awfully fresh, you know.”

“But if it was that,” objected Nita, who had come to sit on the arm of Betty’s seat, “I should think he’d have shown his feelings



long ago. He's been so amiable about Georgia—so much more amiable than he has about anything else—that I thought he'd suspected all along that she was a fake, and that he liked the joke as well as we did."

Betty stared disconsolately out the window. "It's such a pity that Georgia should be spoiled just at the end," she said. "I wish I had asked him right out what the matter was."

"You might go back and do it now," suggested Mary. "He is probably still sitting there thinking about Georgia, and it may spoil his whole vacation."

Betty shrugged her shoulders and turned back from the dismal prospect with a sigh.

"Well," she said, "you may laugh all you like, but I am sorry. I like Dr. Eaton, if Madeline doesn't, and I hate to have a misunderstanding about Georgia." But Betty was never disconsolate for long. "Bob," she called across the aisle a few moments later, "is Georgia liking Tombstone so far?"

Bob nodded. "And isn't Georgia's photographer a perfect wonder? I got her picture this morning. Want to see it?" she asked,

turning to the round-eyed freshman in the next seat. "You know we all think that Georgia Ames is about the most interesting girl in your class."

The freshman stared at Georgia's picture in awe-struck silence, privately resolving to look up Miss Ames the minute she got back. For if she was admired like that by "The Merry Hearts," she must indeed be a marvel.

## CHAPTER X

### THE UNDOING OF GEORGIA

ALL Christmas vacations are alike. Just as you are beginning to realize that Christmas is really coming, and that it is almost time to pack to go home, the faculty make a unanimous decision to give papers or written lessons to all their classes. This seems to be their idea of making the holiday pleasant, by making the week before the holidays particularly full of agonies. And no matter what courses you are taking, the written lesson in the one you know least about is sure to come on the last day of the term. When it is over, you rush back to your room, tuck the Christmas packages that you have strict injunctions not to open until the right day comes into your trunk, shut the lid—with the assistance of several friends—sweep the débris that litters your dresser into a suit case, and run for your train. Probably you think you have failed in your test, but you have no time to worry about that now. You are

going home for Christmas! If you are lucky enough to live on one of the main-traveled roads you will have plenty of company on the journey, and you will slip from your friends' clamorous good-byes straight into the waiting arms of your family. And before you have settled down to the joyful fact that you are at home, Christmas is over, everything you wanted most is packed in your trunk—but with mother's packing there is somehow room enough—and you are speeding back to college. Glad? Yes—and sorry. But how much sorrier you would be if the rest were going back without you.

Betty's Christmas was "just perfectly lovely"—so she told her father, who always sympathized with Betty's raptures. It brought her the furs she had wanted, and the Temple Shakespeares, and the snow-shoes, and a copper chafing-dish as nearly like Babbie's as Will had been able to buy.

"Oh, you extravagant boy!" cried Betty when she saw it. "When I have a perfectly good nickel one now. But things will taste twice as good in this! Let's make a rabbit this minute!"

And they did—at ten o'clock on Christmas morning, and the Wales family unanimously declared that they had never tasted such a rabbit before, and unanimously laid the credit at the door of Harding College, which had taught them all that the most impossible things are often the most amusing.

One thing that made this Christmas vacation seem particularly precious was because father and mother would not be at home for the Easter one. Betty's father had overworked, so the doctor said, and must take a long, restful vacation. So he and Mrs. Wales were going to spend the remainder of the winter in the West Indies. They had not decided just when or where they would go.

"We'll attend to all that when we get rid of you, young lady," said Mr. Wales, playfully pinching Betty's ear. "Don't those look interesting?" He pointed to a great pile of steamship and railway folders on the library table. "And if you weren't in college we'd take you along."

"Oh, dear!" sighed Betty. "But I don't believe you would. You and mother are such old lovers. You'd rather go alone."

“We have to go alone,” corrected her father laughingly. “Will has his business to attend to, and Nan has to stay and look after Will, and Little Sister has to stay and look after Nan. Don’t you, Little Sister?”

The smallest sister nodded solemnly. “Nan would be awful lonesome if I wented wif you,” she explained with an air of great importance.

“But if Betty wasn’t in college we’d take her,” went on Mr. Wales, “and she could pick oranges and grape-fruits, and sit under spreading palm-trees, and shin up the trunks for cocoanuts, and pick roses in January and ——”

“Don’t!” begged Betty. “Please don’t! It sounds just too lovely for anything. Promise to take me the first winter after I’m through college.”

“Oh, I don’t know about that,” teased her father. “I don’t take a vacation every winter, you know. The last one I had was—let me see—twenty years ago, Miss Betty. So you may have to wait twenty years more if you don’t seize your chance and go now.”

“Father,” said Betty severely, “you know you wouldn’t think much of me if I should give up college in my junior year—even to

pick you roses and oranges in the West Indies."

"No," said Mr. Wales, "I shouldn't. I'm glad that all my children are the sort that stick to whatever they undertake. It pays in the end—and perhaps I can manage another vacation in—say ten years, Betty."

"Thank you," said Betty demurely, planting a kiss on his forehead and running off to see if Will was ready to go skating with the merry crowd of boys and girls who were just turning in at the front gate.

In the midst of all these Christmas excitements it is small wonder that Betty forgot Georgia. She entertained the family at breakfast one morning with an account of her lively adventures, and amused herself by putting Georgia's picture among her Christmas gifts and listening to the varied comments of her Cleveland friends, who were much attracted by Georgia's appearance. The men particularly called her "stunning" and "a good looker," and inquired anxiously when she was coming to visit Betty. And Betty laughed and promised to have her "as soon as she could," thinking what fun she would have at

Easter, laughing at them for getting so excited over a composite photograph.

But Georgia was the merest episode during the vacation, and though several of "The Merry Hearts" went back on the same train with Betty, the talk was all of Christmas presents and Christmas gaieties—dances, dinners, skating and sleighing parties—and Georgia was not even mentioned. Tom Alison, being a politic youth, had not allowed himself to be forgotten during the vacation. He sent Betty candy for Christmas and violets for New Year's, and she was not at all surprised, when she opened the Belden House door, to see a letter for her on the hall table, addressed in Tom's sprawling, illegible hand. Betty wondered if he was going back to New Haven by way of Harding—which would have been decidedly the longest way round. But she glanced at the letter, and, as it seemed to be all about Georgia, she put it aside to read later in the day, when she had more time.

Just before dinner she took it up again and being tired of unpacking, sat down at her desk to make out Tom's hieroglyphics at her leisure. But at the bottom of the first page,



she gave a little cry of dismay, and ran off to Mary's room, where she found Madeline and Mary lying on the couch, reading Mary's Christmas books—she had had eighteen of them, and she declared that she simply could not begin to study until she had read them all through.

“Girls,” cried Betty, bursting in without waiting to knock. “What do you think has happened now?”

“Goodness, Betty,” said Mary, who had been completely absorbed in her book. “How you frightened me! We're reading. Help yourself to a book and some candy and be quiet.”

“But, Mary!” began Betty. “Listen to this.”

Mary dropped her book with a sigh of discouragement. “Talk about the silent cloisters of learning!” she said. “College is the worst place I know of to try to work in.” She pulled at Madeline's book. “Come, Madeline, don't try to improve your mind any longer. Betty is bound to talk.”

Madeline looked up lazily.

“It's about Georgia,” explained Betty. “The most dreadful thing you can imagine.”

“Dear me!” said Madeline. “Then the faculty must have found her a poor joke and voted to expel all ‘The Merry Hearts’ from Harding.” And she returned once more to her book.

But Mary was still listening and Betty turned to her. “That dreadful Mr. John Alison has sent Georgia’s picture to Dr. Eaton.”

“Why, that’s lovely,” said Mary calmly. “We ought to have thought of that ourselves. Where does the dreadfulness come in? And who is Mr. John Alison?”

“Oh, Mary, don’t you remember,” began Betty impatiently. “He’s Tom’s older brother—the one that was in college with Dr. Eaton.”

“Never heard of him,” said Madeline, who had abandoned her book again. “How did he hear of Georgia?”

“Why, Mr. Tom Alison wrote him about her,” explained Betty. “He thought Georgia was such a good joke,—after I’d told him about Alice Waite’s using her, you know,—that he wanted to know all about her. When I mentioned Dr. Eaton and English Essayists he was perfectly delighted. Dr. Eaton used

to visit his older brother, and they both used to tease Tom, so of course he approved of our teasing Dr. Eaton now. He said he was going to write his brother about it, and he did. He told him about the Yale part, too, of course, and he sent him Georgia's picture."

"Well?" demanded Mary, as Betty paused for breath.

"I haven't read all the letter yet, but I know that Mr. Alison sent the picture to Dr. Eaton. Let me see." Betty consulted Tom's epistle. "Here it is. 'If you will believe it, John got my letter in Tombstone, Arizona, where he was spending a day on his way from San Francisco back to the railroad that he's building down in New Mexico. He was delighted with the whole game, and thinking that Eaton would appreciate that picture, he sent it along with a note from Georgia which I guess from his description was a corker. You see he didn't realize that you girls would have to stand for it sooner or later, so he wrote that his—I mean Georgia's—heart was Eaton's for keeps, and that she couldn't bear the separation and wanted to exchange photographs, and wouldn't he write her just a line?"

I've written him "just a line" to warn him against taking any such liberties again with my friends' ideas; and I hope that it isn't too late for you to square yourselves all right. I'll make John write and apologize, if you say so. The letter was all right, you see, from him, but Eaton thinking it was from a girl, of course wouldn't like the idea. I hope this doesn't mean the premature death of Georgia, and I hope Eaton didn't get that letter before the Christmas recess, but I'm awfully afraid he may have.' "

"That explains the coolness of the professor the last time you saw him," said Madeline.

"What geese he must think us," giggled Mary, "to be the friends of the girl who wrote that dreadful note."

"And who also wrote those ten-minute tests that he so admired," added Madeline. "I suppose he explains it by referring to the oddities of genius."

"But suppose," suggested Betty, "that he suspects Georgia of being a fake and thinks we wrote that note."

"Horrible!" exclaimed Mary. "Let's round up 'The Merry Hearts' and have a meeting

over at Rachel's. English Essayists meets day after to-morrow, doesn't it? We must do something before that."

It was the sad conclusion of "The Merry Hearts" that Georgia must die. The utmost ingenuity of the entire membership could not avert this unhappy catastrophe. Somebody must tell Dr. Eaton about Georgia, and explain that "The Merry Hearts" assumed the responsibility of everything but that last note. The meeting was also unanimous in its choice of an envoy. Nobody could beard the lion in his den so well as Betty Wales.

In vain Betty protested. "It's dreadfully unfair," she declared hotly. "Madeline ought to do it. Georgia is her double, and she wrote the themes that Dr. Eaton liked."

"And isn't that enough for one person?" inquired Madeline calmly. "I've done my share and more."

"Then Rachel ought to go," began Betty, but Mary was firm.

"You're elected to tell him," she said, "and you know very well that when you're elected by 'The Merry Hearts' to do a certain thing, there's no way out. Besides, you're so tactful,

Betty, and you like Dr. Eaton, and he likes you, and you've had more fun out of Georgia than any of the rest of us."

"Yes, indeed," broke in Babbie eagerly. "You've got to pay up for that bid to the Yale prom., you know, and for all the candy and violets. Why, I'd go to Dr. Eaton twenty times over if I could step into your shoes with Mr. Alison; and you got it all through Georgia."

This was true, and then, as Mary had said, there was no way out. "The Merry Hearts" had dispensed with reports and motions, but their "elections" were as the laws of the Medes and Persians. So Betty put on her new furs, by way of keeping up her courage, and presented herself the next afternoon at Dr. Eaton's office. She had walked briskly across the campus, so that her cheeks were pink, her eyes sparkled, and her dimples were much in evidence, as, without giving herself time to get frightened or to think how she should begin, she knocked on Dr. Eaton's door.

Dr. Eaton was evidently not expecting callers so early in the term. His "Come in"

sounded a trifle brusque, and the nod he gave Betty over the top of his big desk was distinctly businesslike and chilly. But Betty clasped her hands tightly inside her beautiful new muff and kept on smiling a brave little smile as she crossed the room. He couldn't be so very disagreeable when he found out how it all happened.

"This is your office hour, isn't it?" she asked doubtfully, as Dr. Eaton pulled forward a chair for her in silence.

"It is, Miss Wales. What can I do for you?" asked Dr. Eaton in his turn; and Betty, blushing furiously, plunged straight into the midst of things.

"You know Georgia Ames isn't anybody," she began. "We made her all up, you know, —but your friend Mr. Alison wrote that dreadful note."

Dr. Eaton knit his brows and stared. "I —I beg your pardon," he said at last, "but will you please say that again?"

"Why, she's just an imaginary person," explained Betty. "Madeline Ayres thought of her first, but she let us use her and we've had lots of fun fooling people with her. Madeline

wrote those themes that you liked so much, and Helen Adams wrote the Mrs. Erasmus J. Ames part, and we all helped with the other things. But that dreadful letter from Tombstone wasn't ours at all—or Georgia's. Your friend, Mr. Alison, sent it and the picture. So please don't mind. And—and isn't it one bit amusing?"

Dr. John Elliot Eaton still knit his fine brows and stared at Betty as if she had been a ghost—or a double. "Miss Wales," he said, "I've no doubt I seem awfully dense, but I don't understand yet. I haven't the slightest idea what you're talking about. Will you please begin at the beginning and go on very slowly indeed? And—I promise to find it amusing."

There was a reassuring twinkle in his eyes now, and Betty breathed a sigh of deep relief and began again at the beginning, stopping often to let Dr. Eaton ask questions. When at last he comprehended the first chapter of Georgia's experiences, he threw back his head and laughed till he cried. He repeated this performance several times during the rest of the story. Before it was finished, Betty had



the feeling that she was talking to an old friend. She liked Dr. Eaton better than ever, because he liked Georgia, even though she had completely taken him in ; and she was secretly glad that "The Merry Hearts" had "elected" her to explain.

When she had arrived once more at Mr. John Alison's unauthorized "touch" of sentimentality, Dr. Eaton interrupted again.

"Alison's a trump," he said. "I must write and thank him for forcing your hand. As far as I can see you might have gone on fooling me till June, if he hadn't interfered."

"Oh, no," said Betty solemnly. "We wanted to keep Georgia till spring term, but Bob—I mean Miss Marie Parker—suggested to-day that we couldn't have done it, even by having Georgia leave college. You would have handed in a report of her unfinished work to Miss Stuart, and then everything would have come out."

"Don't you want to see the note?" asked Dr. Eaton, rummaging through a drawer of his desk. "Here it is, and you'll find it a beautiful performance. I must confess," he added soberly, "that it worried me a good deal.

You see, Miss Wales, I'm new at teaching, and I was afraid I hadn't conducted myself discreetly."

"When did it come?" asked Betty, laughing over Mr. Alison's heroics.

"The last morning of last term."

"Then that was why you were so cross. We thought it must have come then."

Dr. Eaton laughed. "Was I cross? I didn't mean to be. I only meant to be dignified. You see, Miss Wales, I,—well, I have a particular reason for wishing my work here to be successful. A great deal depends on this year."

His sudden turn to seriousness reminded Betty that she had been wasting nearly an hour of the great Dr. Eaton's afternoon, and she jumped up to go.

But Dr. Eaton stopped her. "You must tell 'The Merry Hearts,'" he said, "that I fully appreciate Georgia, and that I will forgive them for victimizing me on one condition. I insist upon being an honorary member of the club. Don't you think I've fairly earned a membership?"

"Yes indeed," laughed Betty. "The only

trouble is that Madeline may black-ball you because you say nicer things about Georgia's themes than you do about hers. But I'll do my best for you."

"Thank you," said Dr. Eaton. "Tell Miss Ayres that I shall have her double's photograph suitably framed and hung in a conspicuous place on the walls of my den."

## CHAPTER XI

### A NEW EXCITEMENT

THE unhappy taking-off of Georgia Ames supplied Harding College with conversation for a good deal more than the proverbial nine days. Campus dinner-tables buzzed with anecdotes about her, a good many of which "The Merry Hearts" themselves had never heard before. People who knew the "English Essayists" chapter of her experiences had not heard the Yale chapter. Girls who had laughed over the discomfiture of the Westcott House senior, who had eventually paid a high price for her readiness in running off with Bob's violets, listened eagerly to the story of Babe's lace handkerchief. And some of them went forthwith to interview the janitor, thereby adding a new episode. For the janitor was a firm believer in ghosts and other apparitions and saw no reason why Madeline Ayres, whose interest in Irish fairy-tales had gained his worshipful admiration, should not possess a

shadowy double if she chose to. He had a well-grounded distrust of the B's and vehemently pooh-poohed their matter-of-fact explanations of Georgia's movements.

"It's all very well to talk, Miss Babe," he declared, "but I've seen what I've seen, and if Miss Madeline says she has a double I'll believe her. And if you'd be so kind as to return me that handkerchief, I'll—I'll take you up in the clock-tower to-night at nine, and tell you an' your friends a few little yarns of old Erin."

This was a great bribe, for the B's had wanted to make an evening visit to the clock-tower ever since the first evening of their freshman year, when, wandering forlornly around the campus, they had noticed how tall and spectral it looked by night; and Babe sacrificed her precious handkerchief without a murmur.

The janitor's stories were very creepy indeed, and Babe and Babbie went home shivering and clinging tight to Bob, who marched along bold as a lion. The two timid ones were sitting on the edge of Babbie's couch, discussing a gruesome tale of a girl who,

gagged and tied to the bedpost by ghostly bonds, had watched her lover walk unsuspectingly upon an open trap-door and fall shrieking to his fate, when to their horror the door-handle moved and the door slid slowly open. At sight of the towering white-robed figure which entered with a queer, gliding motion, the two on the bed shrieked wildly.

"Sh! It's me—I," announced Bob's familiar voice. "I only wanted to test my make-up on you two. I'm going out to scare the night-watchman. I'm going to tell him that I'm Georgia Ames."

Bob's make-up was doubtless excellent, but much experience with Harding Hallowe'en parties had made the night-watchman extremely sceptical. He walked boldly up to the ghost, explained to her that Georgia Ames "wan't nothin' but them girls' fool doin's," turned a deaf ear to her pleadings to be let into the Belden to see Madeline, and finally grasped her wrist so tightly that Bob abandoned her ghostly falsetto and howled for mercy.

"I knew it," said the night-watchman wrathfully. "You're Miss Parker, and this is

the last time this term that I shall let you in and not report it." And most ungallantly did he spread the story of Bob's adventure among her friends, who teased her unmercifully until no one could say "ghost" in Bob's hearing without paying dear for the liberty.

Dr. Eaton, when he received notice of his unanimous election to honorary membership in "The Merry Hearts," responded with a note that even Madeline had to admit was creditable. In it he expressed the deepest appreciation of the honor done him. He had not, he said, been told all the aims and objects of the organization, but one seemed to be the booming of Georgia Ames. And so, unless the rest of the club disapproved, he would do his best for her by handing in her report to Miss Stuart.

Miss Stuart, being a rather unapproachable person, had not heard of Georgia. So she called upon Dr. Eaton for an explanation, which he furnished in full detail. He knew now that Georgia did not exist, he said; but was it not his duty to give somebody credit for those extremely real and very clever papers which he had had the pleasure of examining?

And Miss Stuart, who looked more unapproachable than she really was, smiled genially on all "The Merry Hearts" and congratulated Mary and Betty, whom she knew best, on having added to the gaiety of life at Harding.

"We're all too serious and too self-centred here," she said. "I like the idea of your club, and I can see that it has a real influence in the college. There is more good feeling and less snobbishness this year. And I haven't forgotten the way you put through the Japanese tea."

Whereat "The Merry Hearts" promptly invited Miss Stuart to be an honorary member too, and she accepted with an eager gratitude that made the astute Madeline stop to think.

"Betty," she said solemnly, "do you know I believe Miss Stuart was truly pleased. I believe she'd like to get down off her pedestal oftener. I've always thought that quiet, self-contained, self-sufficient people like her were perfectly happy, but now I wonder if they are. That Miss Case in our class, for instance,—the one that has a suite of rooms up where Dora Carlson is, and spends her time buying and



reading all the new books that come out. Do you suppose she's ever lonely in that gorgeous library of hers?"

"I shouldn't wonder," said Betty. "You know her father and mother are both dead, and I can't imagine how books and lovely things and all the money you want could make up to a girl for that."

"Nor I," said Madeline. "Next time I see her I'm going to ask her to come down and join us some Saturday evening—even if she is as rich as Croesus and considered an awful snob."

And Miss Case came once, and often after that, and confided to Madeline that she was always lonely and had longed to make friends with her class, but couldn't seem to do it, because she was so shy and so afraid of intruding where she wasn't wanted. And Madeline in her turn explained that the best way was to forget all about yourself and go ahead—a rule which in time Miss Case learned to put in practice.

Meanwhile the winter term was speeding to an end. Mid-years came and went, but they have few terrors for clear-headed juniors.

who know by experience that the faculty are oftener kind than cruel, and who have become expert in arranging their work so as to get as many days of glorious freedom as possible at the end of the terrible mid-year week.

And then, just a month before the end of the term, came an eventful day, full of excitement for Betty Wales and the rest of "The Merry Hearts." The morning was like all other mornings at Harding, made up of recitation hours and hurried intervals of study between. The afternoon began with a disappointment, for Betty and Madeline had planned to go skating, and soon after lunch word came that the ice on the river was not strong enough and the rink was closed for the day.

"Too bad," said Madeline philosophically, "but I think it's growing colder, and we'll go to-morrow. Let's look up our history topics for the day after to-morrow now, and then go for a long walk."

Betty agreed to this, and the two were swinging home in the dusk, when Madeline proposed that, as it was not quite dinner time, they stop and call on Miss Hale.

“Oh, I’m so glad you spoke of it, said Betty. “Nan said in her last letter that Ethel had written her the bluest notes lately. She told me to go and cheer her up, and I haven’t had a minute since then.”

Ethel’s sitting-room was in front on the first floor of the house where she boarded.

“She’s there,” said Betty, as they turned in. “Doesn’t it look cheerful, with the lamp lit and the curtains up? I think everybody ought to——” She stopped short. “Why, Madeline—she’s—I don’t believe we’d better go in now, do you?”

“No,” said Madeline shortly. “We’ll come again in a day or so.”

For full in the cheerful glow of her big student lamp, Ethel sat, her arms on her desk, and her face buried in her arms; and while the girls stood there, unwitting eavesdroppers of her unhappiness, she lifted her head and wiped away the tears with a handkerchief that was already too wet to be very useful.

“Oh, dear!” said Betty sorrowfully, as they turned away, “I ought to have gone sooner. I wonder what can be the trouble. Dear me!

If I was bright enough to be on the faculty just after I'd graduated, seems to me I should be as proud and happy as a peacock all the time. Nan says that Ethel was the brightest and most popular girl in her class."

"Perhaps she hates teaching," suggested Madeline.

"No, it can't be that," objected Betty, "because she doesn't have to do it. Her family is very well off, but she has several sisters at home and she doesn't care one bit for society, for all she is such a favorite. Nan says it was always her ambition to teach here. At first her family didn't like the idea, but now they're awfully proud of her."

"Well," said Madeline, "whatever the matter is, 'The Merry Hearts' will have to take her in hand. We meet to-night, don't we?"

"Yes," said Betty, "in my room. But I don't know—are you sure Ethel would like it?"

"She won't know," said Madeline, "but of course it's just as you say. I only thought we might tell the B's, who are in her classes,

to jolly her up a little, or make Mary Brooks come with us when we call. Mary is such a cheerful person."

To all this Betty heartily assented, but when evening came the B's appeared in costume as Alice in Wonderland, the White Rabbit, and the Queen of Hearts. There was a wild scramble for more costumes, and the Wonderland party was so absorbing that nobody thought of anything else until a freshman admirer of Betty's knocked on the door with a letter.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," she said, staring about her in blank amazement. "But I thought you'd like this letter. It was on the floor behind the table."

"Thank you ever so much. Won't you come in?" asked Betty, who represented the Mock Turtle, in a costume composed of a gray bathrobe and tissue paper paws and ears. "Would you please put the letter on the table? You see my hands are underneath."

But when she caught sight of the English stamps and her father's handwriting on the envelope, she speedily dispensed with the en-

cumbering "flippers" that Rachel had adjusted so carefully, and retired to a quiet corner to read her letter.

"Nassau, B. I.," was the heading. "Girls, where is 'Nassau, B. I.'?" demanded Betty, reading on down the page as she spoke.

"I don't know," said Madeline frankly.

"Near Bermuda, isn't it?" hazarded Mary.

"No, it's near Cuba," asserted Roberta. "My father went there once long ago. He brought me the loveliest shells. You go out in a boat, you know, and whatever you see that you want a man dives down——"

She was interrupted by an ecstatic shriek from Betty. "Girls, what do you think? Father says it's perfectly lovely there, wherever it is, and it doesn't take long from New York, and he wants me to make up a party of girls and come down for Easter. Did you ever hear anything so perfectly, perfectly grand?"

"Never," said Mary, "only please read us all about it."

"Yes," assented Betty, dancing off the rest of the mock turtle's costume, "I will. He

says that it's lovely at Nassau, B. I., and that the weather is just right—it was too hot at Barbadoes, whatever that is—and that while it's not so tropical as the more southerly West Indies —— ”

“ What did I tell you ? ” interrupted Roberta triumphantly. “ You see it is near Cuba.”

“ It's very beautiful just the same,” continued Betty. “ And there's splendid sailing and fishing and bathing. But he says that he and mother are tired of being alone and want me to join them for their last two weeks, only of course I can't come down alone, so he suggests—let me see. Here it is. ‘ When Nan was in college I remember that she was invited to join a party of college girls who went to the Bahamas for their Easter vacation. One of the faculty who wanted to take the trip acted as chaperon, and I think made the business arrangements ; but I enclose a list of steamer sailings and an estimate of expenses, and will engage hotel accommodations as soon as I hear from you. So your chaperon's duties will be merely nominal. I am sure six or eight of you would enjoy the four days' sea voyage and a week or two here immensely, and both your

mother and I hope you can arrange to bring down a congenial party.' Oh, girls, can't you all come?"

"I think I can," said Mary. "I'll tell father to give me the trip as a commencement present."

"I'm sure I can," declared Madeline. "Father and mother are in Italy, so I may as well do one thing as another at Easter. They gave me a check for Christmas, and if that isn't enough, I'll take the rest of my allowance money and trust to providence for the future."

"We can go," announced Babbie, speaking as usual for all the B's. "That is—if our fond parents are willing. We'll go and write them this minute."

"Send it special delivery," advised Mary. "How about you, K.?"

Katherine made a wry face. "I'm afraid you can't count on me," she said. "I can't even afford to go as far as Kankakee this spring. I'm going to stay here and be company for Rachel."

"Yes," said Rachel, "and you must send us lots of letters and post-cards, and bring us



some shells, and an orange apiece that you really saw growing."

"Indeed we will," said Mary heartily. "You won't have time that week for anything but reading our letters."

"And we shall miss you both dreadfully," added Betty. "How about you, Nita?"

"I must go home. I went away at Christmas, you know. Besides, I have to get my spring sewing done. What will you girls do about that?"

"Do without," laughed Madeline. "Don't raise doubts in our minds, Nita."

"I'm so envious," murmured Nita, sadly, "that I have to think of any small compensations that may be coming my way, or I couldn't stand it. Will you go too, Helen Chase?"

Helen shook her head doubtfully. "I'm not sure that I can. I have some money in the savings bank. I don't know how much, and anyway probably mother wouldn't want me to take it. But I've never been anywhere, and I can see that traveling is a great education. Don't you think it would be improving to go?"

"As if it wouldn't be improving to do anything in our company!" laughed Madeline. "Let me see—that makes—three B's, Betty, Mary, Helen perhaps, myself—— Why, Roberta, you haven't announced your intentions."

"I shall go of course, if you and Mary do," said Roberta, calmly. "My father always says 'yes' to me. Sometimes I wish he'd say 'no' to something, so I could be sure he was really listening."

"Don't try the experiment this time," said Mary. "How about a chaperon, Betty?"

"Oh, we can find somebody, I guess," said Betty, joyously. Then she looked at Madeline. "I know the very person," she cried. "Ethel Hale! Let's go this minute and ask her."

"All of us? In these things?" asked Roberta, who was afraid of all the faculty, on general principles.

"Of course," said Madeline. "Betty can be show man and stage manager, since she's torn her flippers and lost one ear."

So it happened that Miss Hale, who was again in her sitting-room reading a wise Ger-

man book about the Thirty Years' War, heard a confused rustling in the hall and opened her door upon a troop of the strangest creatures she had seen since the Hallowe'en party of her senior year.

Besides the White Rabbit, the Queen of Hearts and Alice, there was the Cheshire cat, personated by Mary, wearing her "beamish" smile, the mad Hatter,—Helen, lost in an antiquated beaver that was one of Madeline's most valued stage properties,—and the King of Hearts and four suit cards wearing placards like sandwich men, to show their identity.

After Betty had introduced all the Wonderland people and Miss Hale had admired their impromptu costumes, Betty explained why they had come.

To the joy of "The Merry Hearts," Miss Hale consented at once. "I should like nothing better," she said, heartily. "I'm tired of snow and cold and hard work, and the sea voyage and a week on that dear little green island is just what I need."

"We'll try not to be the least trouble," said Babbie, sweetly.

“And we’ll bring up your breakfast every morning, if you like,” said Babe.

“And we think you are too nice for anything, to say yes without being teased,” declared Bob.

Whereat everybody laughed, thanked Miss Hale, and sped home just in time to escape the dire calamity of being locked out at the mercy of the night-watchman or one’s kind friends within doors.

## CHAPTER XII

### “THE MERRY HEARTS” CONSPIRE

FOR the remaining four weeks of the term it is to be feared that “The Merry Hearts” took small advantage of their scholastic opportunities and privileges. There were so many letters to be written home, first for permission to join the Nassau party, and then for summer hats and muslins, to wear on the trip, and so many consultations to be held about the proper kind and amount of clothes to take, the possibility of the Mary-Bird-Club’s needing their glasses for the study of tropical birds, the possibility of transforming a battered gym suit into a natty bathing costume at short notice, —or would flannel suits be altogether too warm for the tropics, and if so, would there be time for a hasty shopping expedition in New York on the day of sailing? It was surprising how many problems presented themselves, besides the essential one of getting the family’s consent for the trip. All the girls

who had hoped to go, secured this without any trouble, and Helen Adams, who had only half hoped, was overjoyed to find that her father and mother fully concurred with her in thinking that the trip would be improving enough to warrant her in taking her savings bank money to eke out what they could afford to give her. As for the three who could not go, they were quite as interested in the trip as their more fortunate friends. Rachel speedily became the club's authority on West Indian geography, and Katherine studied the steamship folders until she could dilate upon the sights of Nassau as fluently as if she had spent months there. Indeed Nita declared that it was really foolish to go to Nassau at all, after having heard K.'s dissertation, because nothing you saw would be new or surprising.

"Trust a Harding crowd to find something new!" retorted Madeline. "With our up-to-date methods of study and research we shall understand Nassau in a week as she has never been understood before."

"I know you will," said Nita forlornly. "I've always wanted to go there, but now I shan't want to any more, because you will

have so much grander a time than I possibly could, if I went in the ordinary way."

"Doesn't it look as if we were going to have a grand time though?" said Mary gleefully. "Did you know that Miss Hale has heard from the steamer people? We can all have state-rooms together, and the boat sails the very day after college closes."

"Isn't that splendid? Aren't we in luck? Hurrah for Mr. Wales!" cried "The Merry Hearts" hilariously. Only Betty Wales, who was usually the most hilarious of them all, was silent. She sat still on the couch, her forehead puckered with lines of deep thought and her eyes staring very far away. There was something she wanted to do, but she was afraid of the B's.

"Coward!" she said to herself. "Why don't you ask and get it over? You think you ought, and if they don't like it, why they can say so, and things will be just as they were before."

Would they be just the same, Betty wondered. The one thing she hated was a "fuss." It was so much easier to slide along quietly, avoiding disagreeable subjects; but was it al-

ways right? Betty had been over at the Hilton that afternoon to see Eleanor. Eleanor was trying very hard and she was making a little headway against the tide of opposition and prejudice that had overwhelmed her. Girls who didn't know her well were beginning to say that Miss Watson might be a cheat for all they knew but she most certainly wasn't a snob—she was a good deal pleasanter and more friendly than some of the ones who circulated disagreeable stories about her. This opinion was gaining ground fast. Eleanor felt its influence and it gave her the hope to go on. But she had worked very hard, she was tired and despondent, and she had just heard from home that her little step-brother was ill with scarlet fever, and that she would better not plan to come home for the Easter vacation.

“Oh, I wish I could ask you to come and see me,” cried Betty impulsively, “but you know I'm going to the Bahamas.”

“How lovely!” said Eleanor. “I can't imagine anything nicer than a southern trip after this awfully cold, long winter.”

Betty wondered if she had heard before



about "The Merry Hearts'" cruise, but decided not to ask. "Where will you go, Eleanor?" she said instead.

"Oh, to my aunt in New York, I suppose," answered Eleanor, uncertainly. "Jim is going to stay with a friend in Montreal, so there really isn't anything else for me to do. I love Aunt Flo dearly, but somehow she always upsets all my ideas. I'm beginning to see now why father doesn't care to have me go there. Perhaps I shall decide to stay on here and rest."

A lonely vacation at Harding seemed very forlorn indeed to Betty. She went home in a thoughtful mood, and she was still thinking when her friends drifted in for the customary after-dinner chat, that now always centred around the Nassau trip. It would be so pleasant for Eleanor to join the party; but would her coming spoil the feeling of good-fellowship and fun that made all "The Merry Hearts'" festivities so delightful?

Betty was still considering the question absently, when she heard Mary say, "Why can't two of us walk with her, pray tell?"

"Because," announced Katherine pom-

pously, "the sidewalks are very narrow. The folder says so. You ought to be an even number."

"Hear the omniscient globe-trotter!" jeered Mary. "Well, if you think we ought to be an even number, counting Miss Hale, why don't you solve the difficulty by coming along?"

"Why don't I?" sighed Katherine. "Because unfortunately my father has five other hungry mouths to feed."

Betty slid forward to the edge of the couch. "Girls," said she in a voice that she tried to keep cool and even, "I know some one that I think would love to come with us,—if you really think an even number would be better."

There was the slightest pause, then, "Is it Eleanor Watson?" asked Bob Parker pleasantly. "Because if it is, I move,—I mean I say that we have her. I'm sure she'd be no end jolly. Tell her to bring her mandolin, so she can play when we go off on moonlight sails."

Bob Parker, of all persons, championing

Eleanor's cause! Betty felt as if a thunder-bolt had fallen, and she waited in awed silence to see what would happen next. Nothing happened—but more thunder-bolts. Babe said she guessed it was a case of, "The more the merrier." Babbie wondered if Miss Hale would wish to share her state-room, and suggested that if another could not be procured for Eleanor, the three B's could easily crowd into one.

"We often sleep three in a single bed, you know," she explained. Then Mary in matter-of-fact tones announced that she, Babbie, and Betty would go over at once to invite Eleanor, and would report to the rest after study hours. It was all as simple as simple could be. After the meeting had broken up and the envoys had started for the Hilton House, Betty remembered suddenly that she had not even told the girls why she had particularly wanted to include Eleanor.

"But we were just as glad to have her without knowing that," declared Babbie earnestly after Betty had explained. "This is sort of your party, you know, Betty. And besides

Bob has been just hoping you'd give her a chance to make up for what she did last fall—when Georgia joined 'The Merry Hearts.' She never meant to be so rude and she was awfully ashamed and wanted to make up for it."

Eleanor received the invitation in the same cordial spirit in which it was tendered, and accepted it so gratefully that any lurking regrets in the minds of the B's were speedily dispelled.

As Mary put it, "We're cozy as we are, but coziness isn't everything. And anyhow this is Betty's party, and of course it must go along according to Betty's ideas—which are always nice after you've got used to them."

"Betty's party" certainly bid fair to be a great success. Her eyes had not ceased sparkling over Judge Watson's telegram of thanks, sent to her personally, as his "daughter's best friend," when something else happened quite different but equally exciting. Mary and her chum Marion Lawrence appeared at dinner one evening fairly bursting with suppressed importance.

"Have you heard the latest news?" they

teased. "Guess! Has it anything to do with you? Easily! Oh, wait till after dinner, and then perhaps Laurie can be induced to tell. I couldn't because it's her news—her scoop, as they say in the newspaper offices. You can't expect me to steal her scoop," ended Mary piously.

So after dinner the Belden House "Merry Hearts" besieged Marion in a corner, and by dint of bribes and threats finally got at the great item. "Did any of you happen to know that Dr. Eaton is going to a place called Nasau at Easter?"

"No! Really?" cried Betty.

"How did you find out?" demanded Roberta.

"It's one of Mary's rumors," declared Madeline.

"Not at all," retorted Mary with dignity. "Tell them how you heard, Laurie, and then perhaps they'll believe you."

"Met him down-town," began Marion in her most businesslike fashion. "We walked up together, and he said he'd been buying a new steamer trunk because his old one was falling to pieces. He seems to have been to

Egypt several times, and to Alaska and Japan and pretty nearly everywhere else, and now he's going to Nassau."

"Did he say so?" demanded Madeline.

"Certainly he did. He said he had heard it was very quaint and English, and that for so short a time he thought he should prefer it to Havana."

"But perhaps he's going by rail," suggested Betty. "Father and mother did that, and then they crossed over from Florida."

"I'm not sure about that," answered Marion doubtfully, "only he seemed to be counting on several days at sea."

"Then he must be going from New York," declared Nita eagerly. "If it's four days from New York, it can't be much over one from Florida."

"Of course not," agreed Mary, while her fellow-voyagers exchanged delighted glances.

"And if he goes from New York he must take the same boat we do," went on Betty, "because there isn't any other. Oh, Marion, did you tell him we were going?"

"No, I didn't. I thought I'd keep it for a pleasant little surprise. He's so extremely

fond of girls—though you people seem to be shining exceptions to that rule.”

“I’m glad you didn’t tell him,” said Roberta hastily. “I only hope I can keep out of his way. Do you suppose he and Miss Hale know each other any?”

“That’s so,” said Mary. “Won’t it be joyous news to Miss Hale? When she gets tired of our childish chatter, she can talk history and literature with Dr. Eaton. Did you ever hear her mention him, Betty?”

“No,” said Betty, doubtfully, “but she knows him a little anyhow. I remember he went home with her from our faculty party.”

“Girls,” began Mary suddenly, “I have an idea! Don’t you know how romances always begin on shipboard? Let’s encourage a romance between the learned lady and the learned doctor. Miss Hale is so pretty and attractive that she ought to get married instead of burying herself up here.”

“Hear! hear!” cried Katherine, who was dining at the Belden with Betty. “She’s much too nice to turn into a prim, old-maidish blue-stockings. Don’t you think so, Betty Wales?”

Betty laughed and blushed. "I'm awfully fond of her, and I think she's nice enough for anything, but I think we must be very careful not to embarrass her or make it uncomfortable for her in any way."

"Of course we'll be careful," promised Mary easily. "We'll give her the time of her gay young life. 'Merry Hearts'—match-makers—doesn't that sound well? Betty, do you agree not to tell Miss Hale that Dr. Eaton is coming? We'd better surprise her too."

And Betty, who had an uncomfortable suspicion that if Ethel knew about Dr. Eaton, the Nassau party would be straightway minus a chaperon, gladly promised. "For we're not to blame," she thought, "as long as we didn't tell him we were going. And if she should back out now——" Betty's expression indicated the depths of gloom into which such a calamity would plunge her.

As if the southern voyagers had not already had sufficient unexpected and exciting blessings showered upon them by a kindly providence, something else had to happen at the very last moment. The something else was not on the face of it a blessing. It was a fire.



Bob Parker discovered it. Coming up to her room on the fourth floor two full hours later than any Harding damsel is supposed to be awake, she happened to look out the window at the head of the stairs, and saw a strange light in the Main Building, which was just across the lawn from the Westcott. Bob was an extremely clear-headed young person. She rushed into Babbie's room and then into Babe's, commanding them to rouse the house and dress, so as to be ready in case there was anything girls could do to help. Then she fled down-stairs and out of the house in pursuit of her sworn enemy, the night-watchman, who cast one doubting glance in the direction she indicated, and ran for the nearest alarm box. Then he and Bob went together to the burning building, and Bob guarded the outer door, while he pushed up through the smoke to find out where the fire was and how big it had grown before Bob noticed it. A minute later the fire company arrived and the fight began.

It wasn't much of a fire, as fires go, but it had started—nobody ever knew how—in the library, the very worst place it could have

chosen ; for every stream of water that the firemen played meant the destruction of shelvesful of valuable books. But Bob had an idea.

“The Westcott girls are dressed,” she said to the fire chief. “Let them make a line and pass out the books by armfuls.”

So the girls worked valiantly, despite the smoke that filled the hallways, and under Bob’s gallant leadership saved a great part of the valuable Harding library.

Meanwhile the fire had crept under the flooring and burst out in a recitation room directly beneath the library. But it was soon under control, and just as the first streaks of flame color brightened the gray east the sleepy Westcott girls filed home, leaving the night-watchman and a fireman or two to keep a lookout for further outbreaks.

Bob slept like a log till ten. On her way to an eleven o’clock class she met the night-watchman, grinning from ear to ear and bursting with importance.

“The president seen me about last night and he said to me, ‘You done noble, Henry.’ Them was his very words, Miss Parker—his



THE GIRLS WORKED VALIANTLY

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very words. I guess he'll say the same to you, when next he sees you."

"Oh I hope so! I hope he'll say it just that way," laughed Bob, resolving to seek out the president at once and cheer him with Henry's unconscious humor.

The next day there was a mass meeting of the student body. The Main Building was a good deal injured and the sorting, repairing and rearranging the library would be a work of time. The president wondered if loyalty to the best interests of the college would make the students willing to lengthen their Easter recess by a week, and stay on a week longer in June. The president was very popular and the students voted unanimously to do as he wished; but "The Merry Hearts" voted with both hands. "One for ourselves and one for the college," as Mary put it. For was not an extra week the only thing they needed to make their Nassau trip perfect? Mr. Wales had urged them to get permission to stay over, but Mary declared that the mere request would endanger her diploma, and Helen and Eleanor looked so grave over the proposal for different reasons that Betty had said no

more about it. And now they had had a present of the extra week. It was all too good to be true.

## CHAPTER XIII

### “THE MERRY HEARTS” ABROAD

NEVER was there such a bustling, confused, hurried, but withal happy departure from Harding as “The Merry Hearts” made on the last day of the long winter term. The stay-at-homes—Rachel, Katherine, Nita and little Dora Carlson—were all at the station to see them off and wish them a successful journey. They left at ten o’clock in the morning, and their boat sailed the same afternoon at five. There would not be time in New York, therefore, for anything but to get themselves and their baggage across the city and safely on shipboard. Madeline and Mary, the experienced travelers of the party, were “elected” to attend to the trunks, for Miss Hale was suffering with a bad headache.

“Anyway,” as Mary told her, “we don’t want you to bother with anything like that. You are just to tell us what to do and what

not to do, and then to sit still and see that we do it."

And Miss Hale had laughingly responded that she should not forget for a minute that she was mistress of nine willing slaves; and she had submitted without a protest to being tucked up comfortably in a corner of her seat, with Betty's suit-case for a foot-rest and Madeline's steamer-rug for a pillow.

Meanwhile the matter that was agitating "The Merry Hearts" was the whereabouts of Dr. Eaton. Was he going to Florida by rail after all? Or had he missed the train? Perhaps he was ill; he almost always came to chapel, and everybody was positive that he had not been there that morning. Finally an off-campus senior, who took her meals at the same house where he did, was appealed to for information, and she quickly solved the difficulty. Dr. Eaton had gone away the night before. "The Merry Hearts" breathed a sigh of relief. They were becoming vastly interested in Mary's match-making scheme. Indeed Betty Wales was a little worried lest their well-meant enthusiasm should carry some of them too far.



"You needn't be one bit afraid," Mary reassured her. "We're awfully sensible, you know, when we try to be. Besides, I don't suppose we shall have to do anything but just watch proceedings. Judging by all the stories you read, I should say that you almost have to fall in love on shipboard, because there's nothing else to do."

"'The time and the place,'" quoted Madeline. "Then how about the rest of us, Mary? Do you expect us all to fall in love too?"

Mary surveyed the group scornfully. "I don't forget," she said, "that you are children, far too young even to think of such things. As for me, I shall have the responsibility of you all on my shoulders." Mary sighed deeply. "Let me see; is it you, Betty, or Roberta, whose trunk is to go in the hold?"

"Mine," said Roberta, shivering forlornly. "Isn't this car cold, girls? I know I shall never want all those thin dresses that I put in."

The train reached New York on time and the transit across the city was made without mishap. Eleanor's aunt was at the boat to see her off, and she had brought a carriage

full of flowers, fruit, and candy for Eleanor and her friends, so that the state-rooms looked very festive indeed, and Mary declared that she felt as if she was starting on a wedding trip to Europe at the very least.

Miss Hale, who had warned "The Merry Hearts" that she was always seasick, went to her state-room as soon as the boat swung off, and the girls, most of whom hadn't had experience enough to know whether they should be seasick or not, arranged their belongings as comfortably as possible for the voyage, and then, all but Roberta, who had already begun to feel very miserable indeed, made ready to answer the call of the supper-gong. The boat was not at all crowded, for the season of southern travel was nearly over; but that made the girls all the more anxious to get a look at their fellow-voyagers, and particularly to see if Dr. Eaton was among them.

"For," said Mary Brooks sententiously, "it makes all the difference in the world. Either this is going to be a novel with a hero, or a novel without a hero, and it takes a regular genius to write that kind, so I guess we'd better not attempt it."

But Mary was just marshalling her little flock in the passage when Dr. Eaton opened the door of a state-room across the way, and came toward them with a smile.

“What’s this?” he demanded, nodding to Betty and the B’s. “Is this an expedition of ‘The Merry Hearts’ that I haven’t been told of?”

Betty explained that it wasn’t exactly that—that it only happened that most of the travelers were also members of the club; and then she introduced Dr. Eaton to every one that he did not know.

“And now you must let me escort you down to supper,” said Dr. Eaton, falling in beside Betty. “You say you’re going to Nassau to meet your father and mother?”

“Yes,” explained Betty, “but we have a chaperon besides. It’s Miss Hale. You know her, don’t you?”

Dr. Eaton glanced hastily over the little company. “Do I?” he said. “Which one is she?”

“Oh, she’s not here,” explained Betty again. “She’s seasick,—or at least she’s expecting to be.”

"Not Miss Ethel Hale?" asked Dr. Eaton, in a tone that was unmistakably eager. Betty nodded.

"How—how—very pleasant," stammered Dr. Eaton. "I—I do know her, but I didn't know she was going to take this trip. May I ask, Miss Wales, if she knows that I am on board?"

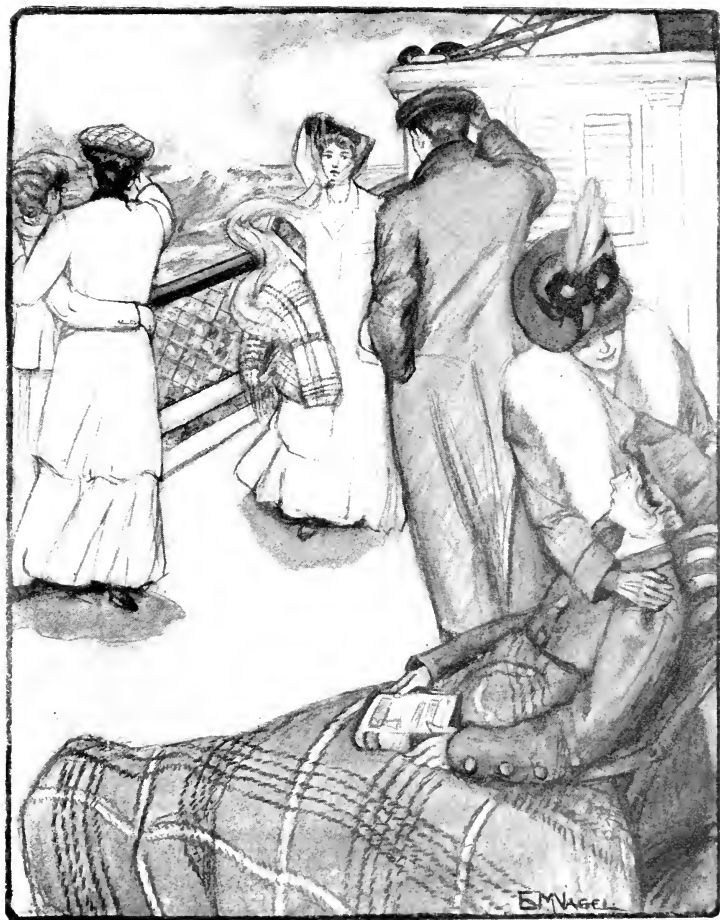
"No," answered Betty hastily, wondering why he should be so dreadfully embarrassed, and hoping that she was not nipping Mary's romance in the bud. "Or at least I don't think that she does."

"Thank you," said Dr. Eaton soberly.

The next minute he had stepped ahead of Mary and was asking the steward for places for a party of eleven.

"You see," he said, when they were all seated, "I insist upon being counted in with the rest of the club, even if I did get here by accident."

Perhaps it was because Dr. Eaton talked so entertainingly all through the meal, or perhaps the big bunch of roses that Eleanor had put in the middle of the table had something to do with it. At any rate "The Merry



HE WAS THE FIRST ONE TO SEE HER

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Hearts" forgot their fear of seasickness, and ate a good dinner; and no one but Roberta was ill for a minute of the trip. Mary insisted that even Roberta was not really seasick—that she was just shamming, so that she could lie in bed all day, and be waited on, and have Dr. Eaton and Miss Hale send her sympathetic messages.

Dr. Eaton did not send any sympathetic messages to Miss Hale. He did not even inquire for her, but when on the second afternoon, she surprised the girls by coming up on deck, he was the first one to see her and to spring to take her rug and her book, and put her steamer chair in a sheltered corner, out of the way of the saucy little breeze that was blowing the blue sea into the tiniest of ripples.

There was a party of Harvard men on board, several of whom Mary knew, and after they had been duly presented to Miss Hale, it was the most natural thing in the world for the young people to drift back to the ship's railing, leaving Dr. Eaton to sit down in the chair next Ethel's.

Betty and Mary Brooks, however, were not too engrossed in the sail-hunting match that

Bob had proposed, to notice the manner of the two in the steamer chairs. At first Ethel looked troubled, and Betty was sure, though she never told Mary so, that she was almost ready to cry. But after a few minutes' earnest talk between them she smiled and nodded an emphatic assent to something Dr. Eaton had said, and presently they were promenading the little deck together in the most sociable fashion, stopping occasionally to hear how the sail-hunting match was going on.

"What did I tell you!" said Mary triumphantly, recounting it all to Roberta later. "They've made a splendid beginning already, and the Merry Match-makers haven't lifted a finger."

The only trouble was that the splendid beginning stubbornly refused to develop. During the rest of the voyage Miss Hale and Dr. Eaton were apparently on an easy, friendly footing, as two people who have taught in the same college for a year, and met at chapel and faculty meetings and at various social functions, might be expected to be. But after their first talk, they seemed to avoid being alone together. Without making any ap-



parent effort, Ethel always happened to be attended by some of her nine slaves, and there was nothing for Dr. Eaton to do but talk cheerfully to the rest of the nine. Whether or not he wished to talk to Miss Hale instead, was a question on which "The Merry Hearts" were divided.

Meanwhile the girls were enjoying to the full what was for most of them their first taste of ocean travel. Every day the sea and the sky grew bluer, and the little breeze softer and more languorous. There was one last dreadful night when the ship tossed up and down on the rolling swells of the Gulf Stream. But toward morning the tossing ceased, things stopped tumbling about the state-rooms, and when the girls awoke the sun was shining on a sea as calm as a mill-pond, and the ship was anchored just outside the low, gray reef that blocks the entrance to Nassau harbor.

"Why, I'm going to see my father and mother to-day," cried Betty Wales, jumping up in great excitement. She was the first one of the party to be dressed and on deck, and there to her delight were Mr. and Mrs. Wales in a little launch, waiting to meet the party

and take them in to the wharf. Betty waved them a frantic greeting, then flew back to tell the rest to hurry, and presently they were one by one making the precarious descent down the ship's side. Betty went first, because it was her father and mother, and Roberta last because she was so dreadfully frightened and only consented to go at all after the captain had promised to rescue her himself if she fell overboard, and Mr. Wales had assured her that there was yellow fever in Havana, whither the ship was bound. Roberta had just decided that drowning was preferable to fever, and had reached the shelter of the launch in safety, when Dr. Eaton appeared on deck, and waved a friendly good-bye to "The Merry Hearts."

"Who's that?" asked Mr. Wales. Betty explained. "Then tell him to come to shore with us," said her father. "There's plenty of room for one more, and I need a man to defend me against all these ladies."

So Betty called back the invitation, and Dr. Eaton ran down the ladder and dropped into the boat with an easy indifference that made Roberta sigh with envy.

The excitement of disembarking over, the girls had time to look around them, and there were "Ohs!" and "Ahs!" of surprise and pleasure from everybody. The launch slipped through the narrow entrance to the harbor, and skirted the long, low island that sheltered it and shut it in from the open sea. The shores of this island were covered with a luxuriant growth of bushes, not distinctively tropical in appearance; but the island across the way—Mr. Wales explained that it was called New Providence, and that Nassau was the name of its town, which was also the capital of the Bahama group of islands—New Providence was dotted with groups of tall palms, a queer old fort crowned the hill, and the houses that lined the water-front and straggled up the steep streets toward the fort, had an unmistakably foreign air.

"You'd know in a minute that you were out of the United States," said Betty.

"'The States,' you must call them down here," corrected Mr. Wales.

But it was the harbor, more than the town, that had made "The Merry Hearts" wonder and exclaim. Its opalescent waters sparkled

and shimmered in the sunlight, showing every conceivable shade and tint of blue, green and purple. Patches of green so pale as to be almost white lay close to pools stained a rich, deep purple. Why was it? It could not be the effect of cloud shadows, for there was not a cloud in the sky.

Mr. Wales, being appealed to, explained that the iridescence was due to the remarkable clearness of the water. Sand, white coral rock, reefs coated with sponges or with dark sea-weeds,—each showed its color through the perfectly transparent water of the harbor.

The launch was steered by a bright-looking mulatto boy, who had listened intently to the conversation. When Mr. Wales had finished his explanation, he smiled broadly and joined in the talk.

“They do tell an awful funny story 'bout that water, mass'r,” he began. “Onct a woman come down here from the States. She buy shells and sponges to tek home, but she lak the water bes' of all. So she get some little bottles, and she hire a black boy to fill 'em with all the diff'rent kinds, and she label 'em and tek 'em home. An' when she pour

'em out to show her fren's, they all come white—all jus' the same. An' the lady she awful sorry."

Everybody laughed and Mrs. Wales said she hoped the poor woman hadn't had to pay duty on her water.

Just as she had finished speaking, there was a loud splash in front of the boat, and the girls looked around to see three black men swimming toward them.

"Throw a penny, mass'r! Throw a penny, please!" they shouted.

"What is it? What are they doing?" demanded the girls.

"Watch!" answered Mr. Wales, and taking a big copper coin from his pocket he threw it toward the men. Before it hit the surface of the water all three were after it. One caught it as it fell, but another knocked it out of his hand, and then all three dived for it. The girls crowded to the side of the boat to watch proceedings, and sure enough, though the boatman said the water was twenty feet deep, it was so clear that they could see distinctly when one of the men, feeling along the bottom, reached the coin and, sputtering and

coughing, came up to the surface with it. Instead of going back to his boat to rest, he calmly put the coin in his mouth, and paddled lazily about, joining in the shouts of his companions for more pennies.

The girls began searching for small change, and Roberta, who wanted to take a picture of the divers, was recklessly holding out a quarter, when Mr. Wales discovered her predicament and gave her an English half-penny instead.

"I brought a stock of them along," he explained, "for I thought the divers would amuse you girls."

But the men had seen the glint of Roberta's quarter, and they swam close up to the launch, crying, "Throw us siller for 'sperience, lady," until Roberta gave it to them after all, declaring that she had more than her money's worth of fun out of watching their frantic efforts to capture the big prize.

The men followed the boat till it reached the wharf, and immediately the picturesque sights on shore engrossed the girls' attention. "Look at that," cried Betty, pointing to a funny little gray donkey harnessed to a dilap-

idated dump-cart on which was perched a tall, lank negro boy. His clothes were very ragged, and the harness looked as if it might have been mended with the loose bits of them. Odds and ends of string and strips of parti-colored cloth entirely covered up the leather, if there had ever been any.

"Oh, do you suppose he would stand for his picture?" asked Eleanor, who, like Roberta, was a camera fiend.

"He certainly will, if you give him a half-penny for doing it," said Mr. Wales, producing his last copper.

"See that horse!" cried Bob, as a diminutive pony, harnessed much like the donkey, dashed madly down the street and deliberately ran full tilt into a lamp-post.

"That's a native horse," explained Mr. Wales. "See, he's blindfolded. Most of them are only half-broken and are driven that way. Be careful that you don't any of you get run over while you're here."

"They don't go up on the sidewalks, do they?" inquired Babbie, anxiously.

Mr. Wales laughed. "I guess not often, but most of the streets haven't any sidewalks.

You have to walk in the road most of the time here. And remember that you must pass to the left instead of to the right."

"How lovely!" exclaimed Babbie. "Need we ride up to the hotel, Mr. Wales? I think we ought to get some practice right away in passing to the left."

Everybody preferred to walk, and the party set out forthwith. Mr. Wales had already told the girls that the main hotel down on the water-front had filled up unexpectedly, and that in order to give them all rooms near together the manager had offered to open the "annex" up on the hill. This was really another hotel that the owners of the Colonial had recently bought. "The Merry Hearts" would have it and its beautiful grounds practically to themselves, and would be driven down to the main hotel three times a day for their meals.

"The annex is really much prettier and cooler than the Colonial," explained Mrs. Wales. "We wanted to move up there with you, but we decided that it would be foolish for so short a time. Besides, all the sail-boats leave from our wharf, and our piazzas over-



look the bay. So it's really pleasanter to have some of us in one place, where there's more breeze, and some in the other, where the water is."

"Isn't the sun hot, though?" sighed Babe, as they climbed one of the steep streets that lead up to the crest of the hill.

"Oh, you'll soon get used to that," said Mr. Wales cheerfully.

"I'm not so sure," laughed Mrs. Wales. "It takes more than a week or two to get used to tropical sunshine, I think. But there's one comfort; you don't need to do anything while you're here but sit on a shady piazza and look at the bay and the flowers."

"Nonsense, mother," laughed Mr. Wales. "Do you think these girls have come down here to sit still and twirl their thumbs? There's a cricket match this afternoon, girls, up at the golf-club. Want to go?"

"Of course we do!" chorused "The Merry Hearts" eagerly.

"Then get unpacked, and come to lunch with your thinnest dresses on," said Mr. Wales. "Here we are at your hotel."

Again there was a chorus of delighted ex-

clamations, as "The Merry Hearts" climbed the terrace and found themselves in a park of tropical loveliness. Great silk-cotton trees, with their strangely gnarled roots and wide-spreading branches, and feathery-leaved tamarinds shut out the glare of the sunlight. Banana-trees waved their great leaves, torn into shreds by the winds. Hibiscus bushes, starred with scarlet blossoms, bordered the paths. Yellow jasmine climbed the trellises of an arbor. At their feet beds of violets and sweet alyssum perfumed the air, and overhead myriads of gaily colored birds chirped and warbled among the green branches.

"Why, it's like fairy-land!" cried Roberta.

But the great white hotel, with its wide, vine-sheltered verandas, bespoke more substantial comforts than fairies would need. The girls hurried in to unpack, for it was almost time for lunch and the cricket match.

"And by the way," announced Mr. Wales, as he bid the party good-bye on the veranda, "I'll ask Eaton to go with us this afternoon. He's stopping at the Colonial, he tells me. He seems like a fine fellow, and besides, I've

got to have somebody to help me keep all you girls straight."

Mary gave Betty a significant pinch, as they followed the turbaned black woman, who was in charge of the annex, up-stairs to their rooms. But unfortunately her hopes were speedily dashed. Ethel had seen plenty of cricket in England, and she had arranged to spend the afternoon in the shade with Mrs. Wales.

This disappointment did not in the least prevent "The Merry Hearts" from having a delightful time. The cricket match was on the golf grounds, and the golf grounds proved to be the fields around an old Spanish fort—not the little boat-shaped one that the girls had seen from the harbor in the morning, and noticed again just behind and above their hotel, but another one much larger and a great deal more interesting, for most of it was underground.

The cricket match was over early, so that there was plenty of time before dark for a visit to the fort. An English soldier was supposed to be in charge, but Friday afternoon was a half holiday, the soldier was merry-

making like the rest of the Nassau people, and his small son, who was black as the ace of spades and who said that his name was Philip Charles Augustus Smith was acting as guard and guide in his father's stead. First he took the party up in the lookout tower, which commanded a fine view of the town, the island, and the harbor, and then, getting a light-wood torch, he showed them through the great range of underground chambers, cut in years gone by by convict labor out of the solid coral rock, which cuts almost as easily as putty when it is first exposed to the air. There was the governor's chamber with its one grated window, the prisoners' quarters with no air at all, save what could come through a long winding shaft, barrack rooms for several thousand soldiers, a vault for storing powder, and, most interesting of all, a well to supply the garrison with water. Philip Charles Augustus Smith felt in his pockets and produced several pebbles, which he threw down this well; and the visitors were amazed at the interval that elapsed between the tossing of the stone and its splash in the water far below.

Finally they mounted a dizzying spiral stairway into the upper air, and went home in the cool of the afternoon to tell Mrs. Wales and Miss Hale all about their adventures.

"Well!" said Mrs. Wales, when they had finished, "I'm very glad you've come. Mr. Wales has rested so long that he is boiling over with energy. Don't let him tire you out."

"I tire out a crowd of Harding College girls!" repeated Mr. Wales scornfully. "I guess there's no danger of that."

"We are pretty active, I'm afraid," admitted Babe.

"And there's so much to see," added Babbie sweetly.

"Even if Katherine Kittredge did try to steal all our thunder," concluded Bob. "I guess we shall need our extra week all right if we're going to take in everything."

"Betty," said Eleanor that evening, as the girls sat in Betty's rooms in the dark, indulging in good-night confidences, "I never saw such a thoughtful man as your father is. He doesn't leave a thing undone for any one's

pleasure. Have you seen Miss Hale's orange-blossoms?"

"No," said Betty. "Did father send them to her?"

"Why, I suppose so," answered Eleanor, "because certainly none of us did, and when I went in just now to see if her ice-water had come up all right, there was a great bunch of them on the table."

"Probably he did send them then," assented Betty carelessly. "He and mother are both awfully fond of Ethel, and of course they feel ever so much indebted to her for coming down here with us."

But the next morning when Betty went in to escort Miss Hale to breakfast, the orange-blossoms had disappeared.

"Oh, I threw them away," Ethel explained, when Betty ventured to inquire for them. "I can't bear the fragrance of them in a room."

"Father didn't send them at all," Betty decided swiftly. "It was Dr. Eaton, and Ethel wouldn't keep them on that account. I do wonder why she dislikes him so."

But for reasons of her own Betty did not

confide her theory about the donor of the flowers to her match-making friends. She had a feeling that, since she knew Ethel so much better than the rest did, she was pledged, so to speak, to stand between her and the absurd schemes of the match-makers. For Ethel was tired and unhappy—so she and Madeline had discovered—and when people are unhappy they don't always appreciate fun and jokes. To be sure, Ethel had seemed to appreciate all the fun they had had so far on the trip.

“But I can't help thinking,” Betty reflected, “that she wouldn't like this. Dr. Eaton must have offended her in some way that he doesn't know about—though it isn't like Ethel to harbor a grudge. He evidently doesn't suspect how she feels—or yes—maybe that was why he was so embarrassed when he found that she was with us. Oh, dear! it's all awfully complicated. But it's a great deal too hot down here to argue about it with Mary Brooks, so I shall just let them get all the fun they can out of thinking the other way—as long as they don't bother Ethel.”

“A penny for your thoughts, little sister,” said Ethel, wondering at her companion’s unaccustomed silence.

Betty came out of her brown study with a guilty start. “You haven’t a penny,” she retorted gaily. “You gave all yours to Roberta, so that she could take as many pictures as she wanted without using dimes to pay the children.”



## CHAPTER XIV

### EASTER IN NASSAU

"THE MERRY HEARTS" had started out bright and early, intent upon making their first whole day of sight-seeing as long as possible. They were glad to find that the weather was a shade cooler, and that the blinding glare of the sunshine was veiled by thin clouds. At breakfast they announced their intention of visiting Grant's Town, and invited Mr. and Mrs. Wales to join their party.

"Grant's Town?" repeated Mr. Wales. "I never heard of it. Where is it? And what is it? And how did you hear about it?"

"It's the negro settlement up on the hill," answered Betty. "The old black woman who has charge of our hotel told us about it. She says that the yards up there are a lot prettier than the grounds of either hotel."

"Very well," said Mr. Wales briskly. "We'll go to Grant's Town this morning."

Mrs. Wales and Miss Hale were loath to

leave the shade of the Colonial's piazza, but even they had to admit, after they had been persuaded to see it, that Grant's Town was well worth visiting.

Eleanor acted as guide, because it was she who had had the conversation about Grant's Town with the colored maid. "We go straight up Market Street," she said, "and Market Street starts from the town market, which is somewhere on this long street that skirts the water—Bay Street, the woman called it—the one that your hotel is on."

Presently they came to the market, and Mr. Wales wanted to stop and exhibit that to his party, but Eleanor objected. "The best time to see the market is before breakfast," she declared. "There's nothing much left by this time, and if we wait now, it may be too hot to go to Grant's Town."

And Mr. Wales, with a laughing remark to Ethel about the difficulty of managing these college girls, with their superior information, admitted that Eleanor's council was wiser.

Market Street gradually changed from a closely built highway, lined with little shops and shabby wooden houses built close to the

street, to a shaded country road with walled gardens and orchards on either side of it.

"This is the governor's estate," said Mr. Wales presently. "Did you know this was the governor's estate, young ladies?"

The young ladies had not known it. They were straightway all interest, and were greatly disappointed to hear that the governor's grounds were private.

"Still we can see a lot from here," said Helen. "What is that tree with those lovely red blossoms? And what is that purple vine?"

"I don't know," said Mr. Wales, "but we'll ask this woman."

So they waited for the negro woman who was swinging up the hill toward them at a fast walk. On her head she carried a great flat wooden tray filled with dozens of tomatoes, some eggs, and a few heads of lettuce. Under one arm she had tucked away a big white hen, and in the other hand she carried some slices of fish, strung on a forked stick.

"My, but she must have a big family!" said Bob, when the woman had answered their questions and hurried on. "It would take a

whole regiment of children to eat all those tomatoes."

"Let's follow her," suggested Roberta. "Then perhaps we can take the children's pictures. I brought along a whole lot of coppers."

The woman turned in at one of the first of the little houses that suddenly began to crowd the road at the foot of the next hill, and she had no children at all, so she informed the inquiring Bob. She kept a store. That is to say, a big table was set across the room, just inside the open door of her cottage, and on this improvised counter she was arranging her wares when the visitors came up with her. The girls found that there were any number of these little shops in Grant's Town. Every morning the proprietors, starting often before daylight, went down to the market for supplies, and the neighborhood saved itself the long walk through the sun by patronizing the little local stores. Other negro women carried their heaped-up trays through the white settlement, bringing to their regular customers the choicest fruits and vegetables that the day's market afforded. So it soon

grew to seem perfectly natural to see eggs, oranges, tomatoes, and other kinds of "rolling stock," as Mary flippantly named them, carried about on the heads of graceful, swiftly moving negresses, who stopped to chat with their friends, laughed, talked, turned their heads unconcernedly this way and that, but never spilled anything.

The adventurous Bob made friends with an old woman who sold cocoanut cakes on the streets near their hotel. One day when the girls had bought out nearly all her supply, Bob persuaded her to empty the tray and let her try to carry it. Before Bob had taken three steps the tray toppled, slipped, and banged down hard on her toes.

"Goodness!" she said, as she picked it up, "I'm glad I don't live in a country where you have to carry things this way. Suppose that tray had been full of eggs!"

"If you lived here," sniffed Babe, "you'd have to learn on sugar-cane. You wouldn't get a chance at eggs till you could carry sticks of sugar-cane without ever dropping one of them. Isn't that so, Martha?"

"I guess 'tis," said Martha, shuffling off,

grinning at the strange doings of "them gals."

But "The Merry Hearts" didn't discover Martha until long after their first visit to Grant's Town. What interested them most on that trip were the gardens and the pickaninnies. The latter, quickly perceiving that the party was well supplied with pennies, appeared in hordes as if by magic, and followed the white folks all through the colored town, not begging except with their great eyes, which looked so wistful that the girls invented all sorts of excuses for bestowing half-pennies.

"It is prettier up here than down where we are," said Mrs. Wales before they had gone far. "The soil must be richer away from the sea. Look at those palms! And see the roses around that little tumbled-down cabin! Do you suppose I could buy some?"

Just as she spoke a pretty mulatto woman appeared around the corner of the house, and, saying that she was willing to sell her flowers, picked Mrs. Wales a lovely bunch.

"How much?" asked Mrs. Wales, hoping that she had not been too extravagant.

The woman looked critically at the roses. " 'Bout threepence," she said at last.

The girls fairly gasped. To think of buying a dozen roses and quantities of buds for threepence—which is the same as six American pennies. Then they began to order roses.

" I've never had as many roses as I wanted in my whole life," said Roberta, " and now I'm going to. I shall come up here every day."

Presently they turned off the main road into a grassy by-path, and came all at once upon a small orange grove, whose trees were loaded down with great clusters of golden fruit.

" The Merry Hearts " shrieked with joy.

" Do you suppose they'll let us pick a few, father ? " asked Betty. " We promised Rachel and K. and Nita that we'd bring them some oranges we had picked ourselves."

" Hadn't you better wait and come back later in the week ? " asked Mr. Wales with a twinkle. " Ripe oranges don't keep long, you know."

" But we may not have time to come back," protested Betty. " I think they'll keep. And

anyhow, father, we are just crazy to pick some now, aren't we, girls?"

"All right," said Mr. Wales, laughing heartily as he went off toward the nearest house. He came back after a minute with the owner of the grove, who invited the party in and told them to pick as many oranges as they wanted.

"Take some grapefruit, too," he said, "and some forbidden fruit. They're a good deal the same, but you'll want to try everything while you're here."

"Yes, we do," said Bob. "What other kinds are there?"

"Sugar apples," said the man, "and sour sops, and shaddock. I don't raise any of those, but you can buy them at the market."

"I hope you'll remember all those names, Helen Chase Adams," said Bob. "As long as you came to improve your mind, you might as well do the remembering for the crowd. Let's go to market to-morrow, girls."

"We can't," objected Helen. "To-morrow's Sunday."

"Easter Sunday," added Madeline. "Do



you suppose anybody will wear Easter hats to church?"

"I don't see how they know when to get new clothes down here," said Mary. "There isn't any winter, and so of course there isn't any spring. I suppose they just have to wait until things wear out, and then get some more."

"Quite a sensible way of doing, I should say," laughed Mr. Wales.

"I wish to-morrow were Christmas, instead of Easter," remarked Roberta irrelevantly.

"Why do you wish that, my dear?" asked Mrs. Wales, who was always interested in Roberta's odd fancies.

"Because," said Roberta, "if to-morrow were Christmas, we could have a Christmas tree, and an orange tree would make such a fascinating one, with all the oranges for decorations."

"But you couldn't cut one down and take it to the hotel, Roberta," objected Helen, the matter-of-fact.

"No," said Roberta, "but we wouldn't have to. There is a dear little orange tree with ten oranges on it in the yard behind the annex. I can see it from my window. The oranges

look rather green, but still it would do beautifully."

"Why not have an Easter tree?" asked Madeline. "It's really just about as sensible as having one at Christmas."

"We'd better wait and have it on Easter Monday," put in Babe. "We couldn't get ready for it to-day, and to-morrow we're going to the Cathedral in the morning and to the colored church in the afternoon. Besides, we could have more fun with it on a week-day."

"Monday is all right, but how about the presents?" inquired Bob practically.

"Let me attend to that," answered Mr. Wales. "I've picked up a few odds and ends among the islands that will be just the thing for an Easter tree."

"I want to help a little," put in Eleanor. She had heard Betty admiring a turtle with a polished back, that hung in a shop-window on Bay Street, and this would be a graceful way of giving it to her.

"Anybody may help who wants to," decreed Mary, who, in her capacity of president and senior member of "The Merry Hearts," had fallen into the habit of deciding such matters,

“but no one must feel that she has to put anything on the tree, because we all contribute by just being down here, and that’s a pretty expensive contribution for most of us.”

“Won’t it be fun!” cried Babe enthusiastically. “Roberta must be mistress of ceremonies, and arrange the presents. Let’s have it the first thing Monday morning. Seems as if I couldn’t wait a whole day and a half to see it!”

“The Merry Hearts” spent Saturday afternoon shopping in small and mysterious parties of ones and twos. No one but Eleanor had much money to spend, and Eleanor felt that it would not be in good taste for her to spend much, except for Betty’s tortoise. But all the trifles added together made almost an embarrassment of riches for the mistress of ceremonies, who, as soon as Monday’s breakfast was over, ordered them piled on the ground near the Easter tree, and then banished everybody but Madeline from the back-yard.

When the tree was ready there was another brief delay because Mr. and Mrs. Wales had not arrived. But they came in a few minutes, and Dr. Eaton was with them.

“ You ought to have let me know about this function sooner, Miss Brooks,” he began reproachfully. “ I rushed around wildly in the few minutes that I had after Mr. Wales invited me to be present, but I haven’t had time to get very much.” He held out a bulky parcel to Roberta. “ The nine things that are all alike are for you young ladies, and the two odd ones are for Mrs. Wales and the chaperon.”

“ The things all alike ” proved to be nine funny little “ finger-sponges,” like those that the girls afterward saw growing in the sea-gardens of the bay, and the “ two odd ones ” were bits of the dainty drawn-work that the Nassau women do so beautifully. Roberta decided that all the presents should be put on the tree without wrappings, and the result was decidedly original and fantastic. Betty’s turtle clung to one bough ; Babbie’s, presented to her by the other two B’s, was climbing the trunk. Gay necklaces from Jamaica encircled the smaller branches ; shell-combs and pins, native-woven baskets, post-cards with Nassau or Cuban views, drawn-work handkerchiefs and collars, shells, corals, and other strange spoils of the sea—not to mention the oranges and a bunch

of bananas for Eleanor, who declared she had never yet had as many of them as she wanted, as well as a bunch of roses for Roberta,—made the Easter tree look very festive indeed. Mr. and Mrs. Wales had provided something for everybody, including Dr. Eaton, who entered thoroughly into the spirit of the occasion and seemed to enjoy the fun and frolic quite as much as anybody.

“I think we ought to propose a vote of thanks to Miss Lewis for originating the Easter tree,” he said, when all the presents had been distributed.

“Oh, I didn’t think of it,” interposed Roberta hastily. “It was Madeline.”

“You began it,” said Madeline, “and it certainly has been a lot of fun. Can’t some of you think of another Easter celebration to take up the rest of the morning?”

Everybody considered for a moment, and Bob had the first inspiration.

“We ought to have an Easter egg-rolling,” she said. “Our terrace here is a lot nicer place than the one they use in Washington.”

“But we couldn’t dye the eggs,” said Helen.

"It's so hot that the colors would run. I remember I dyed a dress once at home in August and ——"

"Have oranges instead of eggs," interrupted Mary. "They are bright enough without being dyed, and we can have a whole lot, for they cost only six cents a dozen. Roberta and I asked at the market this morning on our way to breakfast."

"But where will you get your children?" asked Mrs. Wales, laughing at the girls' enthusiasm.

"In Grant's Town, of course!" shrieked everybody at once.

"Those little black boys will be too cunning for words," said Madeline, jumping up. "Somebody else go for the oranges, and Mary and I will find the children."

"I'll go with you," said Miss Hale, rising also. "Wait a minute while I get my sunshade."

"I'll go too," said Dr. Eaton. "I don't like the idea of you ladies wandering about in Grant's Town alone."

Ethel flushed and murmured something about its being perfectly safe, though when

Mrs. Wales said doubtfully, "Perhaps it isn't quite, dear," she submitted. But she managed to start off with Madeline, leaving Dr. Eaton to console himself as best he could with Mary's lively company.

Meanwhile Mrs. Wales, Eleanor and Betty, went after more oranges, and the rest sat on the piazza, admiring their Easter presents and discussing the egg-rolling.

"Do you think the children will care about the oranges?" asked Helen, doubtfully. "I suppose they're even commoner here than apples are with us."

"That's so," said Bob, dubiously. "Perhaps they won't think they're worth scrambling for."

"I know what we can do," said Babbie, after a minute's pause. "We can put coppers inside. Then they'll go for them fast enough."

"In that case we shall have to get some more money changed," said Babe. "Come on down to the book-store. The man there is awfully obliging."

The various foraging parties returned at about the same time, Betty, Eleanor and Mrs. Wales loaded down with huge bags of oranges,

the B's bringing coppers galore, and Mary and Madeline convoying ten small, ragged, and rather frightened black urchins.

"Where are Eaton and Ethel?" asked Mr. Wales, counting up his party.

"They'll be right along, I think, Mr. Wales," answered Mary, sweetly, "but I don't believe we'd better wait for them, do you? These boys didn't really want to come, and I'm afraid they'll run away if we don't hurry."

Babbie explained her scheme for adding excitement to the orange-rolling, and there was no doubt of its efficiency. The instant that Mr. Wales began making slits in the rinds of the oranges, so that the girls could poke pennies or half-pennies down the holes, the ten small boys became suddenly rigid with attention. They had come reluctantly, not exactly knowing what to expect, but when there was a prospect of coppers they became eagerness personified.

When all the oranges had been duly "stuffed," the boys were stationed at the foot of the steep terrace, and the girls started five or six big oranges rolling down toward them. For an instant the ten hesitated, then they



plunged wildly up the slope to capture the spoils. As each succeeded in getting an orange, he retreated to the foot of the hill, and began a frantic effort to eat down to his penny before any more oranges were started down the slope. One crafty but too confiding youth decided to pile his booty at the foot of the hill, hoping thus to gain time and distance his fellows. But while his back was turned, the pile disappeared. Another tried dropping the fruit into his blouse, but in the scramble several oranges fell out. The only safe way was to get the penny out as soon as you had secured the orange.

“Do you suppose they’ll die of indigestion?” gasped Mrs. Wales, breathless with laughter.

“Or be poisoned from those dirty pennies?” suggested Eleanor, anxiously.

“I guess not,” said Mr. Wales, cheerfully. “I don’t imagine their digestions are delicate, and you remember that the divers all kept their winnings in their mouths, so I don’t believe you need worry.”

All too soon the supply of oranges was exhausted and the tattered regiment departed, fairly wreathed in smiles, to buy sugar-cane

and gloat over their friends who had not spent the morning so profitably.

“Wasn’t that too lovely?” sighed Mary, as the girls collected the remains of the orange-rolling into a basket for the gardener to throw away. “I saw a moving picture once of two little pickaninnies racing to see which could finish his slice of watermelon first. But they didn’t begin to eat so fast or look so funny as our boys.”

Just as she had finished speaking, Dr. Eaton and Miss Hale appeared around the corner of the house. He was carrying her parasol, and they were walking slowly and laughing and chatting in a very friendly fashion.

“Oh, we ought to have saved some of the oranges until you came,” cried Mrs. Wales, when she saw them, “but the boys were so impatient,—and to tell the truth I’m afraid we forgot all about you.”

“Loiterers mustn’t expect to have their cake and eat it too,” said Mr. Wales, beaming benignly upon the two laggards.

Ethel looked reproachfully at Mary. “Why didn’t you wait for us?” she demanded. “We were trying to persuade that funny little

boy, at the thatched cottage with the bread-fruit tree in front of it, to come with us. And all at once we noticed that you were gone."

"Yes," said Mary. "We were sorry, but the ten we had wouldn't wait. They were going to strike if they couldn't move on at once. Didn't you get the funny little one to come after all?"

"No," said Ethel, "he positively refused. I was so hot that I had to rest for a minute, and then we came back, but not very straight."

"Not straight at all," corrected Dr. Eaton smilingly. "We got badly lost. You see I'd never been up there before, and when you abandoned us I got completely turned around. I'm sorry I was so stupid."

"Oh, it didn't matter," said Ethel hastily. "But where are the boys? Isn't it time to begin the orange-rolling?"

"Oh, Ethel," exclaimed Betty in dismay. "Didn't you understand? The boys were in a hurry, and we had it right off. It lasted a long while though, and they've been gone almost ten minutes."

“But we’ll get some more boys and have another rolling just for you two,” declared Bob gallantly.

Ethel bestowed a searching glance upon Dr. Eaton. “We must have gone farther out of our way than I thought,” she said frigidly.

And then, all at once, feeling the interested eyes of “The Merry Hearts” fastened upon her, she began to blush, just exactly as Betty Wales or Babbie would have blushed under a similar embarrassment, and picking up her parasol she hurried off into the house.

“The Merry Hearts” did not know exactly how to interpret this incident. Its immediate effect was to make the relations between Ethel and Dr. Eaton a shade less cordial than before. But, as Mary said, you couldn’t judge by appearances.

“We didn’t deliberately run away from them,” she explained. “You see our ten boys began chasing a dog down a side street, and of course we had to chase the boys.”

“So they couldn’t possibly have caught up with us,” put in Madeline, “but that doesn’t account for their coming in at the finish

three large quarters of an hour behind time."

"Well, how do you think they happened to do it?" inquired Babe scientifically.

"I think," returned Mary, "that they were having an awfully jolly little talk, and that they forgot the passing of time—or at least Miss Hale did—and the rules for the dignity of chaperons."

"Yes," said Babbie, "she forgot she was a faculty and acted just like any other girl. She isn't old; she's just at the nicest age. And isn't she dear when she blushes?"

"She's always dear," declared Eleanor, remembering her freshman year.

"But do you think," began little Helen Adams anxiously, "that people generally forget the time until after they've begun to know each other awfully well?"

Everybody laughed at Helen's theory.

"What do you know about such things, my child?" asked Mary loftily. "Did you ever go to walk with a man and get lost?"

"Oh, no," answered Helen simply. "I don't know any men. But I have noticed."

“Well, they’ve had a week.” Mary smiled reminiscently. “You can do a lot in a week,” she announced with a finality that closed the discussion.

## CHAPTER XV

### A RÔLE FOR THE HERO

“THE trouble with this novel,” said Mary Brooks, “is that the hero can’t seem to get any chance.”

The girls were sitting on the Colonial’s piazza after breakfast, their chairs drawn into a confidential circle in a retired nook close to the water’s edge. Farther back Mr. and Mrs. Wales and Miss Hale were talking with a family of Spanish-Americans that Mr. and Mrs. Wales had met at almost every stop they had made in their West Indian cruise. Dr. Eaton was playing clock-golf on the lawn with a group of men.

“Then,” said Madeline, watching him critically, as he made a brilliant put into the cup from the very edge of the green, “I should say that the trouble is not with the novel, but with the hero. He has had plenty of chances, but he doesn’t use them. In plain terms, he isn’t much of a hero.”

“I’m beginning to think he’s slow myself,” declared Bob Parker. “Betty’s father helps him along a lot. He asks him to all our parties, and fairly throws Miss Hale at his head, and yet ——”

“Bob,” interrupted Mary severely, “please speak more respectfully of Betty’s father. You’re making him out a very peculiar person.”

“You know what I mean well enough,” returned Bob calmly. “I mean that he tries to make things pleasant for everybody, and of course Miss Hale and Dr. Eaton are the natural ones to be paired off together.”

“That’s better,” said Mary approvingly. “Yes, I know what you mean, and I admit that Mr. Wales is a merry match-maker with a vengeance, but ——”

“Oh, Mary,” interposed Betty hastily, “he doesn’t know a thing about that. I should never dare mention it to him or mother. I’m afraid they wouldn’t think it was exactly—nice.”

“Oh, I didn’t mean to imply that it was intentional assistance he was giving us,” explained Mary, “but the effect is just the same.



He's been a noble ally, but it wasn't that kind of chances—chances to talk society small-talk with the heroine, or to walk and sail with her, and so on,—that I was thinking of.”

“Well, hurry and tell us what you were thinking of, then,” demanded Bob impatiently.

“Well,” Mary began with provoking slowness, “I was thinking of heroic chances. A hero isn't a hero because he makes love well. The heroine tolerates his love-making because he's a hero. But somehow down here there's no chance to be up and doing. If it was only South America, now, and if there was a revolution brewing, and Dr. Eaton should save some of our lives, or get an army together and be elected president or king or whatever the people wanted to elect—why, then of course Miss Hale would admire him tremendously, and the novel would spin along like a top.”

“I guess there's a good deal in that, Mary,” declared Bob. “Stories that don't have any adventures in them are always about stupid people.”

“Then,” said Madeline, “we must be stupid people, for we haven't had anything yet that

can be called an adventure, and in two days we sail for home."

"We've had an awfully good time though," amended Eleanor.

"And Helen Chase Adams has improved her mind a lot," added Babe, "and she has also improved the way she does up her hair."

"Nevertheless," said Mary, "I shall always regret it if the merry match-making part falls through."

"Girls," said Madeline gravely, "it is clearly our duty to save President Brooks's feelings. Who will volunteer to throw herself in front of one of these crazy Nassau horses, or to fall from the lookout at Fort Charlotte, or tumble down the Queen's Staircase behind Fort Fin-castle, or ——"

"Jump into the swimming-pool," suggested Bob.

"Or off the yacht," added Eleanor.

"Or get lost at night up in Grant's Town," put in Babbie.

"That's enough," interrupted Madeline severely. "You get the idea. Now, who will be the victim?"

"But suppose the hero didn't come and

rescue you?" suggested Helen. "Besides, isn't it the heroine that the hero always rescues?"

"Well, generally it is," admitted Madeline, "but in this case I think any one of us would do beautifully. A chaperon would have to be extremely grateful to anybody who saved the life of one of her young charges."

Madeline yawned ostentatiously. "Girls," she said, "let us elect President Brooks to the office of first victim-in-waiting to the hero. All in favor say aye."

"Aye!" shouted everybody promptly.

"I think you ought to have elected Betty," objected Mary. "She's always getting into fixes, whereas I never do; and if I begin now it will look like a put-up job."

Betty blushed guiltily. "I am always having mishaps," she said. "I had one this morning. I wasn't going to tell about it, but it would have been a perfectly fine chance for a hero if he'd been there. But he wasn't."

"Well, tell us about it," demanded Mary. "Couldn't you do the same thing over again?"

"Of course not," said Betty indignantly. "It was this way. You know I came down

early to breakfast, to help mother into her dress that buttons up the back. Well, I was hurrying down the hill on Market Street, thinking how sorry I should be to leave this funny little place, and all of a sudden I heard a bicycle bell behind me. It startled me dreadfully and I began to go to the right ; but then I remembered that you must pass to the left here, so I changed and went to the left, and the result was that we both landed in the middle of the road on top of each other. That is, the man and the wheel went over me."

"Goodness!" exclaimed Roberta. "Weren't you hurt?"

"Not very much, but I was dreadfully frightened, because the man groaned and acted as if he was nearly dead,—he was a negro, you understand,—and I was afraid he would arrest me, before I could find father. You see it was early and there weren't any white people out, but there were a lot of negroes and I thought they would take his part. In the end they were awfully nice. A big black man helped me up and scolded the man on the wheel, and made him say he was

sorry, and then I walked home and brushed off the dust and got a scolding from father for being so heedless, and made him promise not to tell you girls. But just for a few minutes I should have been awfully glad to have a hero come and rescue me. I suppose, though, he was probably sound asleep," ended Betty practically. "He's always late to breakfast."

"Which shows," said Mary, "that it is the early hero who catches the girl. Just think what a waste of a perfectly good adventure!"

"Anyhow it proves that we're not in the class with Bob's stupid people who never have adventures!" said Madeline, "and that's a great relief. Here comes Miss Hale."

"Girls," said Ethel, hurrying up to the group, "have you any plan for this morning?"

"Nothing but to sit around here until it's time to have a bath in the swimming pool," answered Betty. "So I'm sure that we should all like to do whatever you've thought of."

"These friends of your father's have been telling us about another bathing-place," ex-

plained Ethel, "out on the surf-side of Hog Island."

"That's the little island out in the harbor, isn't it?" asked Betty.

Ethel nodded. "The man who owns it runs boats back and forth across the bay all through the morning. He has a fruit orchard out there too, where you can stop to rest and eat all the fruit you want after your bath. These people say it's great fun to go over there, and the nicest part of all is that it only costs twenty-five cents."

"Boat trips and fruit and all?" asked Eleanor.

"Boat trips and fruit and all," repeated Ethel.

"Of course we all want to go," said Mary. "We don't want to go home feeling that we have missed anything—particularly something that only costs a quarter."

"Shall we start right off?" asked Babe.

"That is just as you please," said Ethel, "but it's quite a walk to the Hog Island landing, and we might have to wait a few minutes for a boat."

"Then by all means let's go now," said

Babe, rising energetically. "I don't care so much about the surf bathing, but it seems as if I couldn't wait to get to the fruit-orchard part."

So the bathing contingent hurried down to the Casino to get their suits; those who did not care to go into the surf collected books and fancy-work to help them while away the morning under the trees in the orange grove, and presently the party, which as a matter-of-course included Dr. Eaton, was wending its way to the wharf.

During the short row to the island, Babe interrogated the boatman as to the exact amount of fruit that was included in the quarter's toll.

"All you lak," said the big black fellow with a grin. "One man he eat forty oranges, and some they stay over all day and git thar dinner and thar supper. Don't you worry 'bout that, missy."

"I shan't," said Babe, with a sigh of satisfaction. "I don't believe I shall have to pay extra. Just imagine eating forty oranges in one day!"

The sun was very hot on the water, and it

was a great relief to get into the shade of the tamarind and almond trees that lined the trail across Hog Island.

"Dear me!" said Babbie, when they had reached the other side. "The bathing-houses are right out in the boiling sun, and the white beach looks sizzling hot. I'm going to stay here with Mrs. Wales."

"I'm going to stay with her, too," said Roberta. "I didn't even bring my bathing things, because I knew it would be too hot for me."

"How about all those thin dresses that I made you pack?" jeered Mary.

"I wish they were thinner," sighed Roberta, who hated dreadfully to be either too hot or too cold.

But in spite of the blinding glare of the sun on the white sand, the rest persisted in their intention of having a bath in the surf.

"It can't be so bad as it looks from here," said Helen, "or all those people who are in bathing couldn't stand it. They seem to be having a grand time."

"The water must be a little cool anyhow," added Mary.



“And it will be such fun tumbling around in those big waves,” said Betty. “I don’t suppose that I can practice swimming though, can I, father?”

“Oh, perhaps you can,” said Mr. Wales, carelessly. “That surf isn’t very strong.”

“Well, if I can’t, I shall take another bath in the swimming pool this afternoon,” declared Betty. “I am bound to learn to swim a little before I leave Nassau.”

“Promise not to begin to eat until we come back,” called Babe over her shoulder to the three who had stayed behind.

“We won’t,” they shouted back, and Babe, reassured that no one would begin until she did, hurried after the rest up the sunny slope to the bath-houses. There was a breeze up there and down on the sand, that wasn’t blowing in the grove; and the water was cool, though not cool enough to be very invigorating. So nobody cared to stay in long,—at least nobody but Betty, who found that she could practice swimming almost as well here as in the still pool at the Casino.

“I’ve almost got it,” she explained to Dr. Eaton, who was an expert swimmer and

had been trying to show her the stroke. "I can stay up as long as I like, but I stay in one place. I can't go ahead any."

"You'll soon get that," said Dr. Eaton, swimming off into deep water. "It's too shallow where you are," he called as he swam. "Try it out a little further."

And Betty, being perfectly fearless, tried, with such success that she did not notice for some time that Mr. Wales, Ethel, and the girls had all gone in, and that the beach was for the moment clear of other bathers except Dr. Eaton, who had waded to shore very much further down and stood there examining a shell that he had picked up in the sand.

"I'm going to swim in from here just once more," thought Betty, wading out to where the water was almost up to her arm-pits. "Madeline has been ready to catch me before, but she hasn't had to. I'm not afraid!"

But somehow Madeline's not being there, ready to help if she was needed, did make a difference. All of a sudden, while she was still in fairly deep water, Betty realized that she was alone and afraid. She lost the stroke and went under. Struggling to get her foot-

ing she was knocked flat again by an unusually big wave. The water surged and gurgled over her, she tried again to get up, and again fell back, faint and almost exhausted. But she would not give up! To die like this in five feet of water! She tried to cry out, but the waves drowned her voice. And then she stopped trying to get her footing. She was too tired to struggle any longer or to notice when something splashed along beside her. She thought it was only another big dark wave coming at her until a strong arm pulled her up into the air and sunshine, and a laughing voice asked her if she was all right now.

“I guess so,” gasped Betty, coughing and trying to wipe her eyes on the dripping sleeve of her bathing-suit.

“Can you walk in to shore, or shall I carry you?” inquired the voice anxiously, and for the first time Betty perceived that it was Dr. Eaton who had come to her rescue.

“Oh, I can walk all right. I’m only—out of breath,” said Betty, waving her hand reassuringly to a confused group of people, headed by Miss Hale, who were running down the beach toward her.

“Lucky I saw you just when I did,” said Dr. Eaton, soberly. “I’m awfully sorry you had such a fright, Miss Wales.”

“Oh, it was nothing,” said Betty, easily, wading slowly in toward the shore, “only it is unpleasant to—— Oh, Ethel, don’t look like that. Please, please don’t! I’m not hurt one bit.”

Miss Hale was as white as the sand that gleamed under her feet. “Oh, Betty, Betty Wales,” she cried, “you frightened us all so!” Her voice broke into a little sob. “You were under my charge, too. I should have had to tell your mother that I’d let you—let you drown.” She turned to Dr. Eaton. “I can’t thank you enough, John.” She held out her hand and Dr. Eaton shook it gravely. Then Ethel turned without a word, and ran up the steps to the bath-house, and after a moment Dr. Eaton followed.

Betty turned with an hysterical little laugh to the girls who were hovering anxiously about her. “Well, Mary Brooks, I hope you’re satisfied,” she began. “I hope you realize that I’ve given your hero a chance.”

Mary stared in astonishment, and then,

suddenly comprehending, as she thought, she smiled her most beamish smile. "You little fraud," she said. "You mean you did it on purpose? How did you ever manage it?"

"Did it on purpose!" repeated Betty indignantly. "If you'd ever been nearly drowned, I guess you wouldn't care to do it again on purpose, Mary Brooks."

"It was beautifully apropos, wasn't it?" laughed Madeline. "Did you remember anything about our talk this morning, while you were waiting for the hero to sprint down the beach?"

"No," said Betty, "I didn't. I was too busy trying to scramble up to think of anything."

"Didn't you think of all your past life?" inquired Babe, solemnly.

"No," said Betty.

"Then," said Babe, "I don't believe you came as near being drowned as it looked."

"Perhaps not," said Betty, wearily, "but I'm awfully, awfully tired now."

Eleanor and Mary flew to help her up to the house, reproaching themselves with not having hurried her in to rest sooner. As

the procession of bedraggled figures took its way up the path, Helen Chase Adams made an astonishing announcement.

"Girls," she began in awed, wondering tones. "Didn't any of you notice? She called him John. Miss Hale called Dr. Eaton that, I mean, just now when she thanked him."

"Did she?" asked Betty, absently. "I didn't notice."

"Yes," cried Babe, eagerly, "she did. I remember now. I was so frightened about you at the time that I hardly heard, but she certainly said, 'I can't thank you enough, John.' How do you suppose she happened to?"

The procession halted to consider the matter. "She was awfully rattled," suggested Bob. "Perhaps it was just a slip of the tongue."

"Why, of course it was a slip of the tongue," agreed Mary, scornfully, "but just the same it shows how fast they've been getting on, when we thought they weren't getting on at all. It's amazing! You don't know how relieved I am, Betty. I don't believe we shall have to worry one bit more about the merry match-making."

"I wonder if Miss Hale knows what she said," Madeline speculated, as they went on up the steps. "If they have got to the calling-each-other-by-the-first-name stage so soon, it must be that they've been acting formal and offish to deceive us and put us off the scent. But after this they must see that it won't be much use to pretend."

"You will be careful, girls, won't you?" begged Betty. "You won't stare at them or—or—act too interested?"

"Never," Mary promised solemnly. "We shall be completely absorbed in you. Besides, it would be against all the rules for good match-making."

But down in the orange-grove, in spite of the excitement over Betty's narrow escape and the counter attraction of a banana-eating contest between Bob and Eleanor, it was impossible for any of the nine girls to keep their eyes turned resolutely away from Ethel and Dr. Eaton.

"My, but isn't he devoted!" whispered Bob.

"They aren't even trying to pretend," declared Helen softly. "I think the pretending was Miss Hale's idea. I'm positive he's

wanted to be devoted before, only she wouldn't allow it."

"And now she likes it as well as he does," added Madeline. "She isn't even thinking of blushing and running away."

"Which proves that all the hero needed was a chance," murmured Mary Brooks, proud of her discernment.

Roberta sat down beside Betty, bringing her a glass of cocoanut "milk" to taste.

"Aren't you pleased about the novel?" she asked.

"Isn't it comical?" laughed Betty. "I was the one that didn't believe in the novel, as you call it, and now I seem to be the one who has helped it along. But just the same, Roberta,—don't tell Mary, because I can't argue the way she can,—but I'm perfectly sure that all Mary's scheming hasn't had a thing to do with it."

"What has then?" demanded Roberta incredulously.

"I don't know," said Betty, "only I'm sure it's all a lot more complicated than Mary and the rest of you think. In novels people may fall in love that way, but not in real life."



Roberta considered for a moment. "Well, anyhow it will make a beautiful story," she declared at last. "Mary is going to write it on the steamer, and we are going to illustrate it with the pictures we've taken."

"What a grand idea!" cried Betty, jumping up as briskly as if she had not just escaped drowning. "And now let's go and try all the queer fruit before somebody says that it's time to go."

## CHAPTER XVI

### BACK TO WORK

THE end of the Nassau visit had come at last, much too soon to suit Betty Wales and the rest of "The Merry Hearts."

"Everything lovely always ends so soon," Betty lamented, as she stood by the deck-railing between Madeline and Mary Brooks and looked back across the shimmering bay to catch a last glimpse of the sunny little city, half hidden in its circle of tall palms.

"Well, so do horrid things end," announced Madeline philosophically. "Everything ends, and how dull life would be if it didn't. Besides, we're going back to spring term."

"Yes," agreed Betty. "That's my one comfort. I couldn't stand it to jump away back into winter again."

"And some time we're all coming back to Nassau," added Mary Brooks.

"How do you know?" asked Betty absently.

“Why, because we all drank out of Blackbeard’s Well. If you do that you are perfectly sure to come back.”

“Was that the reason you made me drink that horrid water this morning?” laughed Betty. “I went up-stairs to get something that mother had forgotten, and when I came back you were all down in a corner of the garden drinking that warm, sickish water; but I hadn’t the least idea why you were doing it. Who was Blackbeard, and why does drinking out of his well make you sure to come back?”

“I don’t know why,” said Mary. “It’s some sort of a spell, I suppose. Your father heard about it and told us. Blackbeard was a pirate who buried his treasure here and watered his ships at that spring. He must have been Bluebeard’s cousin, because Dr. Eaton said he had fourteen wives.”

“Poor things!” sighed Betty. “Well, I only hope that the spell will work. And now I must go down-stairs this minute to see if I can do anything for Ethel or Roberta. I suppose they’re getting ready to be seasick.”

“Eleanor Watson has gone,” said Mary. “How that girl has changed, Betty. She

never used to be happy unless she was at the centre of the stage, and now she's as retiring as Helen Chase Adams."

"That reminds me!" announced Madeline oracularly, and went off in pursuit of the B's, who were seldom far apart.

But to her disappointment the B's frowned upon her plan to hold a "Merry Heart" meeting on shipboard and elect Eleanor Watson to membership.

"I'm ready to be nice to her," declared Bob, "but I think that's enough, for now, any way. She's been a brick on this trip and I'm glad she came, on her own account as well as on Betty's. But I hate cheats."

"When a person has done a thing like that you can't ever really trust her," added Babe.

"And so," concluded Babbie, who, being very tender-hearted, would have yielded but for the support of the other two members of the triumvirate, "you don't want to be known as her very particular friend, and 'The Merry Hearts' are all very particular friends, Madeline."

"All right," said Madeline pleasantly. "I only wanted to find out how you felt. It

would be a risk, I know, to take her in. I suppose I'm a risky person. Just consider that the matter hasn't been mentioned."

"We will," promised Babe, and Madeline strolled back to Betty.

"Mary has gone to begin the novel," Betty told her. "She wants to get as much done as possible before Ethel comes on deck."

"I suppose," remarked Madeline, irrelevantly, "that if it wasn't a lot more trouble to find things than to lose them people would be even more careless than they are now. But it seems a little hard sometimes to have to hunt so many months for a thing you lost in a minute."

Betty stared at her uncomprehendingly. "What kind of things do you mean, Madeline?" she asked.

"Oh, all sorts," said Madeline. "Handkerchiefs and fountain pens and gold beads and reputations."

The novel was the chief excitement during the stormy voyage home. It was to be a sort of log-book of the journey, with the merry match-making for its main theme. Mary Brooks, because of her habit of utilizing local

happenings to advantage in her themes, had been "elected" to write it, the camera fiends were to furnish the illustrations, and the rest were to give suggestions and act as advisory committee.

Fortunately Mary belonged to the small minority of the ship's passengers who were not seasick, and she amused herself and everybody else in the party but Ethel with the chapters of the novel, or novelette as she modestly called it. She found her audience interested, but extremely critical.

"I shall never be an authoress," she declared firmly on the last afternoon of the voyage, when most of the invalids had come on deck and sat about warmly wrapped in rugs and golf capes. "I had thought of devoting myself to literature next year, but I've changed my mind. The general public is too hard to suit, if you are fair samples. Roberta thinks I have too much description of Nassau, and now Betty thinks I haven't enough. Bob says the conversation sounds stilted, and yesterday Helen Adams told me that it wasn't high-flown enough for college faculty."

"Then you'll have to be guided by the dic-

tates of your own inborn genius," said Babbie, grandiloquently. "An 'Argus' editor ought to know how to write a story without asking advice from all her 'young friends,' Mary."

"Thank you in the name of the 'Argus' editors," murmured Mary, recalling a scathing comment to the same effect that Dr. Hinsdale had put on her last psychology report.

"Somehow," said Helen Adams, tumbling into the conversation in her funny abrupt fashion, "somehow—Mary's story is interesting—but it does sound awfully made up. You would never guess it had really happened, would you?"

"That's because I am a romanticist," said Mary, calmly. "I don't suppose you little juniors know anything about romanticists, so I will explain that they are the kind of novelists who use their imaginations. In this case I really had to depend on my imagination because naturally I wasn't there when the most exciting things happened. But when I have been there under somewhat similar circumstances," added Mary, with a meaning smile, "this was about the way things went."

"The chapter about Betty's drowning is the

worst of all," declared Bob, "and it ought to be the best. It seemed exciting enough at the time, but when you think it over there's nothing to it. Betty ought to have been out in water over her head, and Dr. Eaton ought to have sunk once or twice trying to bring her in, and really risked his life to save her. Then it would sound like something, and there would be some reason in the silly way you made the heroine act afterward."

"I know it," said Mary, doubtfully. "It would be a great deal more artistic that way. Shall I change it?"

"Oh, no," objected Roberta. "That would spoil the whole idea of the novel's being true and the merry match-making being ours."

"Oh, well, perhaps it will seem all right when the pictures are put in," suggested Mary, hopefully. "Lots of novels wouldn't amount to anything without the illustrations."

"Did Bob tell you what she thought of?" asked Babbie. "She suggested that the novel would make the best kind of wedding present for Miss Hale."

"Goodness no!" exclaimed Mary. "I'm



not going to be a laughing-stock for the faculty!"

"But think of all the tender memories it would evoke," said Bob, grinning broadly at her own sentimentality.

"And how well it will prove that things are not what they seem to the fine imagination of a budding young authoress," added Madeline Ayres, who had been conspicuously silent during the discussion.

"What do you mean, Madeline?" asked Mary, suspiciously.

"I mean," said Madeline, "that your novel is a fairy-tale—every word of the match-making part, except a few unimportant facts that you saw but misinterpreted."

"I told you so!" cried Betty, in triumph. "Oh, Madeline, how did you find out?"

But Madeline only shrugged her shoulders. "No matter how," she said. "I thought I'd better warn them, so that they wouldn't be too much disappointed later on."

"Do you mean that Dr. Eaton and Miss Hale haven't fallen in love?" demanded Mary.

"Oh, I shouldn't go as far as that."

“I don’t believe you know any more about it than Betty does. You’re both guessing,” declared Mary indignantly.

Madeline smiled her slow, provoking smile. “Wait and see,” she said, and even to Betty she confided little more. “I’ve talked to Dr. Eaton,” she admitted. “That is, I happened to ask him one question, and you’re right, Betty. Mary’s scheming was as much use as most match-making is.

“But the book will be a good wedding-present all the same,” she assured Mary. “It’s a very ingenious fairy-tale, and I’m sure they’ll enjoy seeing themselves as others saw them.”

“How do you suppose they will act when they get back to Harding?” Roberta wondered.

“They’ll certainly make some bad breaks if they try to deceive the girls,” declared Bob.

“Well,” Mary warned them all, “we mustn’t make any breaks. We must remember that it’s the business of the merry match-makers not to breathe a word of what we’ve noticed, but to be very discreet and

dignified." Mary drew herself up proudly in her steamer chair.

Everybody got down to the last dinner on shipboard, even to Ethel, who came in leaning on Mr. Wales's arm, and looking very pale through her Nassau tan. To the surprise of the match-makers she merely nodded to Dr. Eaton, and his nod in return was just as casual as hers. And the next morning when he bade the girls good-bye on the wharf,—for he was taking an early train to Harding,—he shook hands with Ethel in the same hearty, offhand way in which he had just shaken hands with Eleanor, and did not so much as try for a last word with the heroine. It was astonishing and disappointing enough!

Mr. Wales took the party in charge for the afternoon, and they did New York with a vengeance, but neither luncheon at the Waldorf nor the marvels of the circus at the Hippodrome sufficed to cheer Mary Brooks, whose lively spirits were completely dampened by the failure of her pet scheme.

"To think," she sighed to Roberta, "that it's all gone for nothing—that mad dash that

Madeline and I made home from Grant's Town, when it's a wonder we didn't die of sun-stroke, and Betty's drowning, and the novel, and all the films that Eleanor and Roberta wasted getting snap-shots of the hero and heroine, not to mention the able assistance of Mr. Wales. Betty, mayn't I ask your father what he thinks now?"

But Mr. Wales was as much in the dark as the girls. "I thought for a while that we had it all fixed," he said with a twinkle, "but I'm afraid Ethel was playing summer girl down there in the tropics. I should like to tell her what a fine fellow Eaton is, and give her some good advice about marrying and settling down before she's worn herself out teaching troublesome young things like you, but Mrs. Wales says I'd better not."

On the way up to Harding nobody had much time to devote to the subject of match-making. The train was full of Harding girls. Nita got on at the junction and Katherine and Rachel were at the station to greet the southern tourists. There were regular volleys of questions to answer, and it

was great fun telling all about the queer things they had seen and done.

"You didn't find out everything from the guide-books, Katherine," Betty told her, "and you were wrong about the sidewalks. They weren't narrow, because generally there weren't any at all."

A day or two later the college discovered where Dr. Eaton had spent his vacation, and there were more questions: Had they seen much of him? What was he like out of class? How did he and Miss Hale get on together?

The last question the girls parried as well as they could. "And I guess," said Mary, "that our different versions are about as much alike as black and white."

Meanwhile the novel and the illustrations for it lay unheeded in the depths of Mary's desk drawer, for the author declared that she should not copy it into the beautiful gilt edge, morocco-covered blank-book which the club had provided until she knew exactly how things were going to end. This there seemed to be no immediate prospect of find-

ing out. "The Merry Hearts" watched Ethel and Dr. Eaton as closely as they could without appearing intrusive, but they discovered absolutely nothing.

"She asked Betty to go walking with her just as she always did," announced Babbie.

"And he goes off horseback riding with Professor Hinsdale," contributed Roberta.

"I was right behind her when she and Dr. Eaton met on the stairs yesterday morning," added Helen, "and they bowed and said good-morning, just as they'd have said it to any one else."

"She does look awfully happy though," said Bob, who for a tom-boy had become extremely interested in Ethel's romance. "When we were having a written lesson the other day she sat there with her eyes just shining."

"I guess she always was happy enough," objected matter-of-fact Helen. "Why shouldn't she be?"

Betty and Madeline exchanged glances. They had never referred to the night when they saw Ethel crying. But in any case her good spirits were very easily explained; the

Nassau trip had rested and cheered her up, and that was all she needed.

And so, after two weeks of unrewarded observation, "The Merry Hearts" forgot to speculate about the interesting faculty romance—if romance it was—and plunged whole-heartedly into the gaieties of spring term. First and foremost among them was of course the junior "prom." For weeks before vacation it had been a topic of absorbing interest, and now most of the juniors thought and talked of little else. Helen Adams begrudged the way the "prom." monopolized attention, supplanting all the impromptu festivities and throwing the man-less dances in which she delighted quite into the shade. One reason why Helen loved college so was because there were no men to bother about; but now for two weeks man was the sole topic of conversation, and to have a man, safe and sure, for the "prom." the desideratum of every junior. But Helen Adams was a "freak." Every other girl in 19—reveled in the situation, though some, like Katherine Kittredge, scoffed unfeelingly at their friends' predicaments, and others, like Roberta Lewis, who had gathered

courage to invite her cousin from Boston, were filled with secret misgivings and devoutly wished that their men would sprain their ankles (not seriously), like Alice Waite's tenth one, or be asked to go to Europe with a rich uncle, like Rachel Morrison's brother. For a "prom." is a great responsibility as well as a great joy.

"I can tell you it's no laughing matter," declared little Alice Waite, "when you've got your dress and made out your program and are just dying to go, to have the last man you know east of Denver sprain his ankle—it's heart-breaking."

"Almost as bad as when you had two men on your hands for the concert and Georgia Ames couldn't help you out," jeered Katherine Kittredge. "Isn't it a pity that Georgia had to miss the prom.? She'd have been in her element when her men disappeared into thin air."

Nobody took Alice's troubles very seriously, because Alice was always in trouble and out again. But the whole class of 19— looked sober when it was rumored that Rachel Morrison was actually thinking of staying at



home and letting the vice-president take her place. For 19— was very proud of Rachel, and besides a junior “prom.” without the junior president would be Hamlet with Hamlet left out. But Rachel couldn’t be made to feel her own importance.

“I couldn’t get on with a strange man,” she declared, when various of her friends generously offered their guests for the president’s use. “Christy will lead the march a lot better than I, and you must let her do it.”

And so 19— was duly grateful to Eleanor Watson when she overruled all Rachel’s objections, after Betty and Nita had both tried to and failed, and insisted that she should take Jim to the “prom.”

“What an honor for Jim!” she put it. “He’ll be so set up. He’s looking forward to a calm, brotherly evening with me, and now he’ll find himself up in the receiving line, jollyng the patronesses and the class officers. And I—oh, it doesn’t matter. I know plenty of other men. But I do want Jim to have a good time.”

In the end Eleanor watched the prom. from the gallery, except during three dances that

Rachel insisted upon her having with Jim. She had looked forward to taking Jim to her prom. too eagerly to care to put up with any second-best escort, and besides the men she had cultivated in her first two years at Harding—Paul West and his set—were utterly distasteful to her now.

Jean Eastman had her characteristic comment to make on Eleanor's sacrifice. "Bidding for popularity with the class, I suppose," she said. "A very pretty play to the gallery it is, and just before she comes up at Dramatic Club, too. I wonder if it will work."

So it was somewhat of a surprise to her when she discovered at the next Dramatic Club meeting that Eleanor had asked to have her name definitely withdrawn.

"I can't feel that it would be right for me to go in," she explained to Miss Ferris and to Betty Wales, the two who had seen her through that trying sophomore spring term. "A Dramatic Club election is an official honor, and it ought never to go to any one who doesn't thoroughly deserve it. I got it under false pretenses and I should never feel as if it really belonged to me."

## CHAPTER XVII

### HELEN'S DAY—AND ELEANOR'S

It was a week after the "prom.;" all the men had gone home, and all the violets had faded, before anything else of particular interest took place. Mary Brooks, to be sure, had been going about wearing her preoccupied, important air and had declined various invitations on the plea that she was busy; but nobody thought anything of that, because Mary was always having periods of strenuous and conscientious effort, surrounded on all sides, as Katherine Kittredge put it, by periods of the exact opposite.

Nearly all the "literary" juniors, together with a good many like Betty Wales who were not in the least literary, took Miss Raymond's theme course. The bulletin boards were just outside the door of her recitation room, so that part of the hall was always noisy and crowded between classes; and at the close of the hour on this particular Wednesday morn-

ing there seemed to be even more confusion there than usual. But the class paid very little heed to what was going on outside. Miss Raymond had a way of bringing up interesting points that the recitation period was much too short to dispose of, and they sauntered out in this usual leisurely fashion, arguing about the merits of the theme that had just been read—a spirited essay of Eleanor Watson's. Helen Adams happened to be the last one in the line, and at Miss Raymond's desk she stopped to ask a question.

“Miss Raymond, could you tell me——” she began timidly. Just then a tumult of cries and a burst of gay applause came through the half-open door.

“Aren't they noisy this morning?” laughed Helen. “And it's not Monday, so it can't be about a society election.”

Miss Raymond was gathering up her books and papers. “Go out and see what it's about,” she said, smiling down at Helen's eager little face.

“Yes, but I just wanted to ask——” began Helen again.

Miss Raymond gave her a little push in the

direction of the door. "Never mind that now," she said. "You belong out there."

And Helen went out, wondering at Miss Raymond's insistence, into the tightly packed, swaying mob of laughing, excited girls, who all seemed to know what the noise and the merriment were about. As Helen pushed through the door, a girl whom she did not know stretched out a hand to her.

"Congratulations, Miss Adams," she said.

Helen looked her bewilderment, and the girl laughed.

"Your note is on the bulletin board," she said. "Didn't Miss Raymond tell you?"

Just then a movement of the crowd tossed Christy Mason forward toward Helen. Evidently Christy had something to do with the excitement. People were shaking hands with her, and her face was radiant.

"Who else got one?" Helen heard her ask the girls around her.

"Marion Lustig," somebody told her, "and Emily Davis. I don't know who else. One of the notes is still up there on the bulletin board."

“Oh, Miss Mason,” cried Helen, “what is it that you are, please?”

“Why I seem to be an editor of the ‘Argus,’” laughed Christy. “Business manager, I think the note says. Isn’t it splendid—only I don’t see how it ever came to me.”

Helen’s face flushed red, and then she got white and faint and entirely forgot to congratulate Christy, who was much too happy to notice the omission. Could it be that she was an editor? Was that what the girl near the door had meant? Oh, she must have been mistaken! Helen looked despairingly at the bulletin board with the surging crowd of girls between it and her. It seemed as if she couldn’t wait—as if she must know at once whether or not there was anything there for her.

Just then a voice cried, “Pass this to Miss Adams. She’s standing by the door there, and she can’t get through the jam.” In a moment another girl whom Helen didn’t know, but who seemed to know her perfectly, slipped something into her hand.

“I hope you’ll enjoy the work as much as I have,” the stranger said, shaking hands vig-

orously, "and I know you'll do it much better."

Then Helen found herself suddenly a vortex about which the crowd eddied and swarmed as it had swarmed about Christy, shaking hands, congratulating, complimenting.

"But of course, it's no surprise to you," one girl said. "We were sure you'd get it."

Helen only stared at her in blank amazement.

"Why, I never dreamed of such a thing," she told Betty a little later when the hall had cleared and only the editors who did not have a class the next hour and a few of their best friends were left. "Why, Betty Wales, just think! I'm—I'm an editor of the 'Argus.'"

"Exactly," laughed Betty. "What does the note say, Helen?"

"Why, I don't know," said Helen. "I haven't had time to open it." She looked at it doubtfully. "Betty, suppose there should be some mistake. Suppose the note is about something else."

"It isn't," Betty assured her. "I heard Mary Brooks say you were an editor, and of course she knows."

Thus encouraged Helen opened her note and read through its glorious contents. "Betty," she said solemnly, passing it to her to read, "I don't believe anybody was ever quite so happy as I am."

"Except the other editors," suggested Betty teasingly.

Helen shook her head. "I don't believe one of them cares as much as I do. Who are the others, Betty?"

"Marion Lustig and Emily Davis and Christy and Jane Drew and—let me see——"

"And Eleanor of course," put in Helen.

Betty shook her head. "No," she said, "Eleanor wasn't one."

Helen looked perplexed. "I don't see why. She writes better than any one in the class except Marion Lustig. Why hasn't the 'Argus' printed any of her things this year, Betty?"

"She didn't want them printed, I think, for one reason," said Betty. "And doesn't an editor have to do other things besides write? Perhaps Eleanor isn't fitted for it in other ways."

With that she escaped to the library. She



had caught just a glimpse of Eleanor in the crowd and seen the hunted look that came to her face when somebody of Helen's opinion said, "Of course you're on the board, Miss Watson."

"I wanted to choke her," Betty reflected, "but I suppose she wasn't to blame for not having listened to unpleasant gossip. Poor Eleanor! It's going to be a hard day for her!"

Meanwhile little Helen Adams went blissfully home to the Belden. Several times on the way she pinched herself to make sure she was awake. Up in her own room in the quiet of the big empty house she sat down to think it all over. She had been very lonely during her freshman year—but that didn't matter now. And the basket-ball song and the verses and the quaint little essay on apple-trees that the "Argus" had printed had meant long hours of hard work and discouraged waiting for the right words to come. But the struggles and discouragements didn't matter now either, in the face of this glorious, wholly unlooked-for success.

Helen would have been amazed indeed if

she could have heard Jean Eastman's view of her position.

"Yes, I'm sorry for her," Jean informed the Westcott House lunch table. "I think she'd have been happier without this. She won't fit in with the others. They've all been prominent girls ever since freshman year, and she—oh, of course, she has some nice friends, but only the ones she was thrown with at Mrs. Chapin's and some freshmen she met through her roommate. She isn't in Dramatic Club or Clio, and she's never had any office in the class. She'll feel the difference now, and realize how she's been left out from everything else."

"Do you think so? Now I can't imagine anything more exciting than to be a 'dark horse,'" volunteered a bright-eyed little sophomore at the end of the table. "Why, everybody is talking about her to-day. 'Who's Helen Adams?' That's what they all want to know. It must be splendid to take people by surprise and just make them find out about you."

"That sounds well," persisted Jean, "but in actual fact it's a different matter. You get

the place that everybody thought belonged to some one else"—here Jean had the grace to look a little uncomfortable, for her friends had frequently assured her that she stood as good a chance as anybody for a minor position on the editorial staff—"but you miss the fun of it. You don't get the flowers and the spreads and all that sort of thing that the popular girls will have."

"Well, anyway Miss Adams isn't going to miss the spread," said the bright-eyed sophomore.

"Who's going to give it for her?" demanded Jean.

"Miss Watson."

Jean laughed disagreeably. "Indeed! One of Eleanor's quixotic philanthropies, I suppose." She lowered her voice so that only the little crowd of juniors near her could hear. "Wouldn't you think that to-day of all days she'd have preferred to keep in the background? But I suppose she thought that she might as well be 'in it' one way if she couldn't the other."

At first Eleanor's impulse had been just what Jean had suggested. She wanted to get

into the background, away from the noisy demonstrations and the curious or idle inquiries about her omission from the "Argus" board. Ever since she entered college, fully informed by her upper class friends about all the ways of putting oneself forward and all the offices and honors that a clever girl might aspire to, Eleanor had looked forward to the day of the "Argus" elections as her hour of greatest triumph. Now Emily Davis had the place that might have been hers, and she was slinking home by a back path, hoping to avoid meeting any one. She looked across the greening campus and saw little Helen Adams also hurrying home. Her lips curled scornfully as she watched Helen's joyous progress, for to her as to Jean this late hard-won recognition would have had in it more humiliation than triumph. Then all at once her face softened as the idea of the supper came to her.

"I don't believe any one else, except possibly Betty, will think of it," she decided swiftly, "and perhaps it would please Helen more if I should do it. Coming from some one outside her special friends, it will seem like a more general recognition."



AT THE DOOR OF HELEN'S ROOM SHE HESITATED

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At the door of Helen's room she hesitated and drew back to consider. All the editors would be at Cuyler's that evening with parties of their friends. Everybody who saw her would either remember why she was not an editor or wonder what the mysterious reason could be.

"I might wait until to-morrow," she thought. "There would be fewer people then, and I shouldn't be so conspicuous."

But no; to-night was the proper night for an editorial spread, and Helen should have the fun of being in the midst of things for once.

So she knocked and explained her errand. Helen's ecstasy of delight was almost pathetic.

"A supper at Cuyler's for me!" she cried. "Oh, how lovely! How perfectly lovely! Betty has ordered some flowers for me, and now you do this! I haven't anything left to wish for. I'm sure I shall enjoy my one big day as much as girls like you and Betty enjoy all yours put together."

"I hope you will," said Eleanor, thinking bitterly of the "big day," when her story came out in the "Argus."

“And I think it is particularly nice of you,” went on Helen, earnestly, “when we all thought——” The look on Eleanor’s face warned her not to go on, and instead of finishing her sentence she put her arms around Eleanor and stood on tiptoe to kiss her soft cheek.

Some of “The Merry Hearts” had already accepted invitations to other spreads, but two of the B’s were free and received Eleanor’s timidly proffered invitation with a heartiness that surprised her and encouraged her beyond measure to go on in the difficult rôle she had chosen. Katherine could come, and Roberta. Betty excused herself to Nita, who was entertaining in honor of Christy, on the plea that Helen would feel hurt if her freshman roommate could not come to her spread, and Lucile declared that she was almost as “set up” by being invited to a junior party as Helen was by being elected editor. So every one was in the best of spirits and the “dark horse spread,” as Jean called it, was the gayest of all the editorial celebrations.

All the parties broke up at about the same time, and went up the hill to the campus in a



long, straggling line. Without any particular manœuvering "The Merry Hearts" found themselves together in the rear, with no outsiders in their midst but Eleanor. At the campus gate Bob stopped the tail of the procession.

"Just wait a minute, girls," she said. "Mary, I want to call a meeting of 'The Merry Hearts.'"

"All right," said Mary, taking her place under the gate lantern. "It's called. What is the business?"

Eleanor had drawn off to one side, uncertain whether it would be more tactful to go or stay.

"Just to elect Eleanor Watson a member," announced Bob, calmly. "Don't go, Eleanor. I've sounded them all, and they all want you. This is only a formality."

The formality was quickly disposed of after the very informal fashion of the society, and Eleanor found herself wearing Babe's cherished pin and having the objects and rules of the society explained to her by Babbie Hildreth and Nita Reese, who had been her most implacable critics.

“Yes, we changed our minds,” Bob was meanwhile explaining to Madeline, whom she had pulled back to a safe distance for confidences. “We felt pretty mean the night of the prom., and to-day I told Babe that anybody who was generous enough, after everything, to give Helen Chase Adams a spread, and brave enough to face it out down there at Cuyler’s,—well, that for all that she deserved something in place of what she didn’t get. I hope she was pleased.”

Alone in her room a little later Eleanor caught sight of her happy face in a mirror, and laughed at herself for being so absurdly pleased about such a little thing. “But after all it isn’t such a very little thing,” she reflected. “It means that they’re beginning to trust me again, and that’s at the bottom of everything.”

But the happiest person in Harding College that night was Betty Wales.

“Everything is getting fixed,” she told the green lizard joyously. “Eleanor is a ‘Merry Heart’ and Helen is an editor. It does seem as if there was nothing more left to bother about.” The ten o’clock gong sounded omi-

nously through the halls and Betty jumped for her light. "There is always the ten o'clock rule," she sighed, and then she laughed. "I wouldn't bother about things for anything," she said as she tumbled wearily into bed.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### A DRESS REFORM AND A NASSAU REUNION

BETTY WALES came home one lovely afternoon in May looking very sober indeed for her. But her face brightened instantly when she found a note from Ethel stuck in her mirror.

“ Dear little sister ”—she read —

“ Will you and all the Nassau girls come for an al fresco supper with me to-morrow night? My balcony has a view of Paradise, and the sun will be going down at six. Will you ask the others? ”

“ Yours, in a hurry,

“ ETHEL. ”

“ How dear of her ! ” thought Betty, and ran out to give Madeline her invitation and incidentally to find out what al fresco meant.

“ Oh ! ” she sighed in great relief when Madeline had explained that it was Italian for out-of-doors. “ I thought perhaps she wanted us to come in costume or have quota-

tions from Shakespeare or something. I'm glad it's nothing learned like that. Madeline, are you a junior usher?"

Madeline shook her head. "Rachel asked me, but I told her I couldn't bother."

Betty laughed. "Junior ushering isn't generally considered a bother, Miss Ayres. It's a great honor and a lot of fun."

"What is honor but an empty bubble?" declaimed Madeline gaily. "And I don't see where the fun comes in. You have to stand up behind when you usher. I'd rather sit down in front. Besides, most of commencement is deadly dull. While you are hurrying around in the heat spoiling your best clothes and being bored I shall go trolley-riding, or if there's something I want to see, like the Ivy Day procession, I can hang out of my window in a comfortable kimono——"

"You can't do that, Madeline," exclaimed Betty in horror-struck tones, "with the campus full of mothers and men."

Madeline laughed. "No, strictly speaking I can't," she said, "because I don't own a kimono since I gave my red silk one to the Nassau wash-lady who admired it, and I

draw the line at borrowing clothes. I should have to borrow some, though, if I ushered. I haven't anything that would look even presentable beside the dreams of elegance and beauty that you people are going to wear."

Betty jumped up with a start. "Good-bye, Madeline," she said. "I must go and tell the B's about Ethel's supper."

She found Babbie taking the wrappings off of a bulky package that the expressman had just brought.

"I was in my wrapper when he knocked," explained Babbie cheerfully, "and I thought of course it was Bob, because she walks just like a man, so I said, 'Come in.' And all my bureau drawers were tumbled out on Babe's bed. But I guess he's seen things like that before, if he's been in Harding long. It's my junior usher dress, Betty. How these knots do stick! And since I used my scissors to cut picture wire they won't cut string."

With Betty's help the troublesome knots were all undone at last, and Babbie shook out her new dress with a little sigh of satisfaction.

“Oh, it’s made princess,” she cried, “and see the lace! Why, it’s fairly covered. Betty, isn’t my mother a darling?”

Betty gazed admiringly at the filmy, be-ruffled gown, with its rows upon rows of tucking and shirring, and its dainty trimmings of hand embroidery and real lace. “It’s a perfect beauty, Babbie,” she said, “and you’ll look like a beauty in it, you’re so slight and dark.”

Babbie, who had found a note pinned to the dress, gave a little squeal of pleasure. “Here’s a check for a hat,” she said. “Mother says that I don’t need a new white hat one bit, but that considering I’ve lived within my allowance I may have one. Oh, Betty, I do feel guilty about that maid’s wages. And yet the money has helped Emily Davis a lot—a little of the money, I mean. And what could I do with a maid?” Her eyes fell on the chaos on Babe’s bed. “I wish I had one for an hour to straighten out that mess. I shall make Babe help because I was hunting for her history note-book when I emptied them out, and she had it all the time herself.” She turned to Betty. “What’s

the matter with you, Betty Wales? You're as sober as a judge."

Betty waited a minute. "Oh, Babbie, I hate to tell you, but I do want you to help. You know Rachel tried to pick out some of the girls to usher who hadn't had as many good times as the rest of us, like Helen and Lotta Gardner and that quiet Miss Ray who doesn't seem to have any friends. They all seemed so pleased, but to-day Lotta and Miss Ray came to her and said they'd decided they couldn't stay to commencement. Rachel felt around and found out that the trouble was they thought their dresses wouldn't do to usher in. They had heard that everything was going to be so very elegant this year. And just now, while I was down at Rachel's, Emily Davis came in and refused for the same reason. She didn't want to spoil the grand effect, she said, with a dowdy dress. We tried to make her think her dimity was all right, but we couldn't."

"Well?" questioned Babbie coldly, putting out a slim hand to straighten a fold in her new gown.

Betty hesitated. "Why, I thought that if



some of us—in ‘The Merry Hearts’ perhaps—should agree—I thought—oh, Babbie, of course you want to wear it.”

“Yes,” said Babbie briefly, “I want to wear it. Don’t you want to wear yours?”

Betty nodded. “It’s nothing so elegant as this, but it’s very dear, and it’s not—not what you’d call simple. Babbie ——”

“Yes.”

“Do you know, I think Rachel is worrying about her own dress. She wouldn’t admit it, but she brought it out to show me, and it’s very plain and it’s been washed a lot of times. You know she and Christy walk at the head of the Ivy Day procession, in front of the senior president and vice-president. Of course Christy will have a lovely dress and the seniors’ officers are both wealthy girls. Rachel said she hoped her class wouldn’t be ashamed of her.”

Babbie picked up the box her dress had been packed in. There were big bunches of purple violets all over it, and a faint scent of violets exhaled from it as she gave it a vigorous toss to the further corner of her long room.

“What an idea!” she said. “We ashamed of Rachel Morrison!”

She swept up her new dress and hung it out of sight in the remotest depths of her closet.

“There!” she said, coming back to sit once more on the couch. “I can wear it down to dinner some night, I suppose, so that mother won’t notice it’s never been on. I shouldn’t like to hurt her feelings. And now the question is shall I look worse in a white duck suit that I wore mornings last year or in an organdy that the washwoman ironed so that it’s half-way up to my knees across the front and lies on the floor everywhere else. I think myself I should look more like the fair Miss Gardner in the organdy.”

“Oh, Babbie, don’t!” begged Betty. “Please don’t feel that way. Nobody wants us to look like frumps. I only thought it would be a splendid thing if we should agree to wear dresses more like what any girl in the class could afford to have. But don’t do it unless you want to, Babbie.”

Babbie kicked the fringe of the couch-cover savagely with her shiny, high-heeled slipper. “I don’t want to, Betty Wales,” she

declared. "I shan't pretend that I want to, but—oh, you queer old Power behind the Throne!" She leaned forward, scattering the pillows right and left, and enveloped Betty in a riotous hug. "I might just as well do what you say first as last. The reason why you get what you want when the rest of us can't is because you always want the right kind of things. It is absurd, of course, to have such expensive dresses when they're almost sure to be trampled on in the crowd and ruined the first time we wear them, and it's mean too, I suppose, if it hurts people's feelings. So here goes for the simple life!" Babbie sent one shiny slipper flying after the violet-scented box.

"Oh, Babbie, you are a dear!" Betty's eyes sparkled with pleasure. "If you and Christy and Nita and Alice Waite and a few of the others who always have pretty clothes will agree to it, why it will spread, I know."

"And Jean Eastman, who probably won't agree to it, because she didn't think of it first, will find herself out in the cold where she belongs," remarked Babbie affably. "And now the question still is how to dress for the

part of Miss Simplicity. What shall you wear, Betty?"

"Why, all my thin things faded so in the sun down at Nassau that they are frights," Betty explained. "I thought it would be fun to make a dress, Babbie."

Babbie looked dubious for a moment and then her face cleared. "It might be fun enough," she said, "if—— Oh, I know what! Seven dollars isn't too much to spend, is it? I have just that much now, and I'll risk a pound of Huyler's on it, Betty Wales, that I can make a better-looking dress for seven dollars than you can."

"All right," agreed Betty laughingly. "And of course you understand, Babbie, that we mustn't explain we're doing it on account of any particular girls, but just on general principles. I'll tell Rachel to see that the right ones hear about it."

"Of course," assented Babbie, who was hurrying into a shirt-waist. "I'm not to inform the fair Miss Gardner that I'm trying to look like her second cousin. I'll remember. Go and tell Babe, Betty. She's down in Christy's room. And as soon as I'm dressed

we'll go and buy the things. Bob's clothes are always frights, no matter what they cost, so it's no use bothering with her."

Christy received Betty's suggestion with hearty approval. "We certainly want to keep Harding College so that every girl, no matter who she is, can enjoy it," she said. "And the only way to do that is to keep clothes in the background and brains and real good times in front."

She would wear a simple muslin,—“It's really a lot more becoming than the other fussed up one,” she confessed, laughingly,—and she promised to see Nita and half a dozen others who would be at the committee meeting she was just hurrying off to. Babe joined the shopping expedition, insisting that her dress should enter the competition with Betty's and Babbie's. “Only I shall hire the buttonholes done,” she declared. “I can't make buttonholes fit to be seen at the commencement of a cat's orphan asylum.”

It was surprising how many junior ushers were down-town that afternoon and how eagerly most of them took up with “the simple life,” as Babbie called it. A good many

were pleased to be asked to join a movement headed by Christy, Betty and the rich and exclusive Babbie Hildreth, who gave it just the stamp that Betty had counted on in asking her coöperation. Others were relieved to find that an elaborate new dress would not be needed. A few of course declared that the seniors would be disappointed and 19— disgraced if the ushers appeared in “duds.” But these last were so hopelessly in the minority that they could safely be ignored.

“Besides, they’ll come around fast enough when they find out who’s for the simple life,” said Babe decidedly. “As for the seniors, they’ll be mighty sorry that they didn’t set a precedent for inexpensive commencement dresses. I tell you 19— is such a fine class that what it says goes.”

“What Betty says goes, you mean,” corrected Babbie, patting her bundle of lace and lawn.

“Please don’t,” begged Betty. “I didn’t do any more than the rest of you. And that reminds me that I haven’t told you but half of what I came to your room to say.”

Babbie made an imploring gesture. “Please



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don't. I can't be nice about anything more just now."

"Oh, I don't want you to be," Betty assured her solemnly. "This is another kind of thing altogether." Whereupon she was allowed to deliver Miss Hale's invitation.

The Nassau party met by Mary's hammock under the apple-trees, which were now fast losing their freight of snowy blossoms, and walked up to Ethel's together. On the way they argued good-naturedly over the possibility of their hearing anything about the romance.

"I'm afraid there isn't any to hear about now," said Mary, sadly. "But it certainly had a beautiful start."

"Start, did you say?" demanded Madeline with an irritating smile.

"Yes, I did," returned Mary, calmly. "I don't see how you can possibly deny that for two people who barely knew each other before, they got along amazingly fast. I shan't argue any more about particular cases, but certainly if we hadn't taken Miss Hale to Nassau, Dr. Eaton would never have fallen in love with

her. That's a romance in itself. But I suppose you'd say that he wasn't in love."

"Oh, no, I shouldn't," returned Madeline, promptly. "Should you, Betty?"

"No, I shouldn't either," laughed Betty, thinking of the orange blossoms and her queer interview with Dr. Eaton on shipboard. "But I can't give my reasons against the match-making theory and Madeline won't give hers, so let's not argue."

"Especially as it has probably all come to nothing," said Babe. "I hope there'll be lots to eat."

It was a perfect summer evening, and the up-stairs piazza, to which the girls were at once ushered, with its daintily spread table, its flowers, and its view of Paradise pond and the clear gold of the sunset sky, was so pretty that there was a chorus of delighted exclamations.

There was certainly "lots to eat," as Babe had hoped, and Ethel had not forgotten what tastes good to college girls toward the end of spring term. Everything was cool and crisp and as different as possible from conventional campus fare. There was a centrepiece of

ferns and a red rose at each place, and presently it began to dawn on the girls that everything was red and green. Strawberries on their own stems, radishes nestled in feathery parsley, tomatoes on lettuce leaves, gave a touch of 19—'s color, combined with the scarlet of their freshman allies, to each course. After the parti-colored ice had been finished, and the hostess's health drunk in lemonade (with red cherries in the bottom of each slender green glass) there was a sudden lull in the conversation and then Miss Hale began to speak.

"Girls," she said, looking very solemnly around the circle of eager faces, "I asked you here to-day because I wanted to make sure of seeing you all once more before I leave. I'm not coming back next year."

"Oh, Miss Hale——" began Mary Brooks impulsively, and paused, noticing how sober Ethel's face was, and not daring to go on with her question. "We shall miss you awfully—I mean the others will," she ended in some confusion.

"Yes, indeed," said Eleanor Watson eagerly, "I shall for one."

"And I. And I," echoed the rest, while Betty Wales watched Ethel's face and wished she had her alone to catechize.

"Ethel," she said, "you ought to have stayed until I got through. I shan't know what to do without any grown-up person to look out for me. I shall be just forlorn."

"Poor Betty!" said Ethel, with a very faint smile. "Won't Nan come and see you sometimes?"

"Are you going to teach somewhere else, Miss Hale?" asked Helen Adams.

"Teach? Oh, only one private pupil, I think," said Miss Hale soberly.

"I hope you're not tired out," observed Babbie Hildreth politely.

"Oh, no, I'm not at all tired since my restful vacation," responded Miss Hale cordially.

The girls exchanged covert glances. Nobody quite dared to put the question that was uppermost in everybody's thought. No one could think of any more "feelers" and there seemed to be nothing else to talk about. So an awkward silence fell upon the circle, which Ethel, in her capacity of hostess, made no effort to lift.

“What—what a beautiful night it is,” said Mary Brooks at last in desperation. But no one paid any attention to her, for just at that moment Betty Wales gave a little cry of triumph.

“Ethel,” she cried, “you’re engaged! You’re just trying to bother us by looking so sober. I can see your lips twitch from here.”

Ethel’s preternaturally solemn face flashed suddenly into a radiant smile. “I wondered how long it would take you to come to it,” she said demurely. “Yes, little sister, I’m engaged.”

“There’s one thing I’ve guessed right about,” cried Betty Wales, looking triumphantly at Mary Brooks. “Oh, Ethel, I’m so glad. I was so afraid you didn’t like him, and I think he’s so nice—we all do.”

Ethel laughed again. “I’m glad you approve. Are you quite sure who ‘he’ is?”

“Yes,” said Betty confidently, “I don’t believe there is any doubt about that.”

“Oh, Miss Hale, aren’t you glad you went to Nassau?” demanded Mary Brooks, coming to the point at once in her usual energetic fashion.

Miss Hale smiled at her eagerness. "You little romancers! I suppose you've been making up a story-book affair, with love at first sight and moonlight in the tropics, and just reveling in it. I hate to spoil your romance, but we've known each other since my freshman year at Harding, and I've been this whole winter making up my mind to be engaged."

"There!" cried Madeline triumphantly.

"There!" cried Betty Wales before she thought.

Ethel looked in bewilderment from them to the others, whose faces had fallen, and Betty came to her rescue. "It's nothing, Ethel," she explained, "only the rest did think it all happened in Nassau, and we thought it couldn't have. Please go on."

"Go on?" repeated Ethel uncertainly.

"Tell us how it really happened," begged Betty, "and why it seemed to stop off short and all."

Ethel looked round the circle of eager faces. "Then you must promise not to talk about it," she said.

"Of course," they chorused.

“We haven’t said a word so far,” declared Bob proudly.

“I know you haven’t, and that’s why I decided to tell you first of all, but ——” Ethel hesitated again. “It’s so absurd. But of course you want to know. Why, last fall when Mr. Eaton told me he was coming here to teach, I—you can imagine how I felt—when he’d given me a year to think it over in—to decide between my work and marrying him ——”

“And then he came to watch you think?” suggested Helen Adams quaintly.

“Exactly,” laughed Ethel. “That was just it, and while he watched me, every one else would be watching both of us. I told him it was an impossible arrangement, but it seemed impossible for him to withdraw then, so I made him promise to leave me entirely alone and not to let any one guess that we had known each other before.”

“Oh, I see,” cried Mary Brooks delightedly. “What a funny idea! And after the Nassau trip you went back to it again?”

Ethel’s dimples came into sudden play. “Yes,” she said, “that was the agreement.

When I found that instead of running away from Mr. Eaton I had taken passage on the same boat with him, we decided that the only thing to do was to seem reasonably friendly, or else you girls would wonder what the matter was, and then"—Ethel blushed hotly—"it was dreadfully awkward. We were always being either too distant or too friendly, but I couldn't explain, so I had to trust you girls not to gossip. I knew I could. And—and that's every bit there is to tell, little sister."

"Then Nassau did help you to make up your mind?" asked Mary, anxiously.

Ethel laughed. "Dr. Eaton says it did," she said. "He told me particularly to thank you all for bringing me down there. But I think—well, to tell you the truth, I think my mind was already made up, only I didn't know it. It seems to me now that I might have decided last summer and saved all this—this ridiculous explanation," ended Ethel, smiling happily at her eager little audience.

Just at that moment a maid appeared with cards for Miss Hale, and "The Merry Hearts"



realized suddenly that it was time to go home.

"Remember it's not regularly announced until to-morrow night," Ethel warned them, as they went down the steps singing,

"Here's to our Miss Hale,  
May she never, never fail,"

at the top of nine vigorous lungs.

"Well," said Mary Brooks, when the tribute of song was duly paid, "the moral of that is: appearances are deceitful, particularly when they are meant to be deceitful. Madeline, how in the world did you find out that they'd known each other before?"

"Dr. Eaton said he'd been to a Harding prom., and I rudely asked him with whom," confessed Madeline.

"And how about you, Betty?"

"Oh, I had more opportunities to notice Ethel than the rest of you," said Betty, evasively. "I only put little things together and guessed."

She was not going to give Mary's faction a chance to crow over her, but having heard Ethel's story, she was privately of the opin-

ion that the Nassau trip, though not perhaps the match-makers' devices, had helped Ethel to decide her momentous question. "That's what was worrying her before vacation," she reflected, "and it made her queer and changeable on the trip. One minute she thought she was going to be married, and the next she was afraid she wasn't. But as soon as she got back to her beloved work she found out that she liked him best."

"Girls," piped up Helen Adams, "she said she might have one private pupil. Do you suppose she meant Dr. Eaton?"

"Maybe she meant a Swedish maid," chuckled Babe, irreverently.

"Girls," cried Betty, stopping stock-still in the campus gateway. "If she marries Dr. Eaton maybe she'll live here next year. We never asked her."

"You are elected to find out at the earliest opportunity," said Mary Brooks. "As for me, I'm going home to copy the novel. I'm going to leave it just as it is and call it 'As It Might Have Been; or, More Than Half True.'"

"'Less Than Half True' would be better, I

think," said Madeline, "but we won't quarrel. Girls, do you realize that every quarrel we have with President Brooks nowadays may be our last?"

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE RETURN OF GEORGIA AND SOME OTHER MATTERS

ETHEL was not going to live at Harding. On the afternoon after the announcement supper Betty flew up to inquire, and found to her disappointment that Dr. Eaton's first year at Harding was also to be his last.

"You see, he's a wealthy man, little sister," Ethel explained, "and he only taught this year to please me—because I accused him once of being very idle, and said I didn't want to marry a drone, no matter how clever he was or how many learned degrees he had taken. He's written a book this winter, too. I'm so proud of him! Next year we're going to live in New York, so he can be near his publishers, and some day early in the fall you must come down and let me see whether being a senior makes you look one bit older."

Betty promised joyously and hurried back

to the campus. Last days are strenuous for junior ushers, especially when they are making their own dresses and have in addition a particular friend in the senior class to do all the last pleasant things for.

Mary Brooks had never seemed so dear and amusing as she did now that they were going to lose her. Marion Lawrence was going too, and to her utter consternation Madeline Ayres discovered at the last moment that she also could graduate, if she chose to.

"Gracious, but I was scared," she explained inelegantly, coming into Betty's room one night just after ten. "When Miss Stuart said, 'You have credits enough to take your degree, Miss Ayres; I thought you understood that your junior rank was merely nominal, due to your irregular preparation,' I gasped out, 'But I don't have to take it now, do I, Miss Stuart?' She looked at me as if she thought I must be suddenly stricken with idiocy, and said she supposed not, but that she had never before had any one object to graduating too soon. I told her I thought plenty of people objected fast enough, but that I was the first one who had had a good

excuse for telling her so. Then she laughed and we got quite chummy over the joys of being a Harding girl as long as possible."

"And they won't make you go?" asked Betty anxiously.

Madeline shook her head. "Of course I could have come back anyway for graduate work, but I didn't want to do that. I want to be in 19— forever."

"Isn't it funny how much that counts?" said Betty, turning on her light. "I don't care if the night-watchman does see it," she explained. "I can't stand it not to show you my dress. I finished it this morning and it's all pressed and ready to put on."

Madeline inspected the dress critically. "It's lovely, Betty. Does it win the contest?"

Betty laughed. "We couldn't settle that," she said. "Babbie's is a lot prettier, but it cost seven cents over the seven dollars, so we refuse to get her the candy. Mine is next, but Babbie won't pay up because we admit that hers is prettier. And now Lotta Gardner's mother is sick and she can't stay to commencement. So I don't know as it

was much use making Babbie give up that dream of a dress."

"Of course it was," declared Madeline positively. "You know very well that Lotta wasn't the only girl who was going to be made uncomfortable. Besides, the principle is right, and that's what really counts. The girls are stirred up about lessening other expenses and it will make a lot of difference next year."

"Well, I hope so. I hope they don't think it was a big fuss over nothing," said Betty, stifling a yawn. "Oh, Madeline, I'm so happy to think that my last examination is over and there's only fun ahead. Don't you wish now that you were an usher?"

Madeline shook her head. "Only so that I could be in on the right side of the dress reform movement," she said. "The Farmers' Almanac predicts sizzling weather for next week, and I foresee that you'll all be overcome by heat and weariness, whereas I shall sit in peace in the gymnasium basement and other cool and shady nooks and only venture out into the open after sunset."

The Farmers' Almanac and Madeline were

both right. Never in the history of Harding College had there been a hotter commencement, and it was a weary little group of junior ushers who gathered in the gymnasium gallery on the last day of all, "to watch the animals feed," as Katherine Kittredge put it, "and by and by to pick up a few crumbs ourselves."

Everybody but the seniors and the junior ushers had gone home, and all the cooks and waitresses from the campus houses were helping to serve the annual collation to the seniors, faculty and visiting alumnæ. "So it's wait for crumbs here or starve," Katherine added sorrowfully.

"I'm sure we'd better have gone downtown," sighed Babbie Hildreth. "Perhaps we'd better go now."

"But I can't afford to," objected Betty. "I've had to borrow fifteen cents to get my trunk to the station to-morrow, as it is."

"Well, your trunk won't do you any good if you die of hunger," retorted Babbie.

"I don't believe we're going to do that," laughed Rachel Morrison. "I saw Mary



Brooks talking to Belden-House-Annie, and yes—here she comes this minute.”

“Miss Brooks tole me ye were starvin’ up here,” said the grinning Irish maid, whose gay good-nature had made her a favorite with generations of Harding girls. “You take this ’ere salad and san’wiches, and I’ll be afther findin’ yez some cake an’ cream.”

“Annie, you’re an angel,” said Betty, solemnly. “You’ve saved our lives.”

“Then it’s glad I am of that,” said Annie, rushing off with her empty tray, while the girls carried their heaped-up plates to the stairs and sat down to rest and feast.

“Well, we’ve ‘ushed’ our last ‘ush,’” said Katherine, “and the seniors are alums and we’re seniors. And if I do say it as shouldn’t, I think we’re a fine class. Do you know, our dress reform has made quite a little sensation? All the anxious alums who are sure every time they came back that the college is getting fashionable and haughty and good-for-nothing are patting us on the back.”

“They were pretty, too,” said Babbie, looking complacently at a grass stain on the front-

breadth of hers. "But do you really think people noticed the difference?"

"Indeed they did," said Rachel earnestly, "and I think——" she lifted a warning finger. "Why is it so still out there all of a sudden?"

"Prexy must be making a speech," said Babbie, who was an authority on commencements, since she had stayed to all three to see the last of some adored senior. "I remember he did last year, when he thought they'd eaten enough. I was waiting for Marie Nelson, and I was so much obliged to him for ending things off."

"Oh, I know," said Rachel, setting down her plate and scrambling to her feet. "He announces the legacies to the college at collation. Let's go in and hear how much money Harding has got this year."

"I wouldn't stir for a million dollars," sighed Babbie wearily. "I'll wait for you here."

The other three reached the gallery just in time to hear a burst of half-hearted applause.

"That couldn't have been a very big one,"

whispered Katherine. "I suppose he begins with the smallest."

Next came a gift for the library, which had suffered a good deal at the time of the fire, then a new European fellowship, and finally a ten thousand dollar legacy from the father of a prominent alumna.

"I'm going home to pack," whispered Katherine. "This isn't exciting enough."

"Wait a minute and we'll all go," returned Rachel.

The president gave a significant little cough and glanced around the gym.

"The last gift is a complete surprise to me," he went on. "As I was on my way here, I met the donor. In fact he was waiting outside the door to intercept me, which isn't"—the president's gray eyes twinkled—"the way all gifts come to colleges. He has been spending the commencement season with us and during his brief stay he seems to have found out a good deal about Harding. He likes some things about our college very much, he says; and other things he would prefer to see changed. But he wants it made quite clear to you all that the reason why he

just now handed me a check for fifty thousand dollars is because of the stand the junior class has taken in regard to the dresses they wore to usher in at the various commencement festivities. He liked those dresses as much as a great many other people have liked them"—the president's eyes twinkled again—"and he liked the principle behind them. He wishes the junior class, when it reassembles next fall as the senior class, to vote ten of the fifty thousand dollars to any department of our work it chooses, and he hopes the spirit of Harding College may always be the spirit which this class has manifested, not on this occasion alone but on many others, in which wish I heartily join him."

A great wave of applause swept over the crowd, as the president paused.

"I don't know that I am authorized to do so," he went on when he could be heard, "but I think I may safely say that 19— will accept the trust——"

"The junior president is in the gallery," called some one in the back of the hall, and the next minute every one was looking up at

Rachel Morrison, who was too busy shaking hands with Betty and Katherine to notice what was happening down below.

“Speech!” shouted a boisterous young alumna, quite forgetting the dignity of the occasion, and the august president of the college tossed back his head and laughed with the rest.

“Speech, Miss Morrison,” he repeated gaily, and Rachel came forward to the balcony railing.

“19— is very proud,” she began bravely, “to be the means of securing such a splendid gift for the college. But I think the proper person to make acknowledgment is the one who originated the idea of having the ushers dress as they did. She is right here ——”

Rachel turned just in time to see Betty Wales disappearing hastily through the nearest exit.

“She was here a moment ago,” Rachel corrected herself, “but I—I thank you—the class thanks the donor—and promises to ——”

That was all that Betty Wales heard, except the deafening thunder of applause. “I should die if I had to make a speech,” she

thought, rushing past Babbie with an incoherent murmur about being in a hurry. Once safely outside the gym. she paused, wishing the others would come out quickly. They had planned to go for a long trolley-ride late in the afternoon and take supper together at a little country inn, and the time and place of meeting were yet to be decided upon. Before she had decided what to do, Madeline Ayres, who had persuaded the Belden House matron to let her stay as long as the ushers did, and Bob Parker bore down upon her.

“Guess what we’ve found,” called Madeline.

“I don’t know,” said Betty, faintly, wondering if they could possibly have been deputed to return her to the gym.

“You look as if you’d seen a ghost,” said Bob. “Haven’t you had any lunch?”

Betty nodded. “Oh, yes, plenty, thank you. I’ve—I’ve been hurrying.”

“I can’t imagine why,” said Madeline, “when your trunk is packed and Mary Brooks’s last relative went this noon. Listen, Betty. We’ve found Georgia Ames.”

Betty stared in amazement.

"Yes," insisted Bob, "got her in flesh and blood this time. She's a freshman, or at least she's taking her entrance exams. and hoping to be one."

"How did you find out about her?" demanded Betty.

"Miss Stuart told us," Madeline explained. "She thought it was a lovely joke. And we stood at the door of the room where Miss Stuart said she was taking her English exam. and stopped each girl who came out until we got the right one."

"Does she look like her picture?" demanded Betty.

"No," laughed Madeline. "She's dark and rather stout and she wears her hair in a braid. She's not pretty, but she's jolly-looking."

"And she thinks she's flunked her English," chuckled Bob. "Fancy Georgia's flunking in English."

"Her father's name is Edward," contributed Madeline.

"And her mother is dead," added Bob, softly.

"Where is she? Can't I see her?" asked Betty, eagerly.

"Of course. She's going off with us to-night," said Madeline. "We thought it was no more than decent to take her—considering that she's a 'Merry Heart' and that we've got to make up to her for all the jollying she'll get next year."

Just then Rachel, Katherine and Babbie appeared and fell upon Betty and there were explanations from both parties and a joyous interchange of congratulations.

"Won't the others be sorry they went home this noon," declared Katherine, "just in time to miss all these fine doings."

"And won't Mary Brooks be wild to think she can't go with us to-night to help amuse Georgia," said Bob.

"Here comes Mary now," said Rachel.

"Oh, Betty Wales, I am so proud of you," cried Mary, breathlessly, dropping her diploma to hug Betty more effectively.

"It wasn't I, Mary," protested Betty. "Rachel was too bad. Oh, please don't act so, girls, and come away before any one else gets here. Mary, Georgia has come."



Mary's bewilderment and then her chagrin were delightful to behold.

"If there is anything in the world that I'd cut my own class-supper for," she declared, "it would be to see Georgia Ames. But I can't even wait now to meet her. I have a toast to write. 'Be funny, Mary,' the toast mistress said. As if anybody could be funny at her own class-supper! Don't be back too late to serenade us."

The girls promised and then everybody hurried off to pack or to rest and cool off before it was time to start on the evening jaunt.

As Betty took off her "usher dress" and laid it carefully into her least crowded trunk-tray, she gave a rapturous little sigh.

"Fifty thousand dollars is a lot of money to come from such a little thing," she told the green lizard. "I'm not going to worry any more about little things not counting. Everything counts here. Why even doubles that you make up come to life on your hands, and match-making comes out the way you wanted it to and thought it couldn't. It's just the loveliest place! I'm so glad I have another year of it."

There was a sudden burst of song under her window. "They're singing to somebody," thought Betty. "I wonder who. Why—it's —it's to me!"

"Here's to Betty Wales, drink her down!  
Here's to Betty Wales, drink her down!  
Here's to Betty Wales,  
She money gets in pails!  
Drink her down, drink her down,  
Drink her down, down, down!"

Betty went to the window and leaned out to wave her hand to the group of juniors who were laughing up at her.

"I didn't do anything but just suggest," she insisted. "It was 19— that carried it through. Let's sing to 19—."

So they sang to 19— and to Harding College, and then the crowd dispersed merrily.

"I wish they wouldn't," said Betty, turning away from the window. Then she laughed. "But I'm glad they did. I hope they'll do it again some day—when I'm a senior."

THE END

























