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"WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?"

BETTY WALES & CO.

A STORY FOR GIRLS

by
MARGARET WARDE

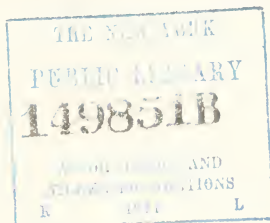
AUTHOR OF

BETTY	WALES	FRESHMAN
BETTY	WALES	SOPHOMORE
BETTY	WALES	JUNIOR
BETTY	WALES	SENIOR
BETTY	WALES	B.A.



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INTRODUCTION

MANY of the girls who will read this book have already made the acquaintance of Betty Wales, and know all about her adventures at Harding College, from her rollicking freshman days to the time when she was a "grave and reverend senior"—and was always being mistaken for a freshman, nevertheless. Mary Brooks graduated from Harding a year before Betty, and she always considered that this gave her the privilege of patronizing her friends in 19—, Betty's class. Madeline joined 19— in its sophomore year, and Babbie Hildreth (she and her friends Babe and Bob were known collectively as the three B's) was another of the shining lights of that famous class. She and Madeline and Betty planned the tea-room, though only in fun; during a trip abroad that came as a grand finale to their college days. You can read all about that in "Betty Wales, B. A.," which also tells about Mary Brooks's "impromptu" wedding. But you will have to go back to "Betty

Wales, Senior," to find out how Mary's "little friends" discovered that she was interested in Professor Hinsdale. There are a lot of other things that you will want to know about Betty and her friends—if you like them—in "Betty Wales, Freshman," "Betty Wales, Sophomore," and "Betty Wales, Junior."

MARGARET WARDE.

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Betty Wales & Co.

CHAPTER I

UNPLEASANT DISCOVERIES

"THE very loveliest part of going abroad is coming home again!" laughed Betty Wales, trying to kiss her mother, hug the smallest sister, and rush into her father's outstretched arms all at one and the same minute. Fortunately Will and Nan had had their turns at the station, and the smallest sister's kitten had run away at the critical moment; otherwise matters would have been hopelessly complicated.

"I hope you'll always feel just that way, dear," said Mrs. Wales.

"We're mighty glad to have you back, child," added father, with a queer little catch in his merry voice.

"Have you got anything for me in your

trunk, Betty?" demanded the smallest sister, who was a very practical young person.

"Lots of things, dear," Betty assured her gaily, "and something for the kitten, even if she isn't here to say 'how do you do' to me."

"We'll have dinner first," mother insisted laughingly.

"And then we'll all sit around in an expectant circle and watch Betty unpack," added Nan.

"I've stopped being expectant since I've heard the news," put in Will. "She's brought back money. How's that, dad, for one of the Wales family?"

"Well, there weren't any emergencies," Betty explained earnestly. "So of course I could save my emergency fund."

"Seeing something that she wants in a store-window is Nan's definition of an emergency," declared Will.

"What's yours?" retorted Nan. "Besides, haven't I turned over a new leaf this month, and isn't it this very next week that I'm to begin earning my own bread and butter and jam?"

"What do you mean, Nan?" demanded Betty in amazement.

"Oh, your college course and your trip abroad have bankrupted father," laughed Nan; and then, seeing Betty's expression of genuine distress, "No, dear, only we are an expensive family and hopelessly extravagant, as Will says, and times are bad. Anyway I'm tired of rushing around, studying and traveling and amusing myself. So when two of the girls in my class, who have a school in Boston, offered me a job, I jumped at it. Don't you think I'm likely to make a stunning school-ma'am?"

"Of course," Betty assured her promptly. "You're so bright. But I thought you hated Boston, and you always said that Ethel was so silly to drudge at teaching when she didn't need to."

"But can't I change my mind?" asked Nan gaily.

"I suppose so." Betty looked in a puzzled way around the family group. "Only ——"

"Only dinner is ready," suggested mother again; and all through the meal the talk was about Betty's voyage home, with its exciting

storm, and her visit to Harding, with Georgia's gargoyle party and Mary Brooks's absurd methods of housekeeping as main features of interest. The minute dinner was over the smallest sister caught Betty around the waist, and whispered something in her ear.

"All right, dear," Betty promised. "You shan't have to wait another minute to see what I've brought you." And they all, except Will and Mr. Wales, who preferred the library and the evening papers, adjourned to Betty's room to help unpack.

"Such a mess!" she sighed, as she uncovered the top tray. "You see I took out some things on shipboard, and then Mary and Roberta and Bob and Georgia all wanted to see what we'd brought home, and of course I was in too much of a rush to put things back straight. Besides, it wasn't worth while to be particular, when all my clothes need mending or pressing or something. Move back, little sister, so I can have room for the Katie pile. It's going to be about all Katie pile, I'm afraid."

"Is the Katie pile what you want Katie to fix in the sewing-room?" inquired the small-

est sister. "Because we haven't got Katie any more, so you'll have to call it something else."

"Haven't got Katie any more!" Betty's face wore an expression of blank amazement.

"Has Katie left?"

"I thought we could get on without her," Mrs. Wales explained hastily. "I have so little to do, now that my girls are all grown up. Dorothy is going to help me mend stockings this winter, aren't you, dear?"

The smallest sister nodded impressively. "I'll help you mend your Katie pile too, Betty. Katie has gone to the Elingwoods' to live, and she likes it, but she says it's not the same thing, and when times are better she'll be glad of it, because then she'll come right back here."

"You see it's this queer horrid panic, Betty," Nan explained. "Father hasn't actually lost much, I imagine; but business is bad, and so we're trying to economize."

"And you never told me!" Betty looked reproachfully at her mother.

Mrs. Wales laughed. "No, dear. Why should we? Anyway it's all come up lately, since we got back from the shore. Even now

there's really nothing to tell, except that everybody is talking hard times and father's business is dull. I'm very sorry it happened this season, because I meant you to be very gay your first winter at home, and now we can't do much formal entertaining."

Betty's face clouded as she remembered a house-party she had planned for the "Merry Hearts." Luckily, she hadn't mentioned it; it was to have been a grand surprise to everybody. Then a horrible thought swept everything else out of her head.

"Oh, mother dear," she began, "perhaps I ought to teach too, like Nan. I don't believe I could, ever in the world, but I suppose every college girl ought to be able to, and I could try."

"Betty Wales," mother ordered solemnly, "unpack your trunk just enough to satisfy Dorothy's curiosity, and then go to bed. You're worn out, and as nervous as a witch. Just because I've decided not to keep a seamstress in the house this winter, and Nan is tired of society and jumps at an excuse to do a little teaching, you decide that the family is on the way to the poorhouse."

"It isn't only that ——" Betty stopped.

She had started to say that father looked worried, and didn't joke back at all when you teased him ; but perhaps that only seemed so to-night because she was fatigued herself from too much gaiety at Harding.

So she hunted out six assorted neck-bows for the gray kitten, six hair ribbons from Paris for the kitten's small mistress, a Dutch doll, and a long chain strung with tiny silver charms, each with a story of its own ; and having assured the smallest sister that this was only a beginning of the treasures she might expect, Betty went to bed and dreamed that she had lost her emergency fund under the teacher's desk in Nan's schoolroom, and had to teach a class in senior "English Lit." before she could get it back. But she couldn't remember when Shakespeare was born, and the girls stood up on their desks and waved their handkerchiefs and screamed, and she waved too, because it was the Harvard-Cambridge boat race on the Thames. No, it was brother Will calling her to breakfast, and little Dorothy saying in a sepulchral whisper, "Oh, hush, Will ! Mother said Betty was to sleep over."

"Coming! Wouldn't sleep over for anything!" Betty called back, making a rush for her bath.

It was such a jolly day. People kept dropping in to say welcome home, and to tease Nan about her "latest fad," as everybody called it. In the evening there was a regular party of Betty's and Will's friends on the big piazza, and before it was over Betty had promised to help at six "coming-out" teas, take part in one play, be on the committee to get up another, join a morning French class and a reading-club, and consider taking a cross-country ride every Saturday afternoon as long as the good weather lasted.

Up-stairs in her room she took down the rose-colored satin dress she had bought in Paris, and examined it approvingly. But one simply couldn't wear the same thing at six receptions. There was her graduating dress, of course, but styles had changed frightfully since spring. If only Katie were here to use her magic touch on the pink lace evening gown that Bob had stepped on at class-supper!

"I never can mend it myself!" sighed Betty. "I shall need another afternoon dress

anyway, and a suit, and I did want a new riding habit. Mine is horribly rusty. I wonder how careful about money we've got to be. And I wonder if Will thought to bolt the piazza door."

She slipped on a kimono and crept softly down the stairs, a slim, golden-haired ghost in a trailing robe of silk and lace. Will hadn't locked the door. And there was a light in the library, though it was long after midnight.

"It's Nan, probably, reading up things to teach. I'll go in and bother her and make her come to bed."

But it wasn't Nan. It was father, poring over a big sheet of paper scrawled full of tiny figures. Betty closed the door after her, crept quietly across the room, and descended precipitately upon the arm of her father's chair.

"What in the world are you doing here all by yourself at this time of night, Father Wales?" she demanded gaily.

Mr. Wales looked up at her, still frowning absently, with a finger on his place among the figures. "Nothing, daughter; just look-

ing over a contract that I wanted to do a little estimating on before to-morrow."

"But it's horribly late," objected Betty. "Think how sleepy you'll be in the morning."

Mr. Wales smiled faintly. "Shall I? Well, run along to bed, so you won't be sleepy too." And he was back at his figures again.

Betty watched him for a minute, dropped a kiss on his puckered forehead, and slipped softly away without a word.

"He's just awfully worried," she reflected, as she went up-stairs. Nan and mummy and Will don't realize how changed he is, because they've been here right along. Why, in these three months he's a different person!" She put the rose-colored satin dress carefully back in its cheese-cloth covering. "I wonder if we're really going to be poor. Why, this may be the first and the last Paris gown I shall ever have! I know one thing. I'm going to talk to father, and make him tell me just how poor we are now. You can go ahead so much better when you understand things."

But it was such a busy week, what with

catching up the threads of the home life that had been dropped for so long, helping Nan off, and getting Dorothy started in school, that it slipped by without the talk that Betty had promised herself. On the evening of Nan's departure, however, her opportunity came. Will had an engagement, mother was tired, and Dorothy very sleepy ; so only Mr. Wales and Betty went with Nan to her train.

It was a fine September evening, and Betty craftily suggested that they walk home. The down-town streets were too noisy for serious conversation, but out on the avenue Betty plunged in at once.

"Father, you're awfully worried. Please tell me why."

Mr. Wales threw back his head and laughed. "Goodness, Betty, but you come right to the point! Suppose I deny that 'awfully.'"

"You mean because it's slang?" asked Betty anxiously. "And isn't it a good thing to come right to the point?"

"Wouldn't that depend on the point, little girl? Suppose it was a point you had never expected to come to, and didn't want to come to,—what then?"

Betty's face wore its most intent expression. "But if you had come to it all the same, father ——"

"Then you'd better get away again as fast as possible, and ask little girls not to bother their heads about you in the meantime." Father's tone was very brusque and final—the one he used when he meant "no" and was not going to change his mind, no matter how much you teased.

"All right, father." Betty tried not to show that she felt hurt. "I won't bother you again. Only I thought that if I understood perhaps I could help a little. I don't think mother really knows how much we ought to try to save this winter, and I'm sure Nan and Will don't. You've always been so generous and let us have just whatever we wanted. I want lots of things just now, but I can be happy without them." Betty stopped suddenly, not quite sure where she had meant to come out.

There was a long pause. "Are you quite sure of that—quite sure you can be happy without them, little girl?" father asked at last.

"Perfectly sure, if I know I'm helping you out, daddy."

"Well, then —— But I can't have your mother worried, not any more than she is now at least."

"Oh, but I won't worry her!" Betty promised eagerly. "It will just be a secret between us two."

Mr. Wales smiled at her eagerness. "Not a very agreeable secret, I'm afraid. Well, then, Betty, if you insist, here it is. My business has scarcely paid expenses for three months, and a big investment I made in June is going all wrong. By Christmas time I shall probably know where I stand. Until then I need every cent of ready money that I can get hold of, and the more things you can be happy without, the better. That's all, I guess."

"Th-thank you." Betty felt as if she had suddenly been plunged up to her neck in a blinding fog that made all the old familiar landmarks of life look queer and far away. "It's rather bad, isn't it? But I'll be very economical, and I'll think up ways of making the others economical without their knowing it. And you can have my emergency fund

this very night. That's ready money. I meant to give it to you before, but ——" There was no use explaining that Nan had said it was foolish to give the check back, when she would need all of it and more so soon for her fall wardrobe.

"Keep it and make it go as far as you can," father told her. "And don't think too much about these business troubles, or I shall be sorry I confided in you."

They were turning in at their own door. "No, you won't be sorry," Betty assured him proudly. "I won't let you be sorry. Goodness! I see one way to economize this very minute. Mother's got dozens of lights turned on that she doesn't need." And she flitted gaily ahead to begin her economy program. But before she had reached the door, she rushed back to whisper a last word in her father's ear.

"It's mean not to tell mother too, daddy. We could have so much more fun over it if we all knew."

"Fun over it!" repeated Mr. Wales slowly. "Fun over it!" Then he reached out and caught Betty in a big hug. "You're the right

sort, little girl. You stand up and face life with a smile. Keep it up just as long as you can, child."

Betty considered, frowning in her earnestness. "I've always had the smiling kind of life so far, father, haven't I? But I've wished sometimes that I had to get things for myself, like Helen Adams and Rachel and K. You know I've told you about them, and about K.'s brother who wants to go to college, and she's going to help. I shan't mind a bit being rather poor—till Christmas," she added prudently. "Now I'll go and turn out the lights and see that Dorothy is all right, and you be telling mother."

But father shook his head. "Not to-night, anyway. You don't realize the meaning of all this yet, Betty. When you do, I'm afraid it will look very different to you."

"I won't let it," declared Betty eagerly. "I said I'd help, and I will. Just try me."

Betty went to bed with her pretty head in a whirl. This was what they called being "out in the wide, wide world." "The real business of life" that she had talked about so glibly with the B's and Roberta was going to begin at last.

CHAPTER II

BETTY WALES, "M. A."

THINGS did look different in the morning. Betty sighed a little as she considered her last winter's suit, which she had relegated to the position of a rainy day stand-by, in the light of a "general utility,"—K.'s delightful name for her one street costume. K. and Rachel had managed very well with a new suit once in two or three years. Well, then, so could she, Betty told herself sternly. Just then Mary Hooper telephoned to know about the Saturday rides.

"I'm afraid you can't count on me," Betty explained to her. "No, I'm not too busy, Mary, but riding horses are very expensive, and I don't believe I can afford it."

Mary's curt, "Oh, very well, I didn't suppose you had to consider that. Good-bye, then," stung a hot blush into Betty's cheeks. She didn't care what Mary Hooper thought of her—yes, she did—well, she wouldn't any more.

That night at dinner mother looked worried, in her turn.

"My new cook has given notice," she told the assembled family the first time the waitress went out of the room, "and I thought she was going to be such a treasure!"

"What's her trouble?" demanded Will gaily.

"She doesn't like living where they keep only two maids. Of course it is difficult to manage, especially with such a big house. Maggie is too busy sweeping and dusting and answering the bell to help at all in the kitchen. Yesterday the cook absolutely refused to clean the silver, and to-night she grumbled about wiping the dishes."

"Then have the third maid back, Alice. It was only to be an experiment, this cutting down household expenses. I simply won't have you worried." Father's voice sounded impatient, because he felt so very unhappy.

"I don't know how I can help worrying when everything goes wrong, and I understood that it was absolutely necessary to cut down expenses." Mother's voice sounded stiff and unsympathetic, because father didn't realize how glad she had been to do her part.

Then in a flash everything came out. "If it wasn't absolutely necessary to retrench when we talked things over, it certainly is now," father began abruptly ; "my New York broker has disappeared. It seems he's been on the wrong side of the market lately, and to help himself out he's been borrowing the securities that his customers had left on deposit with him. That means that a good many thousands of my money have gone, with practically no hope of recovery. I'd been holding that stock as a last reserve. I'm afraid this spells ruin." Father pushed back his plate, and got up from the table.

"Please don't go, father," begged little Dorothy solemnly, catching at his coat tails. "Are we going to be really and truly poor? Because if we aren't going to have enough to eat by and by, we ought not to waste to-night's dinner, that's all cooked."

Mr. Wales laughed in spite of himself ; and then, because Maggie was coming back with the salad, he sat down again, and somehow, between silence and conversation about the weather, dinner was finished.

Afterward Betty got Will and Dorothy

down in the furthest corner of the lawn with the gray kitten, so that mother and father, up on the piazza, could talk things over and come to an understanding.

"Tell me, Betty, are we going to be really and truly poor?" little Dorothy demanded. But when Betty kissed her and said no, not really hungry and ragged, she was quite ready to forget all about it and devote herself to teaching the gray kitten to climb trees. That left Will and Betty free to discuss the family crisis.

"I shall take that job Cousin Joe West offered me out at his shops," Will declared. "He's awfully fussy, and father says he works his men to death. That's why I didn't go last June. Father thought he could certainly get me something better by fall, but nothing has turned up yet, and if I go with Joe that will be one thing off father's mind."

Betty sighed. "It's so easy to be poor if you're a boy. You'll be earning your own living——"

"I suppose a fellow can live on what I'll earn, if he has to," interrupted Will, making a wry face.

“And I shall have to spend father’s money just as usual, only not so much of it. Oh, dear, I wish I was bright enough to teach, like Nan!”

“A penny saved is a penny earned,” quoted Will sagely. “Nan will never save a penny, that’s one thing sure. I say, didn’t we promise the Benson girls that we’d be over to-night?”

When the Benson girls accused Betty of being quiet and absent-minded she laughed at them and asked if she generally monopolized the entire conversation. But on the way home she confided to Will that she hadn’t heard a word Sallie Benson had said about the plans for her coming-out cotillion. For almost the first time in her life, except the night after her famous runaway in senior year, Betty did not fall asleep the minute her head touched the pillow. She had promised father to help and she meant to, as much as ever she could. The hard question was how to keep her word.

Next morning she put her plans into action. After breakfast she hunted up Mrs. Wales, who was in the sewing-room with a huge pile

of mending on the table beside her. Betty heroically helped herself to one of Will's stockings, and led up to her errand.

"When does the cook leave, mother?"

"This evening, I believe. She's packing now. I haven't dared ask her what she means to do about the breakfast dishes." Mother laughed happily. "We had such a nice talk last night, your father and I. I feel as if I were back in the days when we were first married, and had to count all the pennies we spent. After all, being poor isn't so bad as long as we have each other."

Betty nodded sagely. She didn't want mother to find out that any one else had been confided in first. "I knew you'd feel so—I mean I think it's a lot nicer to know the worst. But are you going to get another cook?"

Mrs. Wales nodded. "I told your father that we could get on beautifully with a general maid, but he insists upon two. He thinks we must keep up appearances as far as possible, as a sort of business asset."

"But a cook doesn't appear," Betty suggested. "She's behind the scenes."

"Exactly, and that gives the second maid

a chance to be in front of them. A good many business acquaintances of your father's come through the city, and he wants to be able to bring them up to dinner without worrying about its being properly served."

"It would have to be properly cooked too, wouldn't it?" Betty reflected solemnly. "Well, anyhow, there's no harm in telling you what I want. I want to do the cooking. I hate sweeping and dusting and mending, and the things I mend are frights. But I love to mess in the kitchen, and I've always wanted a chance to do it without a fussy old cook to glare at me and make remarks about its being her kitchen, and a lot too full of people. I don't know how to make very many things, except salads and chafing-dish 'eats,' but I'm wild to learn. Please let me, mother. How much does a cook cost?"

"Eight dollars a week, unless she's a particularly good cook and gets ten," laughed Mrs. Wales. "But you're absurd, Betty. You don't realize how much work it is to cook for a big family like ours. Besides, how would you manage when we had guests? It would be very awkward."

"Oh, I've thought that all out," began Betty eagerly. "I'd wait till the last minute and then just turn things over to the waitress,—we'd have to find a very accommodating waitress, of course,—whisk off my laboratory apron, and appear in the bosom of my family arrayed in my best dress."

Mrs. Wales shook her head. "That sounds very simple, but I'm afraid it wouldn't work. You'd be red in the face from bending over the fire, and your hands would be spoiled. I'm sorry, dear," as she noticed Betty's expression of disappointment, "but I'm afraid you'll have to think of some other more practical ways of saving money."

Betty stabbed viciously at the biggest hole in her second stocking. "All right, mother," she said at last. "But please don't say no to my being cook just until you can find one. You haven't found one yet, have you?"

Mrs. Wales shook her head. "A friend of Maggie's is coming to see me this afternoon, but I don't imagine she'll do."

"Don't engage her unless she sounds perfectly splendid," urged Betty, folding up

Will's stockings and tossing them on top of the pile of finished mending.

A few minutes later she danced back, enveloped in a long, checked gingham apron. "The new cook, mem," she announced, curtsying gravely. "And the ould wan is gone, mem, so wad yuz plaze be so kind as to lave me have the ordhers for the dinner."

Betty's first dinner was a great success. It was agreed not to tell father and Will who cooked it; and when father praised the roast, and Will loudly lamented the imminent departure of a cook who could make such "dandy" lemon ice, Betty blushed pink with pride and pleasure. Next morning it was only fun to get up early and dress in a hurry. But the first relay of toast burned up, and the eggs were done too hard, because the coffee wouldn't boil at all and then boiled over. Will grumbled, father read his paper in gloomy silence, and though mother tried to smooth things over, she wore an "I-told-you-so" expression, and Betty felt sure she would be on hand to help with the next breakfast.

But before that there was luncheon, and

Will, who was going out to see about his new position, announced that he would come home for it. Just as Betty was putting on her big apron to begin operations, Mary Hooper rang the bell. Betty discovered that Maggie had said she was at home, so she slipped off the big apron, and went down. Mary was chairman of the play committee, and she wanted to get Betty's ideas about the cast and the costumes before she called the rest of her committee together.

"College girls are so clever at plays," she explained. "I thought you and I could save a lot of time if we got everything decided beforehand."

This wasn't exactly Betty's idea of good committee work, but Mary hadn't asked her advice on that point, so they set to work. At half-past twelve Mary discovered that it was raining.

"How jolly!" she exclaimed. "That lets me out of a tennis match with the Bensons and Ted Farnum, and we can have the afternoon clear for this."

"Then will you excuse me for a few minutes, Mary?" Betty asked anxiously. "Our

cook has gone, and I'm taking her place. I want to be sure that you'll have some luncheon."

Mary lifted haughty eyebrows. "Can't one of the second maids see to that?" she asked, getting up and going over to the window. "Oh, well, if it's going to put you out, I won't stay. Besides, it looks clearer already, so we may play tennis after all. Oh, no, thank you, I shouldn't think of staying if you're going to make company of me, as they say in the country. I remember at my aunt's in New Hampshire, they never could have any one for Monday dinner, because it was wash-day. Well, we've got a good deal done. I'll drop in at Milly's, perhaps, on my way home, and see what she thinks about our cast."

Without waiting to find her apron, Betty rushed to the kitchen, fully expecting to find Mrs. Wales and Maggie there, and lunch well under way,—which would have been rather a disgrace to the young lady who had begged to be allowed to act as cook, but on the whole a comfortable arrangement. Instead, however, the kitchen was deserted.

"Oh, dear!" soliloquized Betty sadly. "I

wonder what mother meant to have. I remember now that she went out. I wonder what there is to have. Maggie might know—but she probably wouldn't. I'll ask her, though, if she's down setting the table."

Maggie was laying the table, but she had no ideas on the subject of possible luncheon dishes. So Betty found some eggs, got a chafing-dish ready, and had all her preparations made for a delicious omelette, when Will came in, exasperated at Cousin Joe's fussiness, and very hungry, and reminded her that he hated eggs.

"Oh, Will! I'm so sorry! Well, anyhow you love strawberry jam."

"Bread and jam aren't specially filling," grumbled Will.

"Couldn't you begin on that?" suggested Betty bravely. "And in the meantime I'll find you something else that is filling."

"When are we going to have a cook, anyhow?" demanded Will, when Betty had taken her seat again, having instructed Maggie to slice some cold roast beef.

"When are we going to have an experienced cook, you mean, monsieur," Betty cor-

rected him gaily. In the pantry she had decided that she should probably be cross herself in Will's place, and had therefore resolved to take all his faultfinding in good part. "Because at present you've got me, such as I am. Suppose you give me a list of all your favorite dishes, Will, and I'll make them, if they aren't too hard. And just to relieve your mind I'll confide to you that mother is hunting cooks this very morning."

That afternoon Betty got a note from Roberta Lewis.

"I'm considering working for an M. A. at Bryn Mawr," she wrote. "Father is away all day, and I don't know enough people here in Philadelphia to keep me from getting lonely. Of course in some ways I should lots prefer going to Harding, but father wouldn't consent to that. He wants me here whenever he is at home. We're getting to be regular chums. We go to the theatre together, and he always takes me for supper afterward, because he's heard that debutantes prefer theatre-suppers to almost anything. He wanted to have Aunt Nell come down from New York to help him give a big party for me; but I made him see

how absurd it would be for a staid old lawyer like him and a quiet, stay-at-home, 'fraid-of-a-man like me, to bother about big fussy parties. So we just have nice little dinners for father's old friends, and next summer he is going to teach me to ride horseback—I shudder whenever I think of it!—and to play golf, so that we can enjoy more things together. Write me what you think about the M. A.

“ROBERTA.”

Betty scribbled her answer at once.

“I'm doing an M. A. myself, Roberta dearest. It surprises you to hear that, doesn't it? Well, in my case M. A. stands for Mother's Assistant, and so far it's the hardest course I ever took. But if mother ever finds a good cook—I'm the cook at present, and I should love it if everything didn't go wrong—why, perhaps it will be easier. The other topics in my M. A. are mending and dusting and house-keeping odds and ends.

“If I am ever married and have any children, I shall bring them up to eat whatever there is on the table. Will hates eggs, and loves apple-pie. Dorothy hates pie and adores

ice-cream. Father never eats ice-cream and likes his steak rare. Mother wants her steak actually burned, and nothing but crackers and cheese and coffee for desert; and father loves coffee, but mustn't drink it. I am just as fussy as any of them, but I never shall be again. I must stop and get dinner. Pity the poor cook of this hard-to-suit family!

"I think it would be grand to be able to write M. A. after your name, but if you want to really and truly learn something take my kind.

"Yours, with her sleeves rolled up,
"BETTY."

CHAPTER III

THAT TEA-ROOM AGAIN

BETTY WALES, arrayed in her cook's regalia, sat by the kitchen table, one eye on the range, the other on the fly-leaf of the new cook-book that Will had given her. It was scribbled full of figures, which Betty added and subtracted and multiplied laboriously, with sighs and incredulous stares at the distinctly unpleasant results.

"Three weeks' hard work, and so far as I can see I've saved the family exactly five dollars and sixty-four cents. And that Vermont maple sugar is boiling over again!" Betty made a dive for the saucepan in which she was cooking maple frosting for father's birthday cake. "If it tastes burned, what's left of it, I shall just give up!" she declared plaintively.

"Oh, Betty dear!" Dorothy's shrill voice and pattering footsteps sounded down the hall. "You aren't forgetting the kitten's birthday, are you?"

"Of course not," Betty assured her, tasting the frosting critically. "She's to have oysters and whipped cream. By and by you can whip the cream, dearie, but it's too soon now, and I'm very busy, so you'd better run and find mother."

"All right. I'm busy too. I've got to tie on my kitten's new neck-bow, and she wiggles so that it's awfully hard work. And then I'm going to give her her box of corks that I bought for her."

Betty tasted the frosting again, decided that it was done, put it away to cool, and went back to her figures.

"Burned steak, two dollars," she murmured; "salty ice-cream, a dollar and twenty cents; boiled-over coffee, thirty cents. I don't believe I've forgotten anything important that I spoiled." Then her smile flashed out suddenly. "But real cooks spoil things—why, of course they do! Not so many, maybe, but some." She began stirring the frosting vigorously. "You always hear that figures lie. I suppose the reason is because it's so hard to put down all about real cooks and other real things in figures. Anyway, I've tried to help

hard enough. After this I shall always be sorry for cooks. I suppose there may be worse ways of earning your living, but I shouldn't want to try them."

"Here's a letter for you, Betty!" The smallest sister was back again, having evidently intercepted the postman. "And the kitten has got a post-card that says 'Birthday greetings.' Isn't it pretty? My chum at school sent it to her."

Betty declared hastily that the kitten's post-card was perfectly lovely, and asked Dorothy to put her letter, with the address in Madeline's fascinating scrawling hand, and a foreign stamp, into the table drawer; for the cook's fingers were sticky, the frosting obstinately refused to thicken, and dinner-time was approaching with alarming rapidity.

The day after Mary Hooper's ill-timed call Betty had delivered an ultimatum: "You've either got to tend up to things or leave them alone. Hereafter, when I'm busy in the kitchen I can't stop, no matter what happens. Just tell people the truth, please."

It was trying that the first thing to happen should have been an invitation to go automo-

biling by moonlight ; and missing the second—an impromptu tally-ho party, with a corn-roast and a barn-dance to follow—would have plunged Betty into the depths of woe if she had not sternly resolved to “smile and smile and go on cooking,” as Katherine had picturesquely advised her, no matter what happened. It was worth the cost too, when father called her into the library to tell her, in confidence, that he was proud of her, and that she was setting Will a splendid example.

Will was finding Cousin Joe quite as trying as he had been led to expect, and as he had gone through life hitherto on the easy theory that it is foolish to put yourself out much, because the people who expect the most of you are always cranks, nobody had thought that he would stay long with Cousin Joe, who was certainly an ideal instance of the theory. But though he came home every evening tired and discouraged, and grumbled a good deal about Cousin Joe's unfairness and silly notions, he refused to give up his position.

“I'm no quitter. I can stick it out if the girls can,” he announced doggedly, and on his very first pay-day he bought Betty a cook-

book inscribed "With deep respect, from a sympathetic fellow laborer," which meant a great deal from reserved, undemonstrative Will.

Betty suspected that Will's admiration was at the bottom of her mother's tacit consent to her keeping on as cook. They had never discussed the matter after the first interview, but Mrs. Wales had gradually stopped visiting agencies and looking up advertisements, and Betty was beginning to feel that she was accepted as "permanent." And now some bad fairy had put it into her head to see how much she had saved father, and all she could see was five dollars and sixty-four cents!

But that didn't prevent the birthday dinner from being a great success. Three weeks' experience had wrought a wonderful change in the new cook's methods. Not only did she "tend up" to the business in hand, herself, but she could plan work for Maggie, and she was no longer too proud to call on mother or Dorothy for help if she needed it. So things went smoothly, not by happy accident, as things had always had a fashion of doing for Betty Wales, but because she had planned

them to go that way. The cream soup did not curdle, the roast came on hot and done just as mother liked it at one end and as father liked it in the middle. The salad was crisp and deliciously flavored. The pineapple ice was not salty, and if the maple frosting was a little inclined to drip off the edges of the birthday cake, that was due, as Will pompously explained, to "the extreme age of the distinguished person whose semi-centennial we celebrate, and to the consequent overheating of his cake by fifty burning candles."

After dinner they went into the library to taste a wonderful cereal coffee, which Betty felt sure father would like just as well as the real thing that he mustn't drink.

"Let me see, Betty," said Will sipping his share reflectively. "This is the sixth near-coffee that glib-tongued salesmen have palmed off on you in three weeks."

"It's only the fifth," returned Betty indignantly, "and besides they were all free samples."

"In that case suppose you see if you can't discover some more brands before we settle on one for family use," suggested father gaily.

Betty made a wry face as she emptied her cup. "The trouble is the directions always say 'the whole secret of success is in the cooking,' and 'one trial is a gross injustice,'" she quoted so solemnly that everybody laughed.

"Come and see the kitten eat her whipped cream," begged Dorothy. "She gets it all over her little nose, and she hates to stop and wash it off. Besides, I think she ought to have more people than just Maggie and me at her party."

So Betty went out to the kitchen to swell the numbers at the kitten's party, and suddenly remembering Madeline's neglected letter she slipped away to read it.

"Well, I'm coming back to my own, my native land," Madeline wrote. "Father thinks he wants to sub-let the apartment in Washington Square. Of course he'll jolly well change his mind before I get to New York, and then he'll waste his substance cabling me frantically not to sub-let. And perhaps he and mother will come back too, later on. But I don't mind coming along by myself. I've had enough of Italy and idleness. My head is full of tales that I want to

get out of my system and into the magazines. I want to talk them over with Dick Blake. He's a frightful cynic, and he'll be sure to tell me that I can never make good. But he can't stop me that way, not till I've sat on editors' door-steps for a while and seen for myself.

"Incidentally here I am in London buying china madly for the tea-room—yours and mine and Babbie's, that we planned last summer. The plans are so lovely that we've simply got to carry them out. I 'elect' us to do it. I've written Babbie to come and spend October with me and help at one of my famous house-cleanings. You must come too, and then we can discuss it—the tea-room, I mean. I should hate to hear my house-cleanings discussed. And if we don't have the tea-room, the china will be adorable in the apartment. It's a blue Canton kind, and I'm getting mostly double-decker bread-trays, and little toast-racks, and mustard pots—such fascinating squatty fat ones—and pepper grinders. If you were here, we'd hunt up an English cooking school and learn to make scones and bannocks and Bath buns. I've asked a queer little English woman in my boarding-house

to give me the recipes. Perhaps you can make them out. I can cook only by taste, just as I can play only by ear ; and the taste of scones and bannocks is as complicated as Wagner. I got your letter about being the family cook. It will be valuable experience for the tea-room.

“Come down early in October. Wire and I’ll meet you any day after the fourth, when my boat is supposed to come in. If either of you could get there sooner, it would be terribly jolly, because then you could meet me. The key to the house is at the tailor’s underneath, the cook left her new address on the mantle in a pink cloisonné jar, and she’ll bring the usual black cat for company while you wait.

“Yours en route,

“MADELINE.”

Betty read it all through twice. It was so delightfully haphazard and cheerful and Bohemian. To-day was the twenty-sixth of September. It would be such fun to go to New York and share Madeline’s welcome home to Bohemia. Babbie would go, of course, and they would have famous parties to

make use of the blue Canton mustard pots. And if they should really open a tea-room ! For the first time since the launching of the economy program Betty winked back some real tears. Then she carefully turned out the lights in the dining-room, which Maggie never could remember about, and went back to the library to read the family her letter, as she always did when any of the Old Guard wrote to her. As Will said, the penalty of writing entertaining letters to Betty was that she felt under obligation to celebrate your epistolary ability by turning herself into a town-crier, and crying your bon mots from the house-tops.

And the very next morning came a scrap of a note from Babbie :

“ I’m going to spend October with Madeline. Mother is off paying visits, so I can get away easily. Be sure to come right away, because we ought to get the tea-room started at once. Mother says I may do just as I like about it, only of course I know that I can’t stay away from her all the time. When she says I can do as I like she really means that I may have all the money I want.

“ Betty dear, if you really want to earn some

money, why couldn't you run the tea-room? Madeline will be too busy with her writing. Besides, she hates running things. I should love it, only there's mother to be amused.

"Babe is too wrapped up in her beloved John to answer any letters. Bob is trying to make her father start a newsboys' home, and he says perhaps he will if he can have his own home back again. Bob has some little ragamuffin or other up there all the time. I prefer tea-rooms myself to newsboys' homes or fiancés.

"BABBIE."

"P. S. Jack and I have had a dreadful quarrel. He was the one who came to see me off, you know, and I never, never dreamed we could change our minds. But all is over between us. Please never mention his name to me again.

"P. S. Do you think we should have the tea-room in New York or Harding?"

This letter Betty read and reread, and finally put away in her writing-desk without so much as mentioning it to any one. But that afternoon she went all by herself to have afternoon tea at an attractive little shop that

had just been opened down-town. She read the menu carefully, and finally asked the waitress if she might take it away with her. She counted the tables, the waitresses, and the patrons. She scanned the decorations with a critical eye. She frowned when she noticed that there were three different kinds of china in the tea service that the maid had brought her. Then she sat for a long while, sipping her tea and trying to remember little details of the fascinating Glasgow tea-rooms, and of the Oxford Street and Piccadilly shops that the B. A.'s abroad had haunted so persistently in the pursuit of Madeline's "dominant interest." Finally she tried to compare the prices on the cards with those at Cuyler's and Holmes's in Harding. And last of all, she extracted a tiny silver pencil from her shopping-bag, and put down a few figures on the back of the menu. But she soon gave up that. Hadn't she just discovered that figures lie? And besides, when you can't even guess at rents, and haven't the least idea how much chairs and tables and china cost, and are even a little uncertain about waitress's wages, the calculating of the probable expenses per

month of running a tea-room becomes, to say the least, a difficult matter.

At last, having remembered her responsibilities about dinner, Betty rushed home and into her big apron—she had half a dozen big ones now—as fast as possible. She was very quiet during dinner, but afterward, as soon as she had helped Maggie clear the table, she put out the lights, walked into the library, and made an astonishing announcement.

“Father dear, if you’re willing and mother can get another cook and you won’t all miss me too much, I want to go to New York next week to see about running a tea-room for Babbie Hildreth. We haven’t decided yet whether to have it there or in Harding, but Babbie thinks I could run it, and I think so too.”

“Why, Betty, don’t be absurd!”

That was mother’s comment. Will whistled; Dorothy, scenting the loss of her beloved Betty, came over to hug her; but father threw away his cigar, folded his paper slowly, and pointed to the arm of his chair as the best available seat.

“Now begin again,” he advised, when

Betty had established herself comfortably. "Your proposition does sound absurd, as mother says, but perhaps that's because we don't understand it. To begin with, has Miss Babbie Hildreth already gone into the tea-room business? I understood from Miss Bohemia's letter of yesterday, that so far the sole assets of the tea-room were some double-decker bread-trays, whatever those may be, and some very fat mustard jars, which hadn't yet left London, and which Miss Bohemia really wanted for her own use."

"Oh, father, that was just Madeline's queer way of saying it. She's written to Babbie, and Babbie has asked her mother for the money, and her mother is willing. So now Babbie has written me. Of course there are a lot of things still to be arranged," Betty admitted reluctantly, "but it won't take Babbie and Madeline long to arrange them."

"I see." This time Mr. Wales was quite serious. "And you think that under the circumstances—my circumstances, I mean—you would like to join in their project. I'm afraid I can't spare you any capital, little girl."

"Oh, I don't want you to," explained Betty hastily. "The others don't expect it. But I've thought it over and— isn't it likely to be a long while before business is good again, father?"

"I'm afraid it will be fully a year before I'm on my feet again."

"Well, I want to help, to be really and truly earning something, I mean, like Nan and Will. I should perfectly hate to teach, but I should love to run a tea-room."

"I don't like the idea of my daughter's going into the restaurant business," put in Mrs. Wales stiffly.

"Oh, mummy dear!" Betty abandoned her father's chair for a seat beside her mother on the sofa. "An adorable little tea-room isn't a restaurant. College girls are always running tea-rooms. Why, Mary Hooper has a friend in Boston who does it, and Mary is always telling about her, for all she's such a snob."

"Would you have to sit at a desk near the door and see that everybody paid up before he could get out?" demanded Will, very scornfully.

Betty considered. "Why, I don't know. I might. But if Madeline plans things she'll have a desk that the Queen of England would be dying to sit at, if she saw it," she ended gaily.

"But are you sure of making money?" demanded father dryly. "Times are bad ——"

"But even in bad times people have to eat," Betty took him up hastily. "And if tea is sixty cents a pound, and there are piles of cups in that, and you sell a cup for ten cents, how can you help making money? People do, in tea-rooms, or they wouldn't be sprouting up everywhere. And if it can be done I'm sure Madeline and Babbie and I can do it. I just know we can!"

Mr. Wales's glance traveled from Betty's dancing eyes to her mouth with its pleading curves. "Well, mother," he said, "shall we let her try?"

Mrs. Wales hesitated. "I don't like the idea at all, but under the circumstances ——"

"We'll talk it over and let you know in the morning," father suggested.

"Betty," began little Dorothy forlornly, "you said I could be 'sistant cook as soon as

I learned to toast the bread and not burn it. And now I've learned. If you go away and have a tea-room, I think I ought to be something in that."

"You can be a silent partner, mademoiselle," suggested Will teasingly.

"What's that?" demanded Dorothy.

"About the same thing as a company, I guess," explained Will. "Betty can call herself Betty Wales & Co., and you can be the Co. See?"

"Of course I see," declared Dorothy with great dignity. "And I think I'd rather be a Co. than a 'sistant cook. Don't forget that I'm the Co., Betty."

"I won't," Betty promised laughingly. But she gave "Co." a hug that made the little girl gasp for breath. The tea-room might be mere fun for Madeline and Babbie, and father and mother might look upon it as a foolish fad; but to Betty it was solemn earnest, and the unqualified interest and approval of even one little girl, who didn't understand, helped.

CHAPTER IV

PLANS AND PARTIES

NEXT morning Mr. Wales called Betty into the library to tell her she might do as she liked about the tea-room. His voice broke as he explained that unless things took a sudden turn for the better they should probably have to give up their house, at least for a year or so.

"So your present position is likely to be abolished," he went on with a rather forlorn attempt at gaiety, "and I heartily sympathize with your wish to be up and doing. I hate to think that a daughter of mine needs to work, but I'm glad she isn't afraid to. It used to be the fashion for young ladies whose families had lost their money to sit at home, turning and mending their clothes and remembering better days."

"I know—like Mary Hooper's great-aunts," laughed Betty. "That's so stupid. I'm glad I was born later. But, father, did mother come around to the restaurant idea? Because

maybe Nan or Rachel or somebody could get me a place to teach, if mother would be happier about it. But girls who want to work don't all teach nowadays. Truly they don't."

Mr. Wales laughed. "That's another antiquated notion, is it—that teaching is the only 'genteel' calling? Your mother and I about came to that conclusion last night. Anyway we're quite willing that you should try out this project. I will give you the money that your board here would cost for the rest of the winter. You can use it as capital if you like, but I should strongly advise holding it as an emergency fund for personal expenses. Tea may be sixty cents a pound and ten cents a cup, but I imagine you'll find that's only one very small detail in the budget of a tea-room."

"Of course," agreed Betty, not daring to avow complete ignorance of the meaning of a budget. "And thank you ever so much, father, for letting me try. If we don't succeed and my emergency fund gives out, will you send me some beautiful references as a cook?"

"Certainly not, after you've basely deserted us with less than a week's notice," retorted

her father, pulling a yellow curl, and Betty danced off, perfectly delighted at the exciting prospects before her, to look over her clothes and make a list of other things she should need "in her business." But her ideas of the duties of her position were so vague and businesslike, and clothes so very uninteresting, that she finally decided not to waste her last week at home over them. If Madeline thought her shirt-waists looked too frivolous, she could overwhelm her with the six big aprons and Will's cook-book.

Betty timed her arrival in New York a day after Madeline's, but only Babbie Hildreth met her train.

"Madeline's stuck in the fog down the harbor," she explained. "So when I came last night I got the key from the tailor and hunted up the cook, all by myself, and she brought the cat just as Madeline said she would. And then that nice Mrs. Bob, the one we met before, helped me give a party."

"How did you happen to be giving a party?" laughed Betty.

"Because Mrs. Bob was tired of her own apartment. It's perfectly gorgeous, you know,

since they got all that money, but she says it's so elegant and well-kept that it spoils the informality of things. So the cook swept, and we dusted, and Mr. Bob invited the people and bought the food. It was great." Babbie gave a comical little skip to emphasize her complete satisfaction with life. Then suddenly her small face took on its most serious expression. "And to think how miserable I've been lately. Poor mother was glad enough to let me come down here, I'm afraid, I was so cross. I'm never going to look at a young man again, Betty Wales, as long as I live. So there now!"

Betty patted Babbie's arm soothingly. "That won't prevent their looking at you, I'm afraid," she suggested, "at least not unless you stop buying such becoming hats."

Babbie frowned. "One can't turn oneself into a frump, just on their account. Buying becoming hats is one of the chief consolations of life. I didn't mean that I was going to retire from the world, but I shall never let any one fall in love with me, never. That's settled!"

"All right," laughed Betty. "Now let's settle where we're going."

"That's settled too," explained Babbie. "Mr. Dick Blake is meeting Madeline, because I had to meet you. Then we are all to meet each other for a grand lunch party, to celebrate Mr. Blake's getting into his scrumptious new offices,—the ones that your Mr. Morton arranged for, you know. And to-night Mrs. Bob is going to take us all for dinner to a new East Side place that they've discovered." Babbie stopped to survey Betty critically. "You don't mind wasting to-day, do you, and beginning on tea-rooms the first thing to-morrow? Your letter sounded as solemncholy as Helen Chase Adams when she was a freshman."

Betty laughed. "How dreadful! Of course I don't mind. But you see, Babbie, this tea-room business is just fun for you, but for me it's dead in earnest. If we can't make it pay pretty well, why, next year I may have to teach."

Babbie nodded vigorously. "I see. That's a prospect to make a person solemn, isn't it? But by next year your father will probably be rich again. And I don't want you to think I'm not in earnest too, Betty. I'm going into this thing head over heels, just to show a cer-

tain person that he doesn't make one least little speck of difference to me." Babbie's big eyes flashed dangerously. "So to-morrow we'll pursue tea-rooms like anything."

But ten o'clock the next morning found the three pursuers of tea-rooms gathered rather languidly around Madeline's dainty breakfast table. Mrs. Bob's party had been, as usual, a continuous performance, beginning at a very foreign café in Little Italy, going on, because the Italian dessert had proved disappointing, to a glittering hotel on Fifth Avenue, thence back to a Yiddish theatre, whose leading lady was Mr. Bob's latest enthusiasm, and winding up, very late indeed, at supper near the park, after which it took so long to get home that Mrs. Bob declared she was hungry again and made everybody come up to the apartment for more supper.

"If everybody in New York eats as often as we did last night, there ought to be a good chance for tea-rooms," said Babbie, sipping her coffee meditatively.

"If it makes them feel so sleepy the next day, they won't do it very often," suggested Betty prudently.

“ Yes, they will, but they’ll order breakfast at eleven instead of at ten,” amended Madeline. “ Well, now,” she went on briskly, “ how are we going to work? Having decided to start a tea-room, what does a person do next? ”

“ We have absolutely decided, haven’t we? ” asked Betty, to make sure.

“ Of course.” Madeline waved a hand at the huge box of china that an expressman had just delivered. “ Coming over in the cab yesterday, Dick read the story I wrote on ship-board—the one I thought was going to make me a name instantan— and he says it’s amateurish. That’s the most hateful adjective in the language of Bohemia, and I’ll make him eat his words. But meanwhile I’ve got to eat something more sustaining than words, and I’ve spent all the money I had to live on this quarter. So I’ve got to get rid of that china. So we’ve got to take it for a tea-room.”

“ If you think this tea-room is being started to confirm you in your extravagant habits, Madeline Ayres ——” began Babbie, in mock indignation.

“ Well, the point is that we’ve decided to start it,” pursued Madeline calmly, “ and I



"HOW ARE WE GOING TO WORK?"

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might add that the china designated as my latest extravagance is likely to be its chief charm, if not exactly its reason for being. Now I should say the next question is where to have it. And as it's such a glorious day, let's go out and explore."

The exploring expedition, being conducted by Madeline in true Bohemian style, bid fair to degenerate into a progressive course luncheon, leading from one of her favorite tea-shops to the next.

"But it's very instructive," she declared in answer to Babbie's protests. "I've made a beautiful collection of menu cards for us to consider to-night. I'll get Bob Enderby to do us a design that will make a regular hit by itself. What's that, Betty? Of course a menu design isn't the principal thing. But it will be a beautiful feature, like the china. Well, this is the sixth cup of tea I've had, so I don't mind stopping now. If you girls don't like my methods, suggest something else. I think we've had a most entertaining morning, and garnered in loads of valuable ideas."

"Well, but what have we actually decided?" demanded Betty, the matter-of-fact.

Madeline told off the points solemnly on her fingers. "To have waitresses with soulful eyes and, if possible, adorable French accents. To remember that it is the special features that people tell their friends to go and see, but the food must be passable too, or they'll never come twice. To have immaculate linen, and china that matches. To provide dusky corners for romantic couples."

Babbie sniffed. "I hate romantic couples!"

"They order recklessly," Madeline argued. "Therefore, for mercenary considerations, they must be encouraged."

"But aren't those things we would have done anyway?" pursued Betty. "I think we ought to find a place and get started, and then look out for the features."

Madeline considered. "That sounds sensible. Well, then, let's discuss sites."

"Wouldn't it be a good plan to know something definite about rents?" suggested Betty, who foresaw that Madeline's next move would be a leisurely promenade up Fifth Avenue, which would be very pleasant but productive of no tangible results.

"Rents—of course. I'll tell you what!"

Madeline had had another inspiration. "I know a man who is in real estate—the one we rent our place from. I'll call him up and ask him if he's too busy to enlighten us this very afternoon."

Madeline came back from the telephone in high spirits. "He will be dee-lighted to see us. Oh, dee-lighted is out of fashion, isn't it, since I went away? Well, proud and happy then. Come along. It's only a little way from here, and we can do up the whole thing before dinner."

But "the whole thing" proved much more complicated than Madeline had supposed. The agent treated them in a businesslike way, which was really very nice of him, Babbie said afterward, considering their vague and even childlike ideas on the subject of what they wanted. He had half a dozen suites on his books that seemed to Madeline suitable, and she went over them easily, suggesting their respective advantages to the other two girls, who were less familiar than she with the ins and outs of New York life.

"This is really the best, I think," she decided at last, pointing to a Fifth Avenue address.

"It's a rather expensive location," suggested the agent politely. "But perhaps that's no object"—with a glance at Babbie's exquisite little figure.

"Oh, yes, it is," Betty assured him solemnly. "You see we want to make a lot of money. How much is the rent, please?"

The agent's figures fairly took the girls' breath away. "And I believe they prefer a seven years' lease," he added.

"Seven years!" repeated Babbie incredulously. "Why, we shall all be mar—dead in seven years, probably. A month's rent at that rate would take up about what I think mother meant to give me. But then she'll have to give me more. Which is the very cheapest place, please?"

The agent pointed it out, but it was only cheap by comparison. And then, as if matters were not bad enough already, he made a disheartening suggestion. "You ought to have at least capital enough to keep you going for a year," he said. "You couldn't hope to make much the first year, you know. That's usually reckoned a dead loss, in conservative business estimates, I believe."

The girls exchanged glances of consternation.

"We're very much obliged," said Babbie, with a fine combination of dignity and her sweetest smile. "But I'm afraid we can't decide on anything to-day. We may be back ——"

"That's all right," the agent cut her short. "Always very glad to be of service. Good-day."

"He doesn't want us to come back," Babbie declared hotly, outside the door. "He's afraid we wouldn't pay the rent on time."

"We probably shouldn't, any such rents as those," Madeline assured her. "We acted like babes in the wood, I suppose. Never mind. We'll ask Bob Enderby and Dick. They'll know what to do. You were jolly right, Betty, about beginning on the essentials."

That night Mrs. Bob's sitting-room was the scene of a solemn council of war. Dick Blake was scribe, Henri, the Enderbys' cook, who had once conducted what Dick irreverently described as the slowest quick lunch place in town, was called in as an expert,

along with the girl in the top flat, because her two cousins had had a tea-room, until one of them discovered that drawing caricatures of the customers paid much better than selling them sandwiches and tea.

"But it was a splendid thing—that tea-room," explained the girl earnestly, "because Arline never knew she could draw until then. She sat at the desk, you see, and took checks, and there wasn't much she could do, so she got to sketching and thought it was fun, and went into an evening class, and now she's got two things in the big autumn exhibit."

"Listen to that," cried Mr. Bob with enthusiasm. "Which of you is going to sit at the desk?"

"I suppose I am," confessed Betty, "and I haven't the least talent for drawing, so there won't be any great artist discovered in our tea-room."

"Well, my other cousin got married through the tea-room," explained the girl from the top flat, naively. "They sold candy there, and she married the man they bought their candy boxes of. He's a millionaire."

"Hear! Hear!" cried Mr. Bob. "Now

which of you is going to get the millionaire?"

"Come, Bob, do be serious," begged Madeline. "We want to get at the facts."

"A millionaire is a very valuable fact," objected Mr. Bob flippantly. "That's all, Henri, except that we shall want an extra fine supper by and by. Now, Miss Andrus, tell us some more about the profits of tea-rooms, the legitimate ones, if Madeline insists upon it."

But Miss Andrus was vague about "legitimate" profits. She only knew that her cousin had had a darling shop, and had hated to give it up. Then she went over to the piano and played dreamy music, while Richard Blake and Mrs. Bob and the girls struggled with their estimates.

When they had finished, Madeline's brow puckered. "It's going to be too big for us to swing, I think. Mrs. Hildreth might give you all that money, Babbie, but I don't think we ought to take it." She swept the papers together. "Enjoy our society while you have it, ladies and gentlemen. To-morrow we're going up to Harding to open a tea-room."

"But, Madeline," began Betty, "are you sure ——"

"I'm not sure of anything except that rents are lower there, because it would be absurd if they weren't, and that those college girls eat and eat, and they appreciate stunt features beyond anything. Now Cuyler's isn't stunt and Holmes's isn't stunt. With that china and the menu card that Bob is going to do for us—I forgot to ask you before, Bob, but of course you will—and all the other features that we can easily think up, why, at Harding our fortune is made. I can't see how we ever hesitated!"

"But if you go up there we can't patronize you," objected Mrs. Bob forlornly.

"Oh, yes, you can," Madeline assured her promptly, "you can motor up. And Dick can see that your escapade gets into the society columns of all the leading dailies. In a month it will be the fashion to motor up from New York for a cup of tea."

"Madeline," said Dick severely, "you're a persuasive sophist. Who holds the controlling interest in this tea-room, anyhow?"

"Babbie, I suppose," admitted Madeline

cheerfully. "Because she furnishes all the money—or all that's worth mentioning, at least. But Betty furnishes the sense, and I furnish the inspirations. Now what's the matter with that combination?"

"Aren't you about through with your business?" demanded Mr. Bob irrelevantly, from his place by the piano. "Because Miss Andrus is hungry, and I'm starved."

Betty partook of Henri's famous club sandwiches and Turkish coffee in forlorn silence. She ought not to have come. She ought to have realized that Madeline's haphazard methods were splendid for getting up college "shows," but not to be relied on when one's bread and butter had to be earned. Madeline was in a corner by the fire talking earnestly with Mrs. Bob, who was saying something that made Madeline hug her and presently rush over to Betty and Babbie to explain.

"The lovely Mrs. Bob wants to invest in our tea-room," she told them. "You say your mother spoke of four hundred, Babbie. Well, Mrs. Bob says she'll put in the same, and after Betty's salary is paid and the other expenses, the profits are to be divided

—that's what you said was right, isn't it, Dick?"

"But half my profits go to Madeline," Mrs. Bob took her up, "for the inspirations."

"Then I know mother will want half hers to go that way, too," put in Babbie, "and I shall take the other half, to pay her up for being pessimistic about profits. She just laughed when I spoke of them."

"Well, it will be all kinds of fun, anyway," said Madeline. "Goodness, but I feel as if the worst was over now! Does any one know about early trains up to Harding? By the way, father hasn't cabled, so I suppose this domicile is to let. Just spread the report, please, everybody, and I'll come back in a few days to see about it. It's just as well, because I suppose I've got to live in Harding now. I never could manage long-distance inspirations."

The three girls departed early to pack and telegraph Mary Brooks Hinsdale that her "standing invitation" to come and visit her should stand no longer unheeded by her little friends of old.

So perhaps it hadn't been a wasted day after

all, Betty thought, falling asleep while Madeline was still busily discussing where they should live in Harding, and how much they ought to pay the tea-shop for their meals, if they ate them there.

CHAPTER V

THE REAL THING

MARY'S "beamish" smile was dimmed when she met her guests at the station.

"I'm just terribly glad to see you all," she explained, "and to-morrow we can begin to have some fun. But to-night I have an awfully particular faculty dinner-party on, and what do you think? My cook has gone and caught the jaundice." Mary's tone was positively tragic.

"This is what you get for marrying a distinguished member of the faculty," Madeline told her, patting her shoulder sympathetically. "But don't you give that very particular dinner-party another thought, my child. What's the point of having a full-sized catering company invade your happy little home if you don't make use of them?"

"A catering company?" Mary stared. "There isn't such a thing in Harding."

"Well, a tea-shop corporation then,"

Madeline amended briskly. "We are that, you know. We've come up here to establish ourselves. Meanwhile we are not above displaying our talents for the benefit of our very best friends. Betty says she can cook, and Babbie and I are bursting with ideas for original menus and beautiful table decorations. Have you a waitress?"

"Yes, but she's very green and needs piles of coaching. Betty, please explain a few of Madeline's riddles."

"Come up to Cuyler's first," suggested Babbie. "It's such a very long story."

So the story was told, in all its ramifications, over many cups of Cuyler's hot chocolate, and Mary went into ecstasies over the idea of a tea-shop in Harding, and into more ecstasies over the prospect of having Betty, and probably Madeline, so near her. Then she returned to the subject of her dinner.

"Would you really cook it, Betty?"

"Would you really trust her to cook it?" jeered Madeline.

"Yes, because there's absolutely nothing else to be done," said Mary, so dismally that everybody else shrieked with laughter.

"Very well then," agreed Madeline. "You and Betty go and do your marketing, and Babbie and I will examine tea-room sites. We ought not to lose any time, you know," she added impressively, with a sly glance at Betty.

"Don't decide everything without me," begged Betty innocently.

"Of course not," Madeline promised, with a very solemn, responsible air. "Come on, Babbie. Oh, I say, is that Polly Eastman going into the bookstore?"

"Not at all likely," laughed Babbie, rushing off. "I never knew Polly to buy a book."

The pursuit of Polly ended all serious business for that morning. It transpired that she had just been elected a member of the senior play committee, and she had resolved to buy a set of Shakespeare in honor of the occasion. First Babbie and Madeline must help her choose the books, then they must explain themselves, and as that was "such a long story," they all retired to Holmes's to talk it over and have ices. Then Polly had to hurry back for a noon recitation, and it would be a shame not to rush up to the campus with her

and say hello to Georgia Ames. And Georgia, who also had a twelve o'clock class, begged them, with tears in her big brown eyes, to hang around till one, and then have "eats" with her down-town. So Madeline wrote a note to Mary, who would be relieved not to have so many people to lunch, and bribed a freshman friend of Georgia's to deliver it on her way home. And she and Babbie sat on the steps of College Hall in the warm October sunshine, surrounded by a crowd of friends, old and new, to all of whom Madeline confided, under the strictest pledges of secrecy and with much delightful mystery as to where and when and by whom, the fact that a new and particularly "stunty" tea-shop was to be started right away in Harding.

"I should make my fortune as an advance advertising agent," she told Babbie complacently, as they hurried up to Mary's after lunch. "Getting everybody properly excited is awfully important, but I'm afraid Betty won't appreciate that, and will think we ought to have found a place. Did you happen to notice any that would do?"

Babbie considered. "Why, any place down

on Main Street would do well enough, I should think, but they're all full, aren't they? I don't suppose any store would move out to let us in."

"There must have been some vacant places that we didn't notice," said Madeline cheerfully. "We'll just tell Betty that we think she ought to choose, as long as she's going to run it. That will throw the responsibility on her."

"I don't see how it will find us a place, though," said Babbie gloomily. "And we've forgotten the water-color paper for Mary's place-cards."

Mary embraced her guests almost tearfully when, the dinner-party having taken its staid departure, the cook and her assistants returned to the "realms of day," as Madeline poetically designated the library.

"I had awful times explaining," Mary told them. "They pricked up their ears at the place-cards. The soup got them seriously interested, and the salad positively went to their heads. I muttered something about a new cook, and I could see every woman at the table privately resolving to get her away from

me forthwith." Mary chuckled. "When you get ready to establish a catering branch, I'll write you a screaming advertisement like this :

*"Remember Mrs. Hinsdale's Dinner and how
Envious it made you
And Patronize her Caterers, Betty Wales & Co."*

Betty smiled and then sighed. "We can't establish branches until we've started, can we? And we can't seem ——"

"Reproach us not, fair maiden," Madeline broke in. "You are hereby elected committee on rooms, isn't she, Babbie? You go ahead and choose, and we'll agree to anything you decide."

Next morning the committee on rooms announced her plan for a systematic campaign. "I wish you two would come and help look, but if you do, remember that we can't stop to talk with Georgia or any one else we meet, and we can't do any shopping or eating until after half-past twelve."

But a brisk walk the whole length of Main Street only served to confirm Madeline's and Babbie's fears. Every building was occupied.

"We'll go in somewhere and ask what to

do when you want to start something," Betty decided, bound not to lose faith in systematic procedure. "You do the talking, Madeline."

"Why, you might persuade some property owner to build for you," suggested the jeweler's clerk, whom Madeline rushed in upon with her question.

"Thanks, but we want to move in about day after to-morrow," Madeline told him grandly.

"Well, I presume you've all heard the old saying, 'If wishes were horses every Harding girl would ride,'" retorted the clerk with a grin and a wink.

"Horrid thing!" said Babbie, when they were outside. "He thinks we're college girls off on some kind of a queer lark. We'll show him! Where next, Betty?"

Betty was staring up the hill with an air of profound discouragement. "I think we ought to look at the side-streets," she decided at last. "I don't believe it's any use considering up-stairs rooms."

"I feel like the senior play committee," said Madeline, as they began their conscientious tour, hoping against hope that they

should find just the right thing lurking around some corner off Main Street. "We read all the impossible Elizabethan dramas that anybody could hear of, we hunted up Hindu plays, and made frantic efforts to hunt up Japanese ones; and some particularly earnest member even wrote a play herself. And all the time we knew as well as anything that Billy Shakespeare was our man."

"Well, if that's the way you feel about this, where, please, is our Billy Shakespeare?" inquired Babbie a trifle irritably.

Madeline smiled mysteriously. "We shall find him before the set of sun," she declared oracularly. "I have a leading to that effect."

"Couldn't you make it before high noon, just as well?" sighed Babbie. "I've got on new shoes."

Betty looked troubled. "Go home and rest, Babbie dear," she begged. "Two of us can do this just as well as three."

So Babbie went off, after a few polite protests, and Madeline and Betty finished up the cross-streets without seeing anything that could possibly be turned into a "stunty" tea-room.

"Well, can there be anything up nearer the college that we haven't noticed?" asked Betty, trying to keep up the businesslike air appropriate to systematic research, but feeling very silly and completely discouraged.

"All boarding-houses, isn't it, right down to the theatre?" said Madeline.

"Shall we go and look?" suggested Betty timidly. "I can't quite remember what's between the florist's and that little white house that a crowd of juniors had last year."

"Nothing," returned Madeline promptly, as they started up the hill. "Don't you know—there's a wide lawn, and you go back across it to that big barn that the riding man had for his horses? He's moving out, by the way. I met him yesterday, and he assured me that 'e missed them queer moon-lighters most hawfully. He's going to move somewhere where he can have a big ring and some hurdles in a meadow. I'm afraid I rather led him to suppose"—Madeline looked properly conscience-stricken—"that we might be up this afternoon to have a lesson in jumping. But it looks as if we should be too busy."

"Do you think there's any use hunting

much longer?" demanded Betty, who was fast losing courage.

"Of course," Madeline shot back unhesitatingly. "Something will turn up; it always does—if you turn it. Let's make perfectly sure about this nearer-the-campus proposition."

But there was nothing there, and Madeline, not daring to suggest refreshing themselves at Cuyler's, after Betty's strict prohibitions, led the way up the high terrace to the back steps of Science Hall, where they could rest and consider what to do next. Right across from them was the little white house with the big barn looming up behind it.

"What a shame that isn't a house," said Betty sadly. "How did such a tiny house ever happen to have such a big barn, I wonder?"

"It didn't," explained Madeline. "The barn went with the house over on that other street—the one that used to be a big mansion—and now is only part of a factory. But if the barn were a house, Miss Wales, the riding-master wouldn't be moving out of it. It would have been appropriated long ago by

some thrifty boarding-house keeper, and we shouldn't be sitting here staring at it and wondering whether the owner could be persuaded to make it over into a house in hurry-up order."

"I wasn't wondering that," said Betty simply. "I was wondering if we could possibly use it as it is. There's nothing else that I can see, and it's an awfully nice barn. Don't you remember how Mr. Ware showed us through once when he first moved in, and how proud he was that it was all paneled in solid oak, with those lovely great beams in the ceiling? And afterward the pickle heiress's father wanted to buy the beams for his library, and he would have, too, only the owner was in Europe and the pickle man couldn't wait to cable."

"Yes, I remember," agreed Madeline. "It's a beautiful barn, but it's a barn nevertheless, with stalls and mangers and grain-bins and ——" Madeline paused abruptly and stared across at the barn through half-shut eyes for a long minute. "Why, of course it will do," she announced briskly. "Of all the idiots—to sit here gaping! Come on!"

And grasping Betty's arm, she dragged her in a headlong race down the terrace, across the road, and up the drive to the big barn.

"Oh, I'm so glad it's open," she exclaimed breathlessly. "Now I can show you. I see it all myself plain as anything. Long narrow tables in the stalls—ideal nooks for romantic couples. Big sociable round tables out here. Ferns and oak branches in the mangers. Bins transformed into linen and china cupboards. Old sporting prints on the walls—father has some beauties tucked away somewhere. Gargoyles and candlesticks and Flemish lamps scattered around in dark corners. Lights—let me see—oh, yes, carriage lamps for lights. An open fire—we simply must have that—it's the one thing lacking. Why, Betty Wales, there's nothing like it anywhere! People will go crazy over it, and we shall make our everlasting fortunes. See, this little room back here—it's a harness-room, I suppose—is just the thing for the kitchen. Why, it's perfect, and the rent will be a mere song. Come and tell Babbie this minute.

"And to think that it was Betty and not I

who had the inspiration!" Madeline sighed, as she ended her enthusiastic recital to Babbie and Mary. "When Mrs. Bob and Mrs. Hildreth are paying me for supplying them, too. It's disgraceful."

"But, Madeline"—it was the first chance Betty had had to get in a word—"I only said I wondered if it would do, and I'm not sure yet. Where could we put the range and the sink in that harness-room? Barns don't have furnaces, do they? Even if there could be an open fire, that wouldn't make it warm enough in winter; and I doubt if carriage lamps would make it light enough. Those things are even more important than your beloved features."

"Betty," said Madeline severely, "what is the matter with you? You ought to be dancing around on one foot in your childish glee. You're not a practical person. You weren't, I mean, when I knew you."

"She's growing up, silly," Mary Brooks answered, with an arm around Betty. "And it's very lucky she is, if you're going into this thing seriously. Now you telephone your riding-man to see who owns this stable, and

then we can make sure it's not already rented again, and that the rent isn't beyond you. And if everything is all right so far, Betty and I will go and look the place over in the true scientific spirit. You and Babbie can come along if you like, but I don't consider it necessary."

"Hear the experienced-housekeeper-wife-of-an-experimental psychologist talk!" jeered Madeline. "Run along and cast your evil eye on my scheme if you want to. But it will work, practical or not practical. It's simply too lovely not to work."

"I adore your logic, Madeline," declared Mary admiringly. "You'd better come too, after all."

So, first having assured themselves about the rent, the four set out. Babbie sniffed daintily as they went inside.

"Everything is to be varnished over," Madeline explained, "walls, floor, everything. Some of the rough places should be planed down a little, but we'll leave the dents alone. It will be a stunning effect in the lamplight—quite like an old English castle."

"The stalls are too narrow for two rows

of chairs and a reasonably wide table," announced Mary, from the depths of one of them. "The romantic couples will knock plates."

"Then don't have chairs. Build in benches on the sides, and take away the mangers in some stalls to make more room for big parties who prefer to be by themselves—the getting-into-societies celebrations and all that kind of thing."

"That sounds possible. Now about the kitchen," pursued Mary. "Betty, come and look at this harness-room again. I believe it might do. There's running water here and ——"

Babbie sat down on the steps leading to the loft. "I've only said 'oh' and 'ah' so far, like the chorus in a Greek play, but just watch me work at getting us started. And I may have a bright thought some day."

Just then the agent arrived, Mary and Betty came back, and all four girls fired questions and suggestions at the poor man so fast and furiously that he lost his head and yielded every point, promising to shellac the whole interior, put up a stove that would "heat the

place red-hot," and carriage lamps with reflectors that would make it "blaze with light," and a big fireplace at one end of the room, since Madeline declared it to be an absolute necessity. And he guaranteed to have the barn swept and garnished and ready for occupancy within ten days. Meanwhile the girls could install the kitchen fittings, and order their furniture.

"And engage a cook and decent waitresses," added Mary portentously. "And if you do that in ten days I shall be green with envy."

But Babbie did it, without, as she expressed it, lifting a little finger. She happened to meet Belden House Annie on the campus, and during their interview it developed that Annie had a pretty sister Nora, who would gladly come and be waitress, and an Aunt Bridget, who could "cook to the quane's taste, or the prisidint's."

"We'll have 'quane's' style Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays," suggested Madeline, "and 'prisidint's' style the rest of the time. That is, if that idiotic carpenter ever gets the tables right."

The carpenter, Madeline declared, was wear-

ing her to a thread; but Babbie, who was pricking her pretty fingers hemming table-linen, and Betty, immersed in lists of pots and kettles, groceries and silverware, heartlessly refused to come to her rescue.

So Madeline relieved her mind by much grumbling, and in the intervals of her supervision developed new "features" with a joyous abandon that threatened to reduce the Hinsdales' scholastic ménage to chaos. Dr. Hinsdale came home one afternoon to find his study darkened, the floor and table strewn with bits of multi-colored paper and paste-board, and Madeline, in a studio apron, trying the effect of her latest inspiration in candle-shades on the desk lamp.

"I'm going to make a different design for each stall," she explained cheerfully, without looking up when the door opened. "That will be more interesting to make, and when a thing is interesting to make it's more likely to turn out well, isn't it now? Oh, I thought it was only Mary! I beg your pardon. I know I shouldn't have come in here, but they had table-cloths and dish-towels spread around everywhere else. The first day it rains we'll

treat you to a free lunch, Dr. Hinsdale, to pay up. Oh, you've got—there's some one else! Why didn't you tell me?"

As Madeline fled precipitately, she heard "Prexy's" pleasant laugh.

"We're disgraced forever," she announced tragically to the sewing-party. "Prexy will probably proclaim a boycott upon us at tomorrow's chapel."

But he sent word instead, by Professor Hinsdale, that he wanted to be counted in for the free lunch.

"He may, if he'll let us tack our posters on the campus trees," agreed Madeline calmly.

"Posters!" cried Betty and Babbie in a breath.

Madeline nodded. "I'm designing one. It's stored under the sofa in Mary's pink and gold reception room. I'll get it. It's all done but the name."

"Why, we haven't any name!" cried Babbie.

"I thought you called yourselves Betty Wales & Co.," put in Mary.

"That's what we are, of course," agreed

Madeline, reappearing with her poster, "so we'd better call ourselves something else, hadn't we? Everybody can see that Betty is a regular feature. A name should bring out unexpected qualities. Besides, Betty wouldn't want her name to be stuck up on a sign."

"That's a good theory about the unexpected qualities," said Mary, "but I'd like to see you work it."

Madeline sighed plaintively. "As if it was anything against a theory that you can't work it. I furnish the theory. It's only fair for some one else to furnish the name."

"Old Barn Tea-Shop," suggested Mary.

"Sounds sentimental," objected Babbie.

"And rickety," laughed Betty.

"The Coach-and-Four Tea-Shop," from Mary again. "That's certainly the height of elegance."

"But it's humpy to say," Madeline told her, "and possibly a little too elegant for us to live up to."

"The Saddle and Stirrup," was Dr. Hinsdale's offering.

"That's lovely," declared Madeline, "just like a quaint old English inn. But it's too—

well, too sophisticated for us. College girls wouldn't take to it."

"Tally-ho Tea-Shop sounds rather neat," said Babbie reflectively, "but I don't know that it brings out any of Madeline's unsuspected features."

"Why, yes, it does," Madeline declared. "It suggests dash and pleasant glitter and snap—and general stuntiness."

"And ear-splitting horns," added Mary sarcastically.

"But college girls love to blow horns," Betty reminded her.

Mary grinned. "I adore it myself," she admitted, "but I try to live up to the dignity of my position."

Madeline had been sketching in some letters rapidly on her poster. "Tally-ho Tea-Shop fills the space I left most beautifully. I'll copy this in oils on thin wood, and we'll nail a gargoyle to the big tree in our front yard and let the sign dangle out of his mouth. Mary, be a jewel and lend us your gargoyle. Ours are all needed inside."

It was certainly a strenuous week.

"If anybody had made us slave the way we

have over this tea-shop," Babbie declared, "we should have called it cruelty to animals and children. And I don't believe we could have done it except up here at Harding, where everybody throws things together between classes."

Just to be sure that everything was "thrown together," they gave a private view, on the evening before the opening day, for the Hinsdales, Georgia, Polly Eastman, and a few other chosen spirits, who pronounced the Tally-ho Tea-Shop "very neat," "a gem," "adorable," "too cute for words," or "truly stunty," according to their favorite adjectives. The open fire, the carriage lamps, and the darkened oak gave just the effect of dim splendor that Madeline had wanted. The bits of old brass tempted one to exploring expeditions; the double-decker bread-trays made one long to order them filled and eat them empty.

"When we get the prints and the candle-shades, it will be about perfect," declared Madeline, surveying the scene complacently.

"You need a horseshoe over the door for luck," suggested Dr. Hinsdale.

So Georgia rushed out to a near-by stable to get one, and Dr. Hinsdale nailed it up while the girls sang :

“Here’s to Betty Wales & Co. !
Drink ’em down !
Here’s to Betty Wales & Co.
Drink ’em down !
Here’s to Betty Wales & Co.
They’ll be sure to make things go !
Drink ’em down,
Drink ’em down,
Drink ’em down, down, down !”

Betty, standing with Georgia’s arm around her, gave a little shiver.

“What’s the trouble? Are you catching cold?” whispered Georgia anxiously.

“No, nothing,” Betty whispered back. Well, there wasn’t—anything at least that you told people, except perhaps Miss Ferris, who had been kept from the private view by an important department meeting. It was only what K. had once laughingly dubbed “growing pains,”—the same frightened feeling that you had the first time your brother teased you to swim out over your depth, and you weren’t a bit sure he could rescue you if you

went down. Also, it had taken Betty the whole long afternoon to clean and fill the carriage lamps that every one was exclaiming over. Cleaning lamps didn't come under the head of either waiting on table or cooking. Betty wondered, with a tired little sigh, who would do it all the other days.

CHAPTER VI

EUGENIA FORD'S LUNCHEON

THE success of the Tally-ho Tea-Shop's opening day left the amazed proprietors somewhat aghast. When Babbie Hildreth arrived at twelve, in a plumed hat and a trained gown, and with a lunch party of six in tow, things were already at such a pass that after a whispered word with Betty she shoved her guests hastily into the one empty stall, pinned up her train, tucked her plumed hat under one of the benches, and proceeded to take Betty's place as cashier, so that Betty could go to the rescue of her well-nigh distracted cook. At twelve-fifteen Madeline appropriated Polly Eastman's runabout and drove at a gallop to the Hinsdales' to borrow Mary's waitress and a fresh supply of linen and silver. At twelve-thirty Georgia Ames appeared, very hot and hungry from a strenuous game of tennis, only to be mercilessly seized upon by Babbie and rushed off for more oranges and bananas.

"They cry for fruit salad like children for castoria," declared Babbie fiercely. "And they have nothing but five dollar bills. Bring me all the change you can carry."

At one o'clock the real rush began. Girls sat on the broad steps or swarmed over the lawn waiting for vacant tables. At half-past one Madeline went out to them and explained that nearly everything was gone, except tea and bread-and-butter sandwiches; and some of the girls went off, after having engaged tables for next day. At half-past five, when the last of the afternoon tea drinkers had departed, the managers of the Tally-ho Tea-Shop held a solemn conclave in the front stall, their aching feet tucked comfortably under them on the long benches.

"It was a fright," said Babbie. "I took three hundred checks, and money enough to pay the rent till Christmas. I hope I made right change some of the time."

"It's great," sighed Madeline, "simply great! There'll be perfectly huge profits for Mrs. Hildreth and Mrs. Bob and me."

"If this is going to keep up," put in Betty, "we've got to have more of every single

thing. I'm afraid we've killed off Bridget already."

"Send her home in a carriage," suggested Madeline recklessly. "Let's all go home in a carriage. Speaking of home, I've got to take the sleeper down to-night. Poor Mrs. Bob has telegraphed twice. You see I told her to advertise the apartment, and the would-be tenants are standing on the door-steps shrieking to get in. I'll be back here the first minute I can, though."

Betty looked at Babbie. "Didn't you say your mother had changed her plans and come home?"

Babbie nodded. "I've got to fly back to her or she'll get blue and rush me off to Palm Beach for the whole winter. You'll be all right without us, Betty. You must have all the extra help you want, and if we're going to do such a tremendous business I think you ought to have more salary."

"So do I," chorused Madeline, "which is very sweet of me, considering how it will wipe out profits."

"We'd better wait and see whether this rush keeps up," advised Betty wisely. "Maybe

those that came to-day didn't like it and won't come again."

"Everybody was perfectly crazy over it," declared Madeline. "I'm sure it's all plain sailing, now that we've got started."

Betty, tucking a complicated marketing list into her shopping-bag with a still more complicated memoranda of "things to be attended to," said nothing. She wasn't afraid of hard work, but the responsibility and the thought that perhaps she couldn't possibly get through it all worried her a good deal. She could have hugged Georgia Ames next morning, when that brisk young person, having banged persistently on the tea-shop door, finally climbed in the kitchen window.

"Found you a room," she announced breathlessly, "in that little white house in front. Woman has a big beauty left over, and you can have it cheap, because it's so late in the season. With or without meals. Heard you say you wanted one. Now send me on more errands. I've got a free morning—no classes till twelve, and then only a snap course in psychology. What? You silly! As if I

wouldn't do anything for you after the way you treated me last year."

It was Georgia who suggested applying to the Students' Aid for more waitresses and who, when the Students' Aid insisted that it couldn't be expected to provide them on less than a day's notice, sought out the spendthrift Dutton twins and pressed them into Betty's service.

"They're always poor after the second of the month, aren't you, my children?" she asked them, as they presented themselves in two of Nora's aprons, flushed and giggling, for Betty's inspection. "Your hair is in a mess, as usual, Fluffy. Remember, Straight, your right hand is the one you take notes with—if you ever do take notes. Now run out to the kitchen, and Bridget and Nora will show you where things are. And remember it's only a lark to you, but you mustn't queer the Tally-ho Tea-Shop."

These instructions they faithfully obeyed, seeking out Betty later to tell her so.

"And we think we ought to have our lunch extra," the fluffy-haired twin explained, "because all our little pals came in to see us do our stunt."

"And we egged them on to have all sorts of expensive things, more than they'd meant to order," added her straight-haired sister. "Besides, we want to save our wages for lucky pieces."

But while they were eating the lunch that was "extra," Lucile Merrifield came in, and being noisily invited to join them, ate up the lucky pieces and much more, while she listened to the twins' joyous account of their new "stunt." "So the lunch wasn't exactly extra after all," said the fluffy-haired twin as she paid the bill, "because we egged Lucile on too. Extravagance is a good quality in a waitress, isn't it, Miss Wales? I shall write my father that. It may tickle him so that he'll raise our allowance, and if he does we'll be right down here giving a party."

After the first fortnight things began to settle themselves into a more businesslike routine. The girls Betty knew, having recklessly indulged themselves during the tea-shop's first week, were obliged to be content with campus fare for a while. One noon she realized with a little start of amazement that there wasn't a girl that she knew in the room.

Some of them doubtless knew her. Most of them had probably heard that she was a Harding girl, who was suddenly obliged to earn her living. Well, wasn't she? And hadn't she wanted to go into a really and truly business, and been almost sorry that in Harding everything was too much fun to seem like real work?

"We've been waiting a perfect age," announced somebody over her shoulder. "Will you send a waitress, please, right away? You ought to give good service, you know, when you're just starting in."

The speaker was a tall, overdressed girl, with a scowl and a mouth that drooped at the corners. Betty remembered distinctly having seen her come in only a minute before. But she said, "I'm sorry," and took the order out to the kitchen herself.

When Bridget had served it in a hurry, Betty heard the tall girl laugh disagreeably. "Wasn't that neat?" she demanded of her companion. "I can always get what I want. Maybe she did see us come in; she couldn't say so. That's the way to treat tradespeople, even if they have been to college."

That very afternoon, while the tall girl's speech still rankled in Betty's memory, recalling other petty slights and snubs, Miss Eugenia Ford rustled in to order a luncheon for twelve for the next noon.

Eugenia Ford was small and fair, and as exquisitely dainty and delicate as a French doll. She was universally conceded to be the prettiest girl in the entering class, and the petting she had received had gone to her head.

"If her grandmother dies before long, she may get a little real expression into her face, and then she'll be the college beauty," somebody had said about her.

"It will take heaps more than losing her grandmother to put any expression into Eugenia's face," Georgia Ames had retorted wisely.

At present Eugenia was certainly as vain and frivolous as she was pretty, and very badly spoiled indeed.

"Good-afternoon, Miss—Miss Welch," she began in businesslike tones.

"Wales," suggested Betty, smiling at the child because she was so pretty, and because she had been so comical about gargles and gargoyles at Georgia's party.

"Wales." Eugenia accepted the correction gravely. "I want a table for twelve persons to-morrow, for a one o'clock luncheon. This is the menu that I want served. I shall have my flowers sent here, and I suppose you can arrange them. Here are my place-cards, and this list gives the order that I want them arranged in. I want the front stall." Eugenia completed her directions without relaxing one iota of her unsmiling dignity.

"I'm sorry," Betty told her, "but the front stall is engaged for to-morrow. You can have the third—that's just as large—or the big round table out here."

"But I like the candle-shades in the first stall better," announced Eugenia calmly. "Change them to the third, and give me that. And please serve us very promptly, because some of the girls have afternoon engagements." And Eugenia started off.

"I'm sorry, Miss Ford," Betty called after her, "but the girl who engaged the first stall particularly wanted those candle-shades. They are understood to belong to the stall, you know."

Eugenia's smooth white forehead puckered

itself into a disagreeable frown. "Very well," she said crossly, "but you ought to have two sets of that kind of shade. They're the only pretty ones in the place." And she rustled off, annoyance in every line of her dainty little figure.

Betty smiled sadly after her. "I suppose she's forgotten that she ever met me. Freshmen have so many people to remember. Madeline will be pleased to know her opinion of all those candle-shades that she's so proud of."

Betty arranged Eugenia's roses herself, and inspected every detail of the table with great care. Last of all she put around the place-cards in the order that Eugenia had specified. Georgia's name was on one, and Lucile's, and Polly's, and the fluffy-haired Dutton twins'—the one who wrote such cunning verses and was sure to go into Dramatic Club the first time. It was plainly what Katherine used to call a "polite, politic" luncheon.

Unfortunately for Eugenia she was late in arriving—or her guests were early. When she hurried in, looking prettier than ever because her cheeks were flushed with her quick

walk down the hill and her eyes sparkling in anticipation of a triumphant occasion, she found Georgia, Polly, Lucile, and the Dutton twins all hanging over Betty's desk, so absorbed in their conversation that they entirely failed to notice the advent of their small hostess.

"Oh, here you are," began Eugenia, with a vague little nod toward the group. "Shall we go and sit down while we wait for the others? Our table is all ready, I think."

"Come on, Betty, and give us the rest of it while we're waiting," coaxed Lucile, pulling Betty toward Eugenia. "She's been telling us how Babe the man-hater fell in love. It's a joyous tale. You met Babe, Eugenia, when she was up this fall—and you've met Betty Wales, of course."

Eugenia looked gravely at Betty. "Yes, I believe I've met Miss Wales," she said.

"Of course, at my gargoyle party," put in Georgia. "Go on, Betty, about that fascinating Paris pension, and their rubbering out into the garden and planning to have breakfast together every morning."

Betty, watching Eugenia, shook her head,

with a brave little smile. "Some other time. I'm busy now. That is, I can't desert my post to play with you, as I've told you all sixty times before."

"Shall we go and sit down?" asked Eugenia again, sweetly. And as they filed off, her clear high voice came back distinctly to Betty. "I didn't ask her to come," she was explaining to Georgia, "because I think it's much better not to mix business and society, don't you, Miss Ames? Of course if I saw her up on the campus I should be nice to her. But here it's rather awkward, because some of my friends would think it was awfully funny to be introduced to the cashier."

Betty couldn't hear Georgia's low, emphatic retort, but she could guess at its tenor, and later, when Polly Eastman leaned around the edge of the stall, wearing her widest, most provoking smile, and waved her handkerchief, she could imagine how she and Lucile and the Dutton twins were making poor Eugenia's life a burden to her by those subtle methods of persecution that had won the trio their reputation for being the best friends and the worst enemies that a Harding girl could

have. It was four to one, and Betty pitied poor Eugenia, who felt the hostile atmosphere—without in the least understanding what it meant, and spent the afternoon writing a tearful letter to her boarding-school chum, all about the hatefulness of Harding upper-class girls who were “too sweet for anything” one minute and “perfectly horrid” the next. She thought she would leave at Christmas time, she wrote, even if her father had said she couldn’t keep changing her mind. Then she made out a check to the Tally-ho Tea-Shop for her luncheon and mailed it, with a disagreeable little note, complaining of the waitress’s awkwardness and too much pepper in the soup. “The table wasn’t decently laid, either, and the flowers were a mess,” she concluded, and addressed the note to “Miss Welch.”

“That’s what Georgia Ames gets back for calling me an idiotic little snob,” muttered Eugenia, as she posted her letters.

Eugenia’s note, which Betty couldn’t find time to read until late the next afternoon, was the last straw in the load of a very hard day. The week before, business had been so

dull that Betty had reluctantly decided to dispense with two of the Students' Aid waitresses, and, having tried to choose the ones who could best do without the money, she had screwed up her courage and explained the situation. They had both cried, and now, the very day after they were gone, the Tally-ho Tea-Shop was crowded to overflowing, and poor Nora and her one remaining assistant fairly ran back and forth between the kitchen and the stalls in their efforts not to keep impatient customers waiting. Then everybody had been seized with a mad desire for English muffins just on the very day when Bridget had decided only to make up a few, and the sandwiches that there never had been enough of before were all left over. Several people had complained that they could never get what they ordered, and some had gone away. Betty stood it until five o'clock, and then, confiding to the Students' Aid waitress that she felt as if she should fly, she left her in charge and went up to see Miss Ferris.

"What's the trouble now, little girl?" demanded Miss Ferris, when she had established

Betty in a big easy chair by the open fire, with a box of chocolates at her elbow.

"Nothing," said Betty bravely, "or at least there oughtn't to be anything. What would you do, Miss Ferris, if things that you knew oughtn't to bother you, bothered you awfully all the same?"

Miss Ferris considered. Anybody else would have said, "What things, for instance?" but Miss Ferris never asked stupid questions like that. She only smiled back at you and read what she wanted to know in your face.

"Well," she began slowly after a minute, "I'd go to bed very early, so as to get well rested, and next morning I'd look around to find somebody with a big, real trouble that I could, help, perhaps—or try to help anyhow. And first of all I'd take off my hat and stay to dinner at the Hilton."

When Betty bid Miss Ferris good-night after a merry evening in the Hilton House parlors, she was her smiling self again.

"I'm all right even without the going-to-bed-early part," she declared eagerly. "The things I can't help I won't worry about. The

things I oughtn't to mind I won't mind—not one little speck. I guess that disposes of all my troubles, and the first thing to-morrow I'll begin hunting for somebody to help. I don't believe I've thought much about helping lately—except helping father by earning this money. Things are so different ——”

“No, they're not,” Miss Ferris cut her short, “because you're the very same Betty Wales.”

“Am I?” Betty wondered, as she buttoned the coat of her last year's suit and ran down the hill. “I suppose I am. Now there's Rachel—she couldn't be any dearer if she owned a gold mine. Besides, I promised father I wouldn't care and I won't.”

CHAPTER VII

MARY, THE PERFECT PATRON

MADeline had been gone for three weeks and never sent so much as a line of "inspirations" back to the Tally-ho Tea-Shop, when the expressman drove up one morning with a great mahogany writing-desk for Betty, with "Sent by M. Ayres" on the shipping ticket. On one of the lovely old-fashioned brass knobs was tied a note, and Betty stopped unpacking the desk to read it.

"The chief joy of having a tea-shop," Madeline wrote, "is that it grows on your hands. I never was quite satisfied with your desk. A harness cupboard, with a covered watering trough underneath it, ought to have made a picturesque and Tally-ho-ish effect, but some way it didn't. Yesterday I went out into the country to meditate on my Literary Career, and at the little old inn where I lunched I saw the very thing, which I enclose herewith. (That's what I say to all

the editors about my stories. I hope you'll like the enclosure well enough to keep it, which is a thing no editor has done yet.)

"Isn't the inlay lovely, and don't you adore the bulgy little compartments? There's also a secret drawer—not the fake kind that anybody can open after a little hunting, but the real thing. I got all these fascinating features for a song, with the recipe for the most luscious cake thrown in—literally thrown in, Miss Betty Wales. Open the secret drawer, and you'll find it. (Ha! ha! A lively hunt you'll have first.) It's called Aunt Martha's cake, and if it doesn't make a hit for the Tally-ho, I shall lose faith in the Harding appetite.

"Now don't look solemn and sigh over the wild extravagance of all good Bohemians, Betty dear. If you feel that the Tally-ho can't afford the desk just now, why, Mrs. Bob Enderby is crazy about it, and she'll give the firm exactly twice what I paid. Get little Mary Brooks to bidding against her, and we shan't have to worry over dull times.

"I am sending this with the desk, because my Literary Career takes all the postage stamps I can afford,—and then some. Dick Blake

says that writing is exactly like painting. You've got to learn how. He calls my stories 'beginner's daubs—promising, but daubs.' I've talked to a lot of other discouraging people, and I've got hundreds of plans, and several inspirations for B. W. & Co., so I'm coming back to-morrow to settle down for what Katherine calls a little spell of work."

"Goodness, but I shall be glad to see her and talk things over!" Betty said to herself, and looked up to find Mary Brooks standing in the door, smiling in her vague, near-sighted fashion.

"Oh, it is you," she said, as Betty hurried to meet her. "Are you all by yourself? Where are the members of the 'Why-Get-Up-to-Breakfast Club'?"

Betty laughed and then looked sober. "It's almost as nice a name as the 'Merry Hearts,' isn't it? They've stopped coming here lately. I wish I knew why."

"Give them buckwheat griddle-cakes," advised Mary promptly. "Cuyler has nothing but wheat ones. Tell Lucile to tell everybody that yours are heaps nicer. What's that in the crate?"

Betty explained, and Mary, who adored old writing-desks and had been hunting for years for one just to her liking, pulled off her gloves in great excitement and helped unpack the desk, move it into a sunny alcove between the front door and a window, and hunt for the secret drawer.

"It's exactly what I want," she declared rapturously, after they had spent half an hour without finding any trace of the recipe for Aunt Martha's cake. "I'll give you ten dollars more than your Mrs. Bob offered. But you mustn't sell it to either of us, Betty. A secret drawer is a splendid tea-room feature. It suggests all kinds of romantic mysteries."

Betty nodded. "Of course, I should just love to have it here, but we can't afford it. We haven't done a bit well lately, Mary."

"Try the buckwheat griddle-cakes," Mary called over her shoulder, as she hurried off to meet her husband at the end of his eleven o'clock class.

But directly after luncheon she was back again. "I'm bound to find that drawer before Madeline comes, so we can crow over her," she explained. "Besides, George Garrison



SHE STOPPED THE GIRLS AS THEY WENT OUT

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Hinsdale is writing a paper for a philosophical society with a name a yard long, and he's most dreadfully cross. So I thought that as I can't help talking and looking frivolous, I'd better go away. Shall I bother here?"

Mary hunted for the secret drawer in the same sociable fashion in which she evidently expected Dr. Hinsdale to write a paper for his learned society. She stopped the girls as they went out, to ask if they knew anything about secret springs, and she soon had an animated, admiring group around her, eagerly examining the points of Betty's treasure, and incidentally revealing to the astute Mary their opinions of the Tally-ho Tea-Shop and drinking in her casual references to delicious crispy brown buckwheat griddle-cakes and to the wonderful new recipe in the desk, that would certainly come to light before long.

About four o'clock, in the lull between lunch and afternoon tea, Mary detached herself from the girls around the desk and buttonholed Betty in a secluded corner.

"I always knew I had a head for business," she began modestly. "The reason they don't come in to feed isn't because they don't like

the eats, but because they're saving up money for Christmas. Don't you remember how we used to do that? At least," added Mary, with a reminiscent smile, "I used to mean to save, but in the end I always sent home for an extra check."

"I know," agreed Betty. "But what can you do about it? It's just one of the drawbacks of the tea-room business, isn't it?"

Mary surveyed her smilingly. "Don't you really see what to do?" she inquired impressively. "Why, my child, it's as plain as two and two. Open a gift-shop department, of course." Mary paused for the full splendor of her idea to dawn upon Betty.

"But—but this is a tea-room," began Betty doubtfully.

"Of course it is," Mary took her up, "and if people won't buy enough tea, you have to give them griddle-cakes, don't you? And if they don't jump at griddle-cakes, you've got to find out what they will jump at. That's business. What you want is their money. You've got plenty of room for a long table of fol-de-rols over there in the corner. They'll hear about it and come in to buy Christmas

presents, and they'll see Aunt Martha's cake melting in their friends' mouths and have to have some. While they're eating, they'll remember that they haven't bought a thing for their own dear Aunt Martha. So they'll hop up and pick out more Christmas things. See? That's Association of Ideas, my child. George Garrison Hinsdale is writing his paper about it. I'm going home this minute to tell him that I know how it works, and also to give him his tea, which is an idea that he associates with me. I'll be in to-morrow, to see if you've found the drawer."

The more Betty thought of the gift-shop department the better she liked the idea. They could make a specialty of Tally-ho candle-shades and one or two other things that Madeline could be trusted to think up. The Students' Aid girls that she had been obliged to dismiss could take charge of the table—"I shan't have it look a bit like a counter," Betty reflected, remembering the unpleasant remark about tradespeople—during her own busiest hours. Some of the other girls who were earning their own way might like to put work on sale there.

"Pretty things would surely sell better here than from the bulletin-board in the gym," Betty decided swiftly, "and that's a way to help. We might take orders for mending and copying and such things, too. The girls who come here are the very ones who have money to spend, and I'm sure lots of them don't bother to hunt up Students' Aid girls, when they want work done. Why, this is more helpful than I ever could be when I was in college! Miss Ferris was right—she always is. We'll do it! I must consult Babbie and Madeline first, of course."

But Mary, appearing bright and early the next morning, scoffed at delays.

"George Garrison Hinsdale looked as if he wanted to put me in storage till lunch time," she explained, "so I can work for you the whole morning if you'll only decide now. Anyway, we know Madeline is for it. Don't you remember she said in her letter that she liked tea-rooms because they grow on your hands? Well, this is a beautiful example of growth. And you and Madeline are a majority, though I'm sure Babbie will be for it too. Now I've thought of a lovely new kind

of Tally-ho candle-shade with little bunches of oats for fringe. I'm going to fix up a workroom for the gift-shop department in the loft. I've brought down oceans of things in here," and Mary emptied paste, paints and brushes, scissors, a sewing kit, and a miscellaneous collection of scraps of paper, which she explained were designs for Christmas cards, out of a very stylish shopping-bag, borrowed Betty's biggest apron, and proceeded to improvise a work-table out of two sawhorses and an old storm door. But having laid out her implements on it, she discovered to her dismay that the workroom would be plainly visible to the inmates of the third stall, and she came down to consult Betty about the most artistic color for a curtain to screen her from the curious public below.

"For this gift business is to be a secret, you know," she explained to Betty, "until you're ready to spring it on them. Not exactly a dead secret, but the interesting half-way kind. Madeline knows how to manage secrets. And speaking of Madeline, here she comes."

Madeline approved the new departure so vehemently that she would hardly wait to

shake hands before she was up in the loft investigating Mary's arrangements, and emptying the miscellaneous contents of her suit-case out on the floor, to find a "spook" candle-shade, that the little artist, whose cousins had once had a tea-room, had designed for the new adventurers in the same field. When you examined it, you saw just a confused mass of red, blue, green, yellow, and white spots separated by broad black lines ; but with the light behind them the spots resolved themselves in a big yellow Tally-ho coach drawn by white horses, who pranced grandly up to a red-roofed inn on the next panel, with a green lawn in front of it and green trees and blue sky behind.

"Isn't it too cute?" Betty declared enthusiastically. "It ought to be our very special-est specialty, oughtn't it, Mary?"

"I suppose so," agreed Mary grudgingly. "They'll take loads of time to make, though. There'll be more real profit in mine. I must get some oats for my kind, while I'm out buying the curtain. Why, it's noon already—I must fly! Madeline, come down and show us the secret drawer before I go."

Madeline had appropriated a piece of Mary's cardboard and was tracing the design of the "specialest specialty" on it.

She shook her head absently. "It's a trade secret, only for members of the firm. Perhaps, if you don't call me 'my child' too often, and make us some terribly cute shades and cards, we'll let you into it by and by."

"You ought to let her in right away," declared Betty loyally. "I was getting just dreadfully blue, with you and Babbie away, and first she thought of buckwheat griddle-cakes and then of this."

"Yes, I'm the very Perfect Patron," Mary chimed in eagerly, "and I ask you where any business would be without patrons? They're as necessary as the firm, if not more so."

Madeline stopped work to smile benignly at her. "Mary, the Perfect Patron," she repeated, "your logic is irresistible. Your distinguished husband ought to be very proud of you. I'll tell you what, Betty, I'll make out a set of Rules for the Perfect Patron, and if Mary agrees to abide by them she shall be duly initiated with the rite of the Secret Drawer."

"I agree to anything, if you'll only show me that drawer right off," begged Mary.

But Madeline was inexorable. "It is the present duty of the committee on Inspirations to see if it can copy this candle-shade," she said. "And I may add that it is the duty of the Perfect Wife to be on time for meals. And the moral of that is——"

"Goodness gracious!" supplied Mary, who had been consulting a diminutive watch, and now rushed down the stairs murmuring sadly, "It must be fast, but I thought it was slow this morning."

"I'm not at all sure that I can find that drawer again, myself," Madeline confided to Betty, when they were alone. "It's an awfully complicated arrangement."

But that night just before they closed the tea-room, Madeline found the combination, after a little preliminary fumbling, and proudly entrusted to Betty the much-vaunted recipe for Aunt Martha's cake.

"Let's see." She went over the formula. "First you press a spring that opens this panel. Then you pull out that drawer. There's a second spring back of that, and a

false bottom that comes up, and then a spring to open the secret drawer. I shan't forget it again. The woman who sold the desk to me said she thought there was some way of working the whole combination at once, but I don't believe there can be."

"We mustn't put anything in there if you're ever going away again," Betty declared, "for I never could get it out, unless you write down the rules for me."

Madeline shook her head vigorously. "Don't you see, dearie, that the whole idea of a secret drawer is not to have the rules written down where anybody can get at them? Sometimes things get lost in secret drawers for a generation or two, and it's so lovely having your grandfather's will or your great-aunt's love-letters, or your wicked uncle's confession of a murder he committed, tumble out some day unexpectedly, just because you touched a spring that you didn't even know was in existence. But the rules for the Perfect Patron are a different matter. I shall devote my evening to composing them." Madeline sighed deeply. "I suppose I ought to devote it to my Literary Career. I simply

mustn't neglect that, Betty, even to make extra-special Tally-ho candle-shades." She sighed again. "The trouble with a Literary Career is that you work on it for ages, and you've got nothing to show for your trouble but a story that ten editors have turned down. Whereas a candle-shade is a candle-shade, and a Rule for a Perfect Patron is sure to be amusing at least to yourself. Let's see—'First Rule for the Perfect Patron: Don't act patronizing to the Firm; confine your patronage to the menu.' How's that, Betty?"

"Lovely!" declared Betty with enthusiasm. "Only Mary never can do it. She loves to call us my children."

"That's the point of the rule," explained Madeline sagely. "Little Mary has got to work hard before we initiate her into the rite of the Secret Drawer. If I can think up enough joyous impossibilities for rules we might organize a Perfect Patrons' Society, limited to six members." Madeline threw aside her pencil and paper and curled up comfortably on Betty's couch. "I foresee," she announced blandly, "that the secret

drawer is going to be our prize feature. First rule for tea-rooms: Take care of the features, and the patrons will take care of you."

CHAPTER VIII

YOUNG-MAN-OVER-THE-FENCE

THE only trouble with the gift-shop department was that it went too well. When Madeline and Mary had each made a dozen candle-shades and Betty had decorated some cards and blotters and secured a few pretty samples from needy undergraduates, Madeline painted a "postscript sign" to hang like a pendant from the big one in the gargoyle's mouth, and tacked a gay poster, announcing the Tally-ho's new departure, on to the barn door. By five o'clock that night all the shades, except those reserved for samples, and nearly all the cards were sold, and there was an order list for the "extra special" shades that Madeline declared would be the utter ruin of her Literary Career. The workshop in the loft fairly hummed with activity. Mary Brooks was its presiding genius. Dr. Hinsdale continued to work on his learned paper, so it was a mercy, Mary said, waving aside Betty's thanks, that she had something

to work on too. Every morning and nearly every afternoon she fluttered in, to see how things were getting on.

"I've thought up a splendid idea," she would call, as she climbed the stairs.

Or, "Dreamed a scrumptious rhyme in the night, Madeline, for the cards with the half wreaths on them."

Or, "I've heard of a girl who makes the loveliest stenciled things. Will she be reliable about filling orders? How in the world should I know about that, Betty Wales?"

That was Betty's part—to make the undergraduates fill orders according to their agreements, to keep accounts for them and for Madeline and her assistants, to sift Mary's "splendid ideas," discarding the impractical and arranging to have the useful ones carried out, to spur on Madeline's enthusiasm, and to help, whenever she could find a spare moment, with the actual work of making the pretty novelties for sale.

"Let's stop. We've earned lots of money now, and I'm tired to death of cutting queer-shaped holes in cardboard," Madeline would complain at least once every day.

"That wouldn't be business," Betty insisted firmly. "It isn't but three weeks now before Christmas, and then we shall have to stop for a while at least. I'll hire some girls to make the shades and you can show them how and then do cards for a while. No, think up some perfectly new thing. The new things take best." Betty tactfully didn't add "and keep you interested and at work best."

"But I've got an idea for a story," Madeline would grumble.

"Can't it wait? Think of all the stamps you can buy with this money," Betty suggested craftily.

"I'm getting to be dreadfully diplomatic," she confided to Mary Brooks. "I used to hate the girls who were like that—Jean Eastman and her crowd. But now I scheme in all kinds of ways to get Madeline to do as I wish, and to keep Bridget good-natured, and make the customers think they'd a lot rather have English muffins, if the sandwiches are all gone."

"You are developing a hard case of executive ability, my child," Mary told her. "It's perfectly comical, because you look so young

and innocent with all that curly hair. By the way, Betty, hasn't Bridget a recipe for cookies that you can christen 'Cousin Kate's'? I've been talking to ever so many girls about their relatives, and it seems as if they all had a Cousin Kate. And then by association of ideas, you see, they'd buy more presents."

"Hasn't Dr. Hinsdale finished his paper?" laughed Betty. "Because if he has you mustn't bother too much about us, Mary. You've helped us now more than we can ever thank you for. You certainly ought to take the money for your candle-shades."

"Remember you three girls made me famous as a hostess, through the length and breadth of Harding," Mary told her. "I've got to even up for that. And Madeline has half promised that if I'm a very Perfect Patron indeed till Christmas she'll show me the secret drawer. I think I'll go up and make her promise me fair and square before I go to work on this new order-list."

It was rather early for afternoon tea drinkers, but Betty didn't like to follow Mary and leave the tea-room alone; and Nora was busy in the kitchen helping Bridget

to transform chicken salad left over from lunch into "our special tea-sandwiches." So she sat down at her desk and was soon so deep in the auditing of her weekly accounts that she didn't hear the door open, nor see a tall young man stop just inside to look around the room with an appreciative smile and then cross hesitatingly to her desk, his smile growing broader as he found himself still unnoticed.

"Is there a sign anywhere: 'No men allowed within'?" he asked, finally.

Betty looked up with a little gasp of surprise, and the tall young man bowed to her over the desk, still smiling reassuringly.

"Oh, no, there isn't any sign of that kind," Betty explained hastily. "The one on the door is about our new gift-shop department. The snow-storm last night washed it almost out, and we haven't had time yet to make a new one. I suppose I might at least take it down." Betty started toward the door, but the tall young man barred her way.

"Let me take it down for you," he suggested, "while you get me some tea. Because if there isn't any sign—but perhaps you just

depend on the general understanding that seems to pervade this manless town."

"Oh, no," Betty assured him hospitably. "We're very glad to have men come here. They often do—or at least," she added truthfully, "several have since we opened."

"That's good," said the young man gaily. "All right then, since I may stay, I should like a pot of tea—a very big pot, please, with lots of hot water, and lots of cream, and lots of crackers spread very thick with strawberry jam. Now I'll pull down the sign while you're getting the tea."

"Very well," said Betty demurely. "Which table do you prefer?"

"This," said the young man promptly, pointing to the small one in the alcove, close to Betty's desk.

When she came back after having left his order with Nora, he was pacing up and down the room, examining the old brasses with interest, peering into each stall and nodding approvingly as he whirled the double-decker bread-trays, patted the fat mustard jars, and inspected all the different varieties of candle-shades.

"I say," he began, when he saw Betty, "if you put in those nails on the door, you did a very good job. I can't get them out. Have you a hammer?"

It was zero weather outside, and the young man had no overcoat. When he came in again with the remains of the poster under his arm, he was shivering with the cold. Betty, who was sure that he was a gentleman, even if he did have rather a queer way of talking, felt that the least she could do was to bring a chair close to the fire and poke the logs into a blaze for him; and of course he insisted upon doing the poking for her, and that led to more conversation.

"It's a jolly little place you've got here," he said, leaving the fire to examine the motley array of pretty trifles that covered the gift-table. "I saw it yesterday as I drove up from the station, and I realized that it would probably save my life. You see, I've been years in England, and I'm awfully addicted to afternoon tea. If I had my way, we'd serve it regularly at the factory, but a lot of more important things must come first, so I shan't queer myself by mentioning anything

so frivolous as tea yet a while—especially when I can just climb the fence and drop in here. I say,” he added quickly, “you don’t mind my coming in over the fence, do you? It’s licks shorter.”

“Over the fence?” repeated Betty slowly. “Why, I didn’t know there was a fence.” She glanced out of the front window, interrogatively.

“Oh, not over there on the college side,” explained the young man impatiently. “Behind, between you and the stocking factory. I’m not a new college professor. I’m attached to the stocking factory.”

Nora brought in his tea just then, and he drank it very fast and quite in silence.

“I shall be in to-morrow,” he told Betty, as he paid his bill, “and I shall want the same things, except orange marmalade instead of the jam. Could you have it all ready for me at four? You see this break in the middle of the afternoon is—er—rather unauthorized, so I can’t be gone long.”

Betty promised and he hurried off, while Madeline and Mary, who had been listening and peeping surreptitiously from behind their

curtain, rushed down to tease Betty and watch her visitor climb the fence. It was five feet high and of solid boards, but he vaulted it easily, and they watched him sprint up the snowy slope on the other side and disappear through a basement door into the great factory that crowned the hill.

"Who in the world can he be?" demanded Mary excitedly. "I didn't suppose that kind of man worked in a factory. He might be the owner, but apparently he's only just come upon the scene for the first time."

"A new manager, probably, of a very superior brand," Madeline suggested. "He certainly has some authority, because he talked about making changes. But he didn't act a bit businesslike. We'll just have to call him Young-Man-Over-the-Fence and await developments. Hist! Customers approach, and must not discover me in my work-apron." And Madeline rushed headlong up the stairs, and slipped behind the curtain just in time to escape a merry party of freshmen seeking refreshment after a "regular terror" of a written lesson in Latin.

"I was going to have tea to-day myself,"

Mary told Betty, "but I think I'll wait till to-morrow—at four exactly. Young-Man-Over-the-Fence must learn not to expect a tête-à-tête thrown in with the tea."

But the gentleman in question appeared not at all put out, when he arrived next day punctually on the stroke of four, to find a dainty little lady, who smiled demurely down into her teacup, in possession of his chosen table, and a white-capped maid ready to intercept his progress to Betty's desk with the information that his tea would be served in one minute, at the table by the fire or in one of the stalls, just as he preferred.

He didn't even glance in Betty's direction as he slipped silently into a chair by the fire, looking tired and dejected somehow, and staring gloomily into a dusky corner straight ahead of him while he waited. But he had a sudden smile and a "thank you" for Nora when she hurried back with his tray, and he ate and drank with evident enjoyment.

"You don't ask enough for your tea," he told Betty, after having carefully ascertained from Nora that one always paid one's bill at the desk. "I ought to be charged three prices for such a

very big pot. Did you say I have been charged an extra big price?" He shook his head dubiously. "I don't believe you make enough then. And I say, is it permissible for customers to make suggestions—not complaints, you understand, but hints for improvements? Well, in my father's English stables the name of each horse and a picture of it is nailed up at the head of the stall. Don't you think that would take well here?" He waved his hand toward the stalls. "Winona, Prince, Down-and-Out, Vixen, King o' Spades—you get the idea? And little colored prints fastened just below the names."

"I think that would be splendid," Betty told him cordially. "It would be a real feature, to be able to order your lunch served in Vixen's stall or Prince's, instead of just in the third or first. I'll tell Madeline—I mean Miss Ayres—and I'm sure she'll see to it."

"Is she the decorating committee?" inquired the young man. "Because if so, she's certainly to be congratulated. And does she also make the pretty things on that table? I'm coming over here for lunch some day, and then I shall have time to select Christmas gifts."

Marmalade again to-morrow, please. Good-bye."

The next afternoon he came carrying a handful of scarlet pepper berries. "I had a lot sent on from California," he explained, "to brighten up our barracks over there. They'll fit in beautifully here, won't they?"

"He's heard about the Perfect Patrons' Society," Mary declared, "and he's trying to qualify for membership. Let him in on condition that he explains himself. I'm simply bursting with curiosity."

But Young-Man-Over-the-Fence came for his tea, calmly oblivious of the interest he had aroused. He generally arrived tired and listless, and he always hurried out smiling.

"You will save my life yet," he told Betty gaily one day. "I generally forget to go to lunch, but I never pass up my tea. If ever I should, Nora must run up the hill and remind me—no, that would be a lot of trouble for her, because she couldn't climb the fence, and it's further round by the street."

"Then you mustn't forget," Betty insisted. "And I'm sure you oughtn't to miss your lunch either," she added gravely. "It must

be very bad for your health. Is the stocking business so absorbing?"

The young man laughed good-humoredly. "It's not the stocking business exactly that's absorbing; it's the people who make the stockings. There's a little Italian boy whose hand was caught in a machine yesterday morning. He was responsible for my passing up yesterday's lunch. And there are two old men—Russians—who know hardly a word of English. They're terribly forlorn and lonely. And then the girls, and the miserable little children —— Oh, it's a paradise compared to our mills in the South, of course, but—I'm afraid I'm boring you. Perhaps you aren't interested in such things."

"Oh, yes, I am," Betty told him earnestly, "only I don't know very much about them. Are you—do you ——"

"I try to see that the workers are all safer and happier," he helped her out. "It's very hard to accomplish much. The manager thinks I'm crazy, and the workers won't trust me because I'm my father's son. It's my father's mill, you understand. If I plan a dance or a concert they think it's some new

kind of trap to lower wages or get in non-union workers, or to make them buy a lot of new clothes at the Company's store." He smiled sadly at Betty. "I suppose the tea-room business isn't all roses, but I can tell you it looks like long-stemmed American beauties compared to my job. I must be off. Next time it will be your turn to grumble."

But when the hour of Young-Man-Over-the-Fence struck the next day, Betty had a friend beside her desk—Babbie Hildreth, just arrived in response to a despairing summons from Betty, who had found the keeping up of the gift-shop department through the Christmas rush, with Mary off to hear Dr. Hinsdale read his famous paper, Madeline tired and worried over her neglected stories, and the college girl helpers overwhelmed with end-of-the-term papers and festivities, a good deal more than she could manage.

"Of course we oughtn't to stop now," Babbie agreed eagerly as she listened to Betty's account of the situation. "I'm ready to pitch in day and night. I haven't had anything on hand that I absolutely had to do for so

long that I feel half asleep. Who's the long-legged man, Betty?"

Betty explained. "We don't know his name," she concluded, "so Madeline calls him Young-Man-Over-the-Fence."

Babbie nodded comprehendingly. "Of course he can jump fences, but if he couldn't he'd get over them all the same—witness his chin. He's got nice eyes and a nice smile, but I hate a chin like that."

"You've got quite a determined chin yourself, Babbie Hildreth," Betty reminded her laughingly.

"Probably that's why I hate them for other people," Babbie admitted. "Well, I'm going up to let Madeline set me to work."

The "nice eyes" of Young-Man-Over-the-Fence followed her graceful little figure absently, as she climbed the stairs. He had dawdled an unprecedented time over his tea, watching the pretty picture that she and Betty made, absorbed in their merry, animated talk.

"Some day I think you might let me go up-stairs," he told Betty, as he paid his bill. "I've noticed that all your very nicest cus-

tomers do it. I'm a very regular customer—if that counts in any one's favor."

"Babbie isn't a customer," Betty explained. "She's one of the firm. Mrs. Hinsdale is a customer, but she helps us make things. The gift-shop workroom is up there, you know."

"Is it? Well, I'll help make things too, if you'll let me come," he promised. "You keep it up evenings, don't you? I was at the factory last night, and I saw your light going up there. I thought seriously of coming over to protest against your infringing on the working man's rule for an eight-hour day. If I had, would you have let me in?"

"I presume so," Betty admitted laughingly, "because we should have thought it was Georgia Ames come to say good-night, or some college girl, who had filled orders for us, bringing the things."

Young-Man-Over-the-Fence nodded approvingly. "Then the next evening that I find myself perishing of loneliness I shall try it." And he rushed for the door so violently that he almost ran down a pair of little freshmen,

who were chattering too busily about their senior crushes to look out for human whirlwinds coming along in the opposite direction.

CHAPTER IX

AN ORDER FOR A PARTY

"I SUPPOSE people do sometimes have to be away from their homes on Christmas day." Betty held the "extra-special" shade she had just finished up against the light, and gazed pensively at the prancing horses and the hospitable red roof of the inn.

"It has been done," gurgled Madeline, her mouth full of pins, "and it will be done again, with the Washington Square homestead rented and Sorrento, Italy, a little inaccessible from Harding, U. S. A."

"Poor, lonely lady! Come and eat your Christmas dinner with mummy and me," urged Babbie sympathetically. "Is it Tuesday or Wednesday that college closes?"

"Not till Wednesday," murmured Madeline, "and then it's me for freedom and the literary life!" She took the pins out cautiously, one by one. "It's dear of you to ask me for the vacation, Babbie, but I've got to

improve the shining hours. While the tea-room is shut, and Betty, the cruel slave-driver, has gone to be clasped in the arms of her adored and adoring family, I shall turn our palatial apartment into an author's paradise—papers everywhere, genius burning, and positively no dusting allowed. If the wall-paper gets on my nerves I shall come over and start a fire here, and try the effect of a desk with a secret drawer in it on the imagination that Dick Blake rudely says I haven't got."

"I'm sorry, Madeline, but I don't think I can go home." Betty was swallowing hard to keep back the tears. She had thought it all out in the night, and made up her mind not to care, but telling it made it seem more final some way, and consequently worse. "Some of the orders can't be filled until the last minute, and some will surely be late and have to be mailed. I haven't made any payments to outsiders for two weeks, because I couldn't take time to go over the accounts. I shouldn't enjoy Christmas with all those things hanging over my head."

"Then stop making those everlasting candle-shades and go to work on the accounts this

very minute," commanded Babbie, with a tilt of her determined chin.

"But if I do that," Betty objected, "we can't possibly fill our orders. Besides, I don't believe the tea-room ought to be closed during the vacation. A good many girls stay over, and anyway it won't seem businesslike."

"I'll keep it open then," declared Madeline magnanimously.

"Oh, you couldn't ever manage, Madeline. You'd make a mess——" Betty stopped short, with a swift effort to be tactful. "You'd ruin your imagination, I mean, thinking up new sandwiches and paying grocer's bills."

Babbie and Madeline exchanged despairing glances.

"I won't dust our room, Madeline," Betty promised, "not once in the whole two weeks, and you may scatter papers wherever you like. And you mustn't think I mind terribly, Babbie. You've got to tend up to things you do for a living or else—— Oh, dear! who is that knocking?"

"I'll go," Babbie offered, "because I've just washed the paint off my hands."

So Babbie Hildreth and not Betty, who had been sympathetic about lonely evenings, opened the door for Young-Man-Over-the-Fence, and after a frigid "Good-evening" stood frowning in disapproving silence while she waited for him to explain himself.

"I came to ask—that is, I wanted to see about placing an order. I suppose I shouldn't have come this evening, only I was in a hurry to get things settled right away. Is Miss—the young woman who sits at the desk—could I see her?"

"I'm not sure," Babbie told him coldly. "You can't have dinner here, you know. This tea-shop closes at six, and it's nearly eight now."

"I'm very sorry," murmured Young-Man-Over-the-Fence contritely. Babbie Hildreth in a blue gingham studio apron, with a distractingly becoming dinner-gown peeping out from underneath it, was a sight calculated to inspire contrition in the breast of any man who had unwittingly incurred her displeasure. "I'll come back in the morning—no, in the afternoon," he added humbly.

"If it was an order for Tally-ho candle-



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shades," Babbie told him, still icily, "we're not taking any more. We have all the work that we can finish for Christmas already."

"No, it's not candle-shades," Young-Man-Over-the-Fence assured her blandly. "It's a bigger thing than that." He paused impressively and was rewarded when a gleam of curiosity crossed Babbie's impassive little face. "I'll come back to-morrow afternoon," he repeated.

"Wait a minute," Babbie commanded swiftly. Betty had inspired her with a sense of the importance of being businesslike, and here was a big order that ought, perhaps, to be treated with special respect and consideration. "I'll tell Miss Wales that you're here and possibly she can see you more conveniently now. The name, please?"

"Robert Thayer, Junior, from the stocking factory," he told her. "And say, please, that I've come on business, about a Christmas party that I want to arrange for."

"I don't think we do catering for parties," Babbie told him, "and I believe we are to close for the Christmas holidays. But I'll tell her."

A minute later Betty was shaking hands with Young-Man-Over-the-Fence, alias Mr. Robert Thayer, Junior, of the stocking factory.

"It's lucky I didn't just cut in here to be cheered up, as I'd intended to," he explained with a sigh of relief. "That other member of the firm is a suspicious person—or perhaps you'd warned her against me. But her theories were unfounded. May we sit down? You see I've had an inspiration, and I couldn't wait to get it going."

"That's just like Madeline," laughed Betty. "She wakes me up in the middle of the night with her inspirations. Once she even wanted me to dress and come over here with her to see whether we could make a big horseshoe out of oats." Betty pointed to the one over the fireplace. "And then when I wouldn't, she was days and days getting around to it."

Mr. Thayer laughed appreciatively. "I understand that perfectly. There's everything in being in the right mood for things. Now to-night I'm hot on the trail of a Christmas party. I was over in my office directing invitations—they like to get formal invita-

tions, you know—when it suddenly struck me that if I had a regulation Christmas party it would naturally be a regulation failure, like the others I've tried. So I racked my brains for something extraordinary, and nothing came. Then I looked over here and thought of all the extraordinary things you've planned, and here I am to place an order for one extraordinary party, with food, all guaranteed to please three hundred assorted factory hands."

Betty stared at him in amazement. "I don't understand ——" she began.

Young-Man-Over-the-Fence smiled his merry, reassuring smile. "As your tea-shop is to the regulation kind of tea-shop, so is the Christmas party I want to the regular thing. I want it to look something like this room, to be—well ——"

"Stunty," supplied Betty quickly.

"Stunty—that's a new one on me, but if it describes all this ——" He waved his hand comprehensively at the fire, at a grinning gargoyle with its hanging lantern, and across to the dusky line of stalls.

"Features, Madeline calls the queer little

touches," Betty broke in again. "I understand what you want. You want a party in Harding style,—that will go off the way the spreads and Hallowe'en things and freshmen frolics do. Madeline could think up something lovely. But I don't see—how did you happen to come to us?"

"Because I felt sure you could get me what I wanted."

"But we don't do things like that," Betty objected.

"Then you ought to," he told her. "There's a field for it." He laughed merrily. "I'm the field. And—I dislike to mention anything so sordid, but it pays very well, much better than tea and candle-shades, I'm sure. In London once I remember my sister paid twenty pounds to a firm for planning her a cotillion. I'd thought that would be about right for this party."

"Twenty pounds—why, that's a hundred dollars!" cried Betty incredulously.

The young man nodded. "That doesn't include the refreshments, you understand. It's for the design only—the design for a stunts party with features. And then think

of all the pleasure you'll be giving. But—I forgot; the young lady who let me in said you were going to close your shop for Christmas. Perhaps that means that you won't be here to run a party on Christmas eve."

Betty smiled sadly. "We were just discussing that and we've decided—at least, I've decided, to keep open during the holidays. But we're very busy." She considered, frowning. "It all depends on whether Madeline likes the idea," she decided at last. "I'll call her down, and you can tell her about it."

"Oh, wait one minute," he begged, as Betty started off. "Tell me how to make her like it, please. Is she the one who let me in?"

"No," Betty told him, "but of course Babbie will have to approve too." She stopped to consider again. "I'd tell you how to make Madeline like it if I knew myself, but I don't. It just depends on how a thing strikes her."

But when Madeline and Babbie appeared, Betty did help by breaking the ice, for she gravely presented "Mr. Fence" to the other members of the firm, whereupon Madeline promptly told him about his pseudonym at

the Tally-ho, and then, rather abashed by her own temerity, lit the candles in the stalls to show him how she had named them that very evening, according to his suggestion.

So they were all, except Babbie, very friendly, when they sat down again to discuss Mr. Thayer's order; and Mr. Thayer seemed to have decided that it was safest to ignore Babbie, for he addressed himself entirely to Madeline, as he explained again what he wanted.

And of course, because it was absurd and unexpected, Madeline liked the idea. She forgot how busy they were already, and how she hated conducting rehearsals and working out details. She threw her Literary Career to the winds.

"You want it on Christmas eve?" she began briskly. "Then we'll have a masque of the Christmas stockings to start off with. Isn't that an appropriate touch for the stocking-makers' Christmas party? How old are your youngest stocking-makers, please?"

"They say they're fourteen, as the law requires," explained Mr. Thayer grimly, "but you'd never know it. Anyhow they're small

enough to do beautifully for a masque of the Christmas stockings."

"And then," Madeline went on, staring hard at the shiny tip of Babbie's slipper, "and then—well, Twelfth Night isn't till the sixth of January, but probably the stocking-makers won't object to anticipating the date a little. We'll have a pageant of Twelfth Night cakes and Twelfth Night bakers. And we'll choose and crown a King and Queen of the Revels, in accepted Twelfth Night style. Does that sound promising to you, Mr. Thayer?"

"It sounds great," he assured her enthusiastically, "and I'm sure it will be as good as it sounds."

"The invitation card," Madeline ordered calmly, "is to have a beautifully frosted cake at the top and a stocking with a Santa Claus head sticking out of it at the bottom. You'll just have to throw away the ones you got ready to-night. I'll come around some time to-morrow to look over my children."

"Thank you. That will be great," said Mr. Thayer eagerly, and suddenly turned to Babbie, who had listened in silence to all Madeline's enthusiastic planning. "Won't

you please come too? It's a queer place. I think you'd like going through it."

"I shall probably have to come," Babbie told him rather ungraciously, "because Madeline can't go alone, and Betty will be too busy."

"I'm sorry that I should be the means of inconveniencing you," Mr. Thayer told her gravely, holding out his hand. "Good-night." And he was gone, with only a nod for the others.

"Goodness, Babbie, but you're chilly," Madeline protested.

"Well, you're absurd," Babbie retorted. "You can never make such a thing go in the world, Madeline. That sort of people won't know how to carry it through."

"Of course not," Madeline conceded. "I've thought of that. Some of the children will do for Stockings, but for the Cakes and the Jester and all that, I'm going to have college girls who stay here over the holidays. I think I'll go up now to see Georgia about who'll be here."

"Oh, what a splendid idea!" cried Betty eagerly. "I'd been wishing we could make a Christmas for the left-overs."

"I don't believe they'll want to bother with anything like this," objected Babbie. "Besides, only freaks stay over Christmas."

"Bother!" Madeline took her up. "They'll jump at it—the freaks particularly, because they don't get in on such gay doings very often. Now, Betty, don't you worry about my helping on the 'extra-special' order-list. I was afraid Mr. Thayer would be scared off if I explained that I meant to dump all the finishing touches on the left-over girls. They can make the costumes, too, Wednesday night and Thursday."

"If he knew you better, he would have been sure that you'd never bother with any finishing touches yourself," Babbie remarked crushingly.

"How can you expect a person who has such splendid ideas to bother with fussy little details?" put in Betty, who had listened in wondering admiration to Madeline's offhand suggestions. "I'm sure the college girls will like to help. The only trouble is, if they do most of the work who ought to have the hundred dollars?"

"What hundred dollars?" chorused the

other two, and Betty explained that the financial side of the Tally-ho's biggest order was being entirely overlooked.

"It ought not to be put in with the tea-room profits, except the bill for the refreshments," Babbie declared, "and I certainly ought not to have any of it. I shan't be any help. You and Madeline can divide, because you made friends with him first, and she thought up the entertainment."

"But if the others sew for us ——" began Betty.

"Oh, let's wait and see how it comes out," Madeline suggested easily, slipping on her ulster. "You two can be planning Twelfth Night cakes for refreshments, while I'm gone. Did you ever see them in London, Babbie? They're fearfully and wonderfully concocted."

At the door she came back to make another suggestion. "All big businesses have their pet charities. We might have the stocking people for ours. We could just ask Mr. Thayer to pay the expenses, and make him spend the rest of the money for a club-house—well, keep it toward a club-house then, Miss Betty the practical."

Next morning Madeline came back from her visit to the factory more enthusiastic, if possible, than before. She had talked to the Italian boy with the bandaged arm—he came down every day to have it dressed by the company's doctor—and he was from Sorrento and knew her father, had posed for him once in the olive orchard behind the villa. Even Babbie had been interested in the children, Italians, French, Poles, Bohemians, Greeks, dark-eyed, swift-fingered, chattering eagerly to “da pretta lada” in broken English, and all agog over the mysterious Christmas party.

“They live all together down there somewhere.” Babbie pointed vaguely off behind the kitchen. “They were nearly all brought over to this country three years ago, when the factory was opened. It's a real foreign quarter, Mr. Thayer says, with old-country customs and pitiful poverty and ignorance. It's queer that we never knew anything about them, isn't it? The college is on that hill, and the factory on this, and yet they're so far apart that one has hardly heard of the other.”

“So the stocking people weren't so terribly unpleasant after all?” asked Betty slyly.

Babbie blushed faintly. "Well, you and Madeline made me cross. You gave in so to his chin. I suppose I was disagreeable, but I was perfect to-day, wasn't I, Madeline?"

"Depends on what you mean by perfect," Madeline told her. "If you mean that you made everybody in the place from the social secretary, or whatever Mr. Robert Thayer, Junior, calls himself, to the smallest cotton-spinner of them all fall madly in l——"

Madeline and the rest of her sentence found themselves smothered under a huge cushion, which Babbie pummeled viciously.

"Don't bother me about that," she commanded wrathfully. "One minute you say I'm haughty and disagreeable, and the next——"

"The next," Betty told her comfortingly, "we only say you're such a darling, that people can't help seeing it, you silly child."

"I don't care," sniffed Babbie tearfully. "I shan't go over there again, and I shan't be here for his old party. So now!"

After which declaration of rights, Babbie did her hair low in her neck, donned her most becoming afternoon dress, and asked a dozen

adoring freshmen to tea with her in the stall named "Jack o' Hearts." As Babbie sat in the most secluded corner of the stall, it is doubtful if anything but the tip of her ear, a nodding plume, and an absurdly small hand stretched out to press more of Cousin Kate's cookies upon a hungry freshman, could have been visible to the staid young gentleman who had his tea at a small table in the alcove opposite.

"He's the new history professor," one of the freshmen announced in a sepulchral whisper. "Isn't he handsome?"

"No, he isn't," snapped Babbie. "Isn't the new history professor, I mean. He's something or other in a factory. So don't be making plans to move into a history course after midyears, Susanna."

CHAPTER X

UNEXPECTED VISITORS

MADeline composed the Masque of the Christmas Stockings in the first frenzy of her enthusiasm, and then, declaring that genius wouldn't burn any more, she left the Pageant of Twelfth Night Cakes until so late that Betty was in despair; and she persistently forgot the Christmas Stockings' rehearsals until Babbie, rallying to the honor of the Tally-ho, took them in charge.

"Don't you wish you were going to stay for the party?" Mr. Thayer asked her, at her last rehearsal, while Madeline, who had come to take over the reins again, was giving her final directions to the children. In the intervals of the rehearsal, she had scribbled off some songs and speeches for the Cakes, which were so clever that Babbie had been compelled to drop what Madeline had wickedly dubbed her Perfect Manner and laugh heartily over them, as she and Mr. Thayer read them together.

Her Perfect Manner was quite different from the one that she had hastily called perfect on the day of her first visit to the stocking factory. Madeline had written the other B's about it, describing it deftly as "Sweetness from a Long Way off."

So now Babbie answered with distant courtesy, "Of course I'm very much interested in the party, but I shouldn't think of not going home for Christmas."

"Oh, certainly not," Mr. Thayer agreed hastily. "I shouldn't either, only I haven't been sufficiently urged. I had a letter from my father yesterday saying that the laws I got passed last month by the state legislature were going to ruin him, so now I'm not even expecting a present."

"Why do you go to work and have laws passed that your father doesn't like?" inquired Babbie severely.

"You wouldn't want me to have any passed that could possibly please him, would you?" Mr. Thayer retorted, and when he caught the flicker of interest in Babbie's eyes he went on, "You see, Miss Hildreth, my father has the wrong point of view. He always thinks of

the dollars, where he ought to think of the workers. He holds to the old-fashioned theory that the man who toils hasn't any feelings. He's never seen any of his factories. He sits in an office in New York, at a shiny mahogany desk with twenty nice little pigeon-holes in it, one for each of his factories. When a manager's report shows fat profits, he smiles and tucks it into its pigeon-hole. If the profits go down, he sends for the manager—or bounces him without sending for him. When I left college he gave me a pigeon-hole."

"This factory, you mean?" asked Babbie.

"Not at first. He's changed my pigeon-hole several times. First he gave me a mill in South Carolina, and I went down and wrote about the appalling conditions there for one of the prominent magazines."

"That was rather unkind of you, wasn't it," Babbie demanded, "when he'd just given you the factory?"

The young man smiled. "My father thought it was, but I maintained that I could do as I pleased with my own property. Anyhow he took back his little gift and sent me to a beet-sugar plant out in Michigan, and told

me to see if I could keep out of mischief there. Well, the railroads were all giving us special freight rates, and we were fairly coining money and crushing all our competitors to the wall. I told them they must play fair, or I'd expose them. My father was furious, —but I think he was just a little proud too, to find that I couldn't be taken in. So we had a big pow-wow about the duty of sons and fair play in business, and he finally agreed to give me a free hand here, at the least profitable factory he owns. Whatever profits there are I am to have to improve conditions with, and I can take as long as I like to show my father that it pays to treat your men like human beings."

"I don't see the use of fussing so much to prove that," Babbie told him coldly. "If they don't like working for him, they can leave, can't they?"

"If they enjoy starving they can," Mr. Thayer told her grimly. Then he smiled the smile that Babbie always warmed to in spite of herself. "You're a capitalist and an employer yourself, Miss Hildreth. If you have such mistaken ideas on the labor question, I

think I ought to stop patronizing your firm. You may be abusing the cook."

"I'm afraid she is overworked days when there's a rush," Babbie admitted soberly. "But if she says she's tired, we always send her home in a carriage, and she calls us all 'me darlin'.'"

Mr. Thayer threw back his head and laughed. "Then I can certainly patronize you with a clear conscience. I'm so relieved. It would be terrible to have to call off the Christmas party."

It would indeed have been tragic to call off the Christmas party, with three hundred eager factory hands, not to mention twenty-five homesick college girls, looking forward to it as the great event of the holiday season. The whole college had heard about it, and took a deep and envious interest in the proceedings.

"Just mean of you to give it when I can't come," grumbled Georgia.

"Madeline, let us repeat the Pageant of the Twelfth Night Cakes for Dramatic Club's January meeting," begged Polly Eastman.

"Make him have another party when we're

here," put in the fluffy-haired Dutton twin. "It's hateful of you to keep him all to yourselves."

College closed at noon on Wednesday, and lunch hour at the Tally-ho was a pell-mell rush of happy, hungry girls, loaded down with suit-cases, running out between courses to look for "that dastardly cabman who said he never in his life was late," or hailing a passing car with a frantic wave of a sandwich wrapped in a paper napkin. "And it's all I'll get till eight to-night," they assured Betty joyously, for lunch is a small thing when you're going home for Christmas. Betty reveled in the rush and the gay confusion. She helped little Ruth Howard spirit Lucile Merrifield's suit-case into a secluded corner to tuck in a mysterious little package tied with holly ribbon. She took orders for belated gifts, repacked bags that simply wouldn't hold their owner's left-over note-books and last purchases until she took them in hand. She looked up trains, promised to forward trunk checks that hadn't come in time, and was here, there, and everywhere until, when she heard the far-away whistle of the two-

fifteen, she gave a little sigh of relief and declared that she felt like the distracted centipede in the nonsense rhyme.

And then a dismal quiet descended on the Tally-ho Tea-Shop. Madeline was up-stairs with a bevy of Cakes, who were rehearsing and working on their costumes. Betty refused to join them until she had straightened out her accounts; she had a horror of being behind with them. So she was sitting quite alone working busily, when Eugenia Ford came in. Eugenia's pretty face was tear-stained, her eyes were swollen half shut, and her whole appearance was as limp and woe-begone as it usually was alert and aggressive. She hesitated for a minute, and then crossed quickly to Betty's desk.

"Good-afternoon, Miss Ford," Betty said cheerfully, tactfully ignoring the tear-stains, and then she waited, not knowing how to go on.

But Eugenia only nodded and stared at her in dumb misery, evidently afraid to speak lest the tears should start again.

So, "Won't you sit down?" Betty suggested cordially. "Or did you want to go up

and see Madeline and the Cakes? They're behind the curtains in the loft, rehearsing."

Eugenia dropped into a chair. "I'm not going home for Christmas," she announced tremulously.

"Oh, aren't you?" Betty began comfortably. "Well, then you must certainly have a part in the Masque of the Cakes. You'd make a lovely Sugar Cooky, and I heard Madeline say they needed more."

"I—I look like—a fr-fright," choked Eugenia, stifling a sob, "if that's how a sugar cooky looks, and I don't want to see anybody b-but you."

"All right," Betty assured her hastily, "then you shan't. There won't be a soul in here now for a while. Please don't feel so unhappy, but tell me what I can do to help you."

"I've been warned in three different studies." Eugenia's voice was weighted with the tragic significance of her words. "And I th-thought I was doing beautifully," she added, while two big tears rolled slowly down her soft cheeks. Eugenia dabbed at them with a very damp handkerchief.

"Oh, I'm so sorry," cried Betty sympathet-

ically, racking her brains, meanwhile, to think why in the world Eugenia Ford had come to her with her tale of woe. "It's the worst thing about freshman year, I think—the not being able to tell how you've done, nor what the teachers expect of you. I worried fearfully, I remember."

"Were you warned too?" demanded Eugenia with the frankness of despair.

"N-no." Betty was really sorry at the moment that she hadn't been. "But lots of my friends were," she added consolingly.

"My father and mother think I ought to have known that I wasn't studying enough," Eugenia explained. "You see, I didn't pass my prep. school exams one year and my father thought that was perfectly dreadful, so he's extra cross now. I had to write home about it, because of all the money I shall need for a tutor, and when I did that, my father said I should stay on here through the vacation and w-work."

"It's hard now not to go home, but you'll be glad you didn't next term, I guess," Betty suggested. "The time just flies, from the day college opens again to midyears."

"Well," continued Eugenia gloomily, "then my tutor changed her mind at the last minute and went off and left me, and Miss Ferris—she's our class officer—told me to come to you. I said I didn't think you ever tutored, but she said to come all the same and she sent you a note. Oh, I ought to have given you the note first!" A big tear splashed down on the address, as she handed Miss Ferris's note to Betty.

"Dear little helper," Miss Ferris had written, "here's a chance for you to cultivate the right kind of college spirit. That's what Miss Ford needs. She seems bright enough to keep up with her class easily. You must inspire her with pride in her work and determination to do it justice. I needn't tell you that she's a dreadful little snob. Some day you must tell me why she begged me most pathetically to send her to anybody else but you.

"Merry Christmas,

"MARGARET FERRIS."

Betty read it all through twice, while Eugenia, huddled in a forlorn little heap, watched her eagerly.

"Oh, dear, I just can't," she began at last. "Miss Ferris has forgotten what a stupid I was. And if you should be ——" She had started to say "flunked out at midyears," and paused in blank dismay at her own thoughtlessness.

"Oh, but I won't," Eugenia took her up earnestly, reading Betty's thoughts in the light of her own guilty conscience. "I promise I won't be horrid. I was—the other day—I was—well, I'm awfully ashamed of it now, Miss Wales, and I just hated to come and ask a favor of you, after having been so disagreeable, but I couldn't actually disobey Miss Ferris, could I? If you'll only take me, I'll do just as you say, and work awfully hard, and try not to be much bother."

Betty gave a deep sigh, and then a comical little laugh. "I'm sure you will," she said. "And I shall have to do it. Don't you see I shall? Miss Ferris has gone away for the vacation, hasn't she? Well, I can't disobey her either, or disappoint her. But just imagine me tutoring anybody!" Betty sighed again resignedly.

"Miss Ferris said you'd be the best one she

could possibly pick out for me," Eugenia told her, smiling wanly through her tears. "When shall I come, so as to be the least trouble, Miss Wales?"

They arranged an hour, and then Betty asked Eugenia, as a great favor, to help her make tea for Madeline and the Cakes, because Bridget and Nora had both gone to a wedding, and their long talk had made her late with the preparations. And by the time the sandwiches were made, the lemons sliced, and the tea served, Eugenia's face looked merely interestingly pale and care-worn, and she was planning her Sugar Cooky costume with positive enthusiasm.

Of course, Mr. Thayer's party was a grand success. Had any party of Madeline's planning ever been otherwise? First the little Stockings hopped merrily on to the stage that Mr. Thayer had had built at one end of the big social hall on the top floor of the factory. Hopping was their only means of locomotion, for each of them was tied securely into a mammoth stocking, its toe stuffed with paper to give it the proper shape, and its top gathered around the neck of its small occupant,

whose head peered inquiringly out above. There was a Mother-Stocking, a Father-Stocking, a Good-Little-Willy-Stocking, and a Bad-Little-Billy one ; there was a fireplace, and a Santa Claus, who, being a jolly fellow, relented even toward Bad-Little-Billy, and loaded the whole family with comical gifts—for in Stocking Land Santa Claus is not the mysterious, secretive apparition we know of, but a friendly visitor, who slaps you familiarly on the back and lets you come up the chimney and pat the reindeer. The frantic race of Billy and Willy Stocking to get up the chimney with their costumes intact ended the Stockings' performance, and left the audience tearful with mirth.

Then the Cakes appeared. Sponge Cake led the procession, in a corn-colored gown trimmed elaborately with fringes of tiny sponges. She wore a festoon of sponges in her hair, and carried before her a sort of baton with the biggest sponge you could imagine stuck on the end of it. After her came Chocolate Cake, with ruffles of brown and white, and a necklace and bracelets made of chocolate candies. Next came Bride's Cake, all in

white, with a veil and orange blossoms, and Wedding Cake, with garlands of raisins, and wedding bells that tinkled when she moved. Devil's Cake, adorned with all the little red devils that could be found on the Harding campus—relics of a fad that had prevailed in Betty's senior year—drove a regiment of Sugar Cookies before her—yellow-haired girls, each carrying a huge cooky, whose framework was a hoop, plentifully besprinkled with a glittering sugary paste. Last of all came the Doughnuts, very big and beautifully browned, worn like life-preservers around the shoulders of their representatives. The Cakes sang and discussed their respective merits. The Sugar Cookies, being challenged to show what they could do, had a hoop-rolling, in the course of which all the sugar fell off them. Then the Twelfth Night Bakers came in, in white caps and long white aprons, and the Sugar Cookies, no longer sugared, reproached their makers, and were placated with wonderful new Twelfth Night decorations in the shape of toys, birds, and flowers.

Finally the Bakers produced a huge cake, and, served by the plebeian Doughnuts, sat

down to eat it. Hidden in it were a bean, a pea, and a clove, and the three Bakers who were lucky enough to find these Twelfth Night emblems in their portions of cake had the privilege of naming the King and Queen of Revels, and the Twelfth Night Jester.

The King and Queen had really been chosen beforehand from the mill hands, and they had nothing to do but sit on gilt thrones and look imposing, while the Jester, a queer freshman who was wonderful at sleight-of-hand tricks, gave a performance in which cakes and stockings replaced the conventional rabbits and eggs.

It was all absurd and inconsequent and certainly quite different from the usual mill party, even to the way the refreshments were served, for the Cakes moved about among the audience carrying trays of ices, and the Bakers peddled their wares in the shape of little cup-cakes whose fantastic decorations rivaled those of the live Cakes in variety and grotesqueness.

"Shure an' they ain't fit fur civilized humans to ate at all," Bridget had announced, as she

surveyed them indignantly, "an' it's a shamefu' waste of good material, not countin' me slavin' two days solid on 'em."

But Betty had consoled her with explanations about the "foreignness" of the mill people, and their consequent love for queer things. Betty felt capable of consoling anybody that day. She fairly danced as she packed the cakes on the afternoon of the party, and her infectious gaiety in the evening was one of the best reasons why everything went off so well.

"It has been just lovely, girls," she said to the group of Cakes who crowded around her begging her to tell them how they looked and whether they had done their dance well. "Those little Italian girls in the front row told me they never knew a party could be so beautiful, and their mothers almost cried when they thanked Mr. Thayer. We've had lots of fun ourselves, but the best of it is that we've given them a good time they'll remember as long as they live."

But Betty had a special reason for feeling happy. For two letters had come in her morning mail. The one she opened first was

directed in the smallest sister's round, pains-taking hand.

"Darlingest Betty," she began, "mother says I may come to see you. She said I could go to see Nan. I love Nan, but I am your compiny. A person who is compiny always comes to see you. I will be a good girl and always run away when you are busy.

"DOROTHY."

"The dear little midget," laughed Betty, and tossed the letter to Madeline. "She wanted to help with the tea-room, so Will told her she could be a silent partner—the company in the firm. And now she wants to come and see me because she's my 'compy.'"

"She says she is coming," Madeline corrected her. "Is that her own idea, or is she really going to make us a visit?"

"I don't know." Betty was deep in her mother's letter. "Why—oh, dear! Father is going away off to Mexico, and he's going to take mother with him! He may have to stay all the rest of the winter. It's some land he's going to see about, and he hates to go alone. He and mother are such old lovers! oh, and

he hasn't been very well, and he hates to go alone, and mother can't bear to have him. He says that her fare now will cost less than a doctor later, and she can just as well board down there as in Cleveland, if I can manage Dorothy."

"Well, you can, can't you?" inquired Madeline placidly.

"I can, can I?" Betty's eyes sparkled. "It's plain, Madeline Ayres, that you're an only child. You haven't the least idea how it feels to get a letter like this from that cute youngster. Mother says they tried to make her go to Nan's school, but she wouldn't come to any one but me. Can I manage? I can manage anything with a dear little sister to play with. Oh, Madeline, I've been homesick, and I never knew it till now!"

"That's a good brand of homesickness to cultivate," laughed Madeline. "She'll have to go to school here, won't she?"

Betty nodded. "Mother says she can go to the public schools in a nice little town like this, but I shan't have her. I've saved lots out of my salary and my share of the gift-room profits, and I shall pay her tuition at

Miss Dick's. She can prepare for college thoroughly there. And some day, if we keep on having such good luck at the Tally-ho, I can help put her through Harding. Won't that be perfectly splendid, Madeline Ayres?"

CHAPTER XI

THE ADVENT OF THE PLOSHKIN

IF you are busy enough, you usually don't discover that you are homesick—especially if, whenever you do take time to think of your own private affairs, you can run to the calendar to count the days before the coming of the smallest sister. And between work and fun, Betty and Madeline were very busy indeed.

First there was Christmas dinner at Mary's—as gay and lively as all Mary's hospitalities. Next day there was a select lunch party at the Tally-ho, at which Mary was the only guest, and at the end of which, with much pomp and ceremony, she was officially designated the One and Only Perfect Patron, and initiated with the rite of the Secret Drawer.

“You're not opening that the way you did before, Madeline,” Betty declared, as the three bent their heads together over the desk, while Madeline pressed one after another of the tiny, hidden springs.

"Oh, yes, I am," Madeline assured her. "There couldn't be but one way to open it. First you press this spring and take out this drawer ; then you press another spring in the side wall, and out flies your secret compartment."

"You did at least two more things before," insisted Betty.

"Well, the woman I bought the desk of thought one push would do it all," Madeline reminded her. "Before long we may discover the one magic touch."

"Oh, I hope not," sighed Mary rapturously. "I like to have it complicated, so that you forget exactly how it goes between times, and have to fuss and fumble around. Now please shut it and let me find it again all by myself."

"No, that is the second rite," Madeline told her severely. "Come back in a week, a day, and an hour. Meditate, meanwhile, on the Rules for the Perfect Patron, and concoct at least one beautiful new feature for the tea-shop. Then, and not till then, are you permitted to touch these mystic springs. For to-day all is finished, and your long-suffering husband is waiting sadly for his tea."

Though it was vacation time, the Tally-ho Tea-Shop found plenty of patrons. Besides Mr. Thayer, there were all the left-over girls, who, having discovered that they could have a good time if they kept together, organized breakfast and lunch parties and afternoon tea-drinkings, with skating, snow-shoeing, and sliding expeditions for appetizers between times. Betty and Eugenia had to seek the privacy of the loft for their lessons, while Madeline spread her Literary Career, in the shape of a heterogeneous litter of half-finished stories, over Betty's desk, and good-naturedly combined the duties of cashier and manager with the toils of authorship. The best thing about a Literary Career, she confided to Mr. Thayer, when he came in one day for his tea, is that you can pursue it in any reasonably quiet corner.

"Who publishes your things?" Mr. Thayer inquired interestedly. "I must read them."

And Madeline was forced to admit that so far she had no publishers. "But I'm going to keep on till I do," she declared hopefully. "I could learn to paint easier, I know, because that runs in the family, but I don't want to.

I'm bound to write, and I'll keep at it until I succeed."

"And I'll back you to make a big hit," Mr. Thayer declared solemnly. "Anybody that could write those Cake songs, and that Stocking Act—— By the way, please ask the real cashier to send me a bill for my party."

Madeline promised, and wasted the next hour considering whether she should spend her share of the December profits for a trip to Bohemia, New York, or a set of Dickens in morocco bindings. The worst thing about a Literary Career is the ease with which one's mind wanders away from it.

Eugenia Ford cheered up a little over the Pageant of the Cakes, but when that was done with she relapsed into her former state of tearful melancholy. She was too busy to join in the fun the other girls were having, and besides, as she explained carefully to Betty, they weren't any of them in her crowd. Betty received this statement in discreet silence. She believed in taking things one at a time, and Eugenia's complete ignorance of the history of early English literature, her hopeless

wonder at the intricacies of geometrical figures, and her perfectly appalling ideas about the principles of exposition, as exhibited in her themes, were certainly all that could be attended to in a two weeks' vacation. Betty had been "good" in solid geometry; she could glean the main facts of the literary history from the text-book and the notes that Eugenia had thoughtfully borrowed from a friend who was a "Lit. shark"; the themes she could easily see were poor enough to secure their author a warning, but what the exact trouble was she could not tell.

"I don't believe I could do any better myself," Betty confided to Madeline. "Please tell me what to tell her."

Madeline read through a few of Eugenia's stupid little efforts, and called Betty's attention to the marks in blue pencil at the end.

"'No sequence of thought, no progressive logic, no relevant detail.' That's the trouble with them all. 'Poor paragraphing; no development of the central idea.' Her instructor gave her plenty of hints, but she blissfully ignored them all."

"She didn't understand them, I suppose,"

Betty defended Eugenia. "Anyway I don't, and you've got to explain till I do, Madeline Ayres. I'm sorry to bother so, but I've got her on my hands, and she shan't be flunked in composition if I can help it."

"All right," laughed Madeline. "Now just what is it that you don't understand?"

At the end of an hour's careful explanation Betty declared that she thought she could coach Eugenia in theme-work. "You might have explained straight to her instead of to me," she added, "only she cries such a lot. It's awfully embarrassing, until you get used to it, to have to talk to a fountain."

But if Eugenia wept copiously, she listened attentively, and worked hard, and gradually both she and Betty were conscious that their efforts were telling. Betty was more relieved, if possible, than Eugenia.

"You've certainly improved a heap in geometry," she told her pupil, toward the end of the second week. "And you know that table of dates in 'Lit.,' and your themes are a speck better. Your regular tutor will have to put most of her time on those."

"My regular tutor!" Eugenia's tone was terror-stricken. "Oh, Miss Wales, I want to keep on with you, of course."

"No, you don't want anything of the kind," Betty assured her emphatically. "I was second choice, remember, and besides, I don't do tutoring. I only did it through vacation to oblige you and Miss Ferris, but just as soon as she gets back and the tutor, and ——" Betty paused. Eugenia had not cried for three days, but now she was winking hard. "Well, we'll talk it over with Miss Ferris," Betty told her hastily. "I really must go now. I've got to take the two-fifteen to the Junction to meet my little sister."

Eugenia's face softened and brightened suddenly. "Is she really little?" she demanded. "Because I had—I mean I love little girls."

"Yes, she's really little," Betty laughed. "She's eleven and very small for her age."

"Mine would have been ——" began Eugenia, and stopped again, the soft, sweet look still in her eyes.

"You wouldn't care to come and meet her too?" Betty asked hesitatingly. "Madeline

was going with me, but some girls have engaged tea here, so she's staying to see to it."

"I should perfectly love to," declared Eugenia enthusiastically. "I'll be company for you on the way down, but on the way back I'll sit in another seat and—and do theme outlines. It's lovely of you to ask me, Miss Wales."

But Eugenia did no theme outlines that afternoon. The smallest sister was a very friendly little person. She flew into Betty's arms—Will, who had brought her, was going straight to Boston on business for Cousin Joe—and having hugged and been hugged " 'most to pieces " she turned to Eugenia, held up her face for a kiss, and snuggled confidingly up to her new friend while Betty went to see about the baggage, and later sat in the car with one arm around Betty and the other around Eugenia.

Eugenia smiled rapturously at Betty. "It feels so good. You see I had a little sister, Miss Wales, and she—I miss her every day of my life. May I please come and play with yours sometimes?"

Betty assured her that she might come

whenever she pleased, smiling to herself as she remembered how she had meant to warn little Dorothy that girls like Eugenia Ford were too busy to bother with smallest sisters.

It seemed as if nobody was too busy to amuse Dorothy. Miss Dick's school did not open until a week after Harding, and by that time the smallest sister had become a regular—if very restless—feature of the Tally-ho Tea-Shop. Polly and Georgia and Lucile and the fluffy-haired Dutton twin had each had her to dinner on the campus, and the straight-haired twin, who was a basket-ball fiend, had secured her as mascot for the sophomore team, thereby plunging Eugenia, who took no particular interest in basket-ball and so had not thought of the freshman mascot, into the depths of woe. But no amount of flattering attention could supplant Eugenia in Dorothy's affections. Eugenia knew how to talk to little girls. She had a way of appearing when Betty was busy and Dorothy was thinking hard of mother. Her stories were almost as nice as Madeline's, and she was never too busy to tell one. It soon got

to be a regular thing for her to slip down from the campus in the dusk of the afternoon, when Betty was always busiest in the tea-room, and it was too cold and dark for a little girl to want to play outdoors by herself. That was Dorothy's lonesome time—or it would have been, but for Eugenia.

First Eugenia told "true stories" of dolls and canary birds that she had had when she was little, and of a tame toad that lived under the door-step at home. Then she invented the ploshkin, and after that she had to tell how to catch and kill a ploshkin every night for two weeks.

"Do you know how to catch and kill a ploshkin?" the story began, and the answer to that was an anxious "No," even after you knew quite well, by heart, how the deed was done.

"The ploshkin is a sad little soul," Eugenia went on solemnly, "and it lives in the middle of the bay."

"What bay?" demanded Dorothy.

"The bay of the ploshkin, of course. It lurks in the deep round hole that you see exactly in the middle of the bay. So you must



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row out there in a skiff, taking with you a pail of mortar."

"What a funny thing to take," giggled Dorothy each time.

"The only thing," Eugenia announced severely. "And when the skiff is exactly in the centre of the bay you must fasten the prow to the top of a wave, with a pink shoe-string."

"Who ever heard of a pink shoe-string?" demanded Dorothy gleefully.

"You have—now," Eugenia told her. "Where was I? Oh, yes, tie the prow to the top of a wave with a pink shoe-string, and then you must wait and wait and wait and wait, till by and by the ploshkin will come up to drink."

"I should think he could drink enough down where he was. Don't you mean come up to breathe?" inquired Dorothy acutely.

"I mean come up to drink. The ploshkin has an ingrowing face and he drinks up, not down. Now shall I go on with the story?"

"Please," begged Dorothy.

"Well, when he comes up with a flip of his tail, you must jump for the pail of mortar and

sprinkle it on him, and he'll be so mortified that he'll die of mortification."

"And must you hold him by the tail? You said 'catch and kill,'" Dorothy reminded her.

Eugenia nodded. "But it's never been done yet. The tail is prickly, you see, and slippery between the pricks, and the pink shoe-string gets in your eyes."

"How could it?" demanded Dorothy.

"It's enchanted," Eugenia assured her with the air of finality that little girls love. "And so this is how you catch and kill a ploshkin."

"Could you please make me a picture of a ploshkin?" asked Dorothy on the third night of the story.

"I can't draw pictures, dear, but Miss Ayres will, I'm sure," Eugenia told her, and that was how Madeline heard of the ploshkin, and fell so in love with its name, its ingrowing face, and its prickly, slippery tail, that she spent a whole morning making sketches of it, when she should have been pursuing her Literary Career.

Dorothy displayed the sketches to all her

friends, and the exact appearance of the ploskin began to be vigorously discussed in college circles, and pictures of it adorned the fly-leaves of note-books and the margins of corrected themes. The fluffy-haired Dutton twin, who took modeling, even made a comical little clay ploskin and presented it to Dorothy, who thanked her and tactfully refrained from mentioning that she had forgotten the prickly tail. But Madeline was not so reticent, and she and the Dutton twin together modeled another figure that made Dorothy fairly dance with delight. It had, besides the prickly tail, one wing, held coquettishly before its "in-growing face," which was rather like a fish's, except for a "sunny Jim" smile around the mouth; and there was something inexplicably fascinating about the grotesque huddle of its posture.

"That's a real touch of genius—that makes you feel like laughing whenever you look at it," explained the Dutton twin triumphantly, "but it won't help me any if I cut again in Elocution. Good-bye," and she was off, singing, "Midyears are coming, tra-la, tra-la," with a joyous disregard for time and tune.

While the others were still admiring the new ploshkin Mary Brooks appeared.

"It's two weeks, and two days, less two hours," she explained, when she had kissed Dorothy and examined the ploshkin. "I couldn't come at the proper time, because my Uncle Marcellus has been to visit us—the one that gave us the desert island for a wedding gift, you know." Mary sighed deeply. "A desert island is a lovely thing to own, but when it involves an Uncle Marcellus I'd advise anybody to think twice. Well, he's gone at last and here I am, to open the drawer."

"Why didn't you bring your Uncle Marcellus in to lunch?" demanded Madeline severely. "You haven't been any kind of a patron lately. And where's your new feature for the shop that I told you to think up? You're trying to shirk your responsibilities, little Mary."

"Uncle Marcellus," said Mary calmly, "is a vegetarian with dyspepsia. Of course I didn't bring him in here to find fault with everything. New rule for the Perfect Patron: Keep the dyspeptic vegetarian away from the Tea-Room. As for features, I'd thought of

something. Let me see—oh,—why, of course! Make ploshkins.” Mary smiled her beamish smile at the two proprietors.

“Now, Mary, you thought that up on the spur of the minute,” began Madeline. “It’s not fair——”

“Nonsense,” Mary denounced her affably. “You’re always preaching the advantage of impromptu inspirations.”

“But why should we make ploshkins?” demanded Betty.

“Why indeed?” Mary beamed. “Have you forgotten the day when the Gibson girl hung over every desk on the Harding campus? And after that came the Winged Victory. Last year it was red devils, wasn’t it? Well, now it shall be ploshkins. The Harding girl must have her little idol, and the Tally-ho Tea-Shop may as well have the Harding girl’s money.”

“But they’d take ages to make,” objected Madeline. “Fluffy and I spent two long and weary afternoons on this one.”

“Don’t be so literal, child,” advised Mary. “Have them made, I mean, of course. Get one of those plaster statuette places in New

York to turn them off for you. Let me see—three—five—order five hundred. Three hundred girls will rush to buy them, and two hundred out of the three will get that wing broken off before June and sorrowfully buy another.” Mary smiled blandly. “I ought to have been the wife of a shopkeeper, oughtn’t I? Now may I play with your secret drawer?”

Being of a fickle disposition, Mary had no sooner received full and free permission to play with the drawer whenever she liked, than the secret springs lost their tremendous attraction for her. She had just got the drawer open when Georgia Ames appeared and Mary promptly deserted her new plaything to secure Georgia’s advance order for plushkins, and then to help her concoct a beautiful little notice about them to be circulated discreetly through the college.

“Zoology classes, Attention!” it ran. “The plushkin is as instructive as the grasshopper, and you should lose no time in observing its anatomy. To be had, without the trouble of catching it in the Bay, at the Tally-ho Tea-Shop. Order early.”

“The name and that senseless touch about the Bay will get them,” Mary declared, and went home to tell George Garrison Hinsdale all about it. So the secret drawer stood open all day long—for Betty, who would have noticed it, had had an exasperating struggle with the stove, on top of a particularly irritating time over the carriage lamps, and went home early with a headache, leaving a message for Eugenia, who still insisted upon coming for lessons. Madeline found the drawer, when she was straightening up the tea-room for the night, and shut it in hot haste. For what is the use of having a secret drawer at all if you leave it wide open all day for every one to look at?

CHAPTER XII

A TRAGIC DISAPPEARANCE

"I THINK we ought to send for Babbie," declared Madeline Ayres a day or two later.

"To talk ploshkin?" asked Betty. The ploshkin project was still, to Mary's great disgust, being discussed pro and con.

"Yes," assented Madeline, "and to have a say about our keeping the tea-room open for dinners. Also, and most important of all, to save Young-Man-Over-the-Fence from an early grave."

"Oh, yes, we ought to decide right away about the bill for his party," agreed Betty innocently. "At least, we have decided, haven't we, that it was too much fun to take pay for? But we ought to let him know."

"Yes, we undoubtedly ought, but Babbie hasn't a thing to do with that party," Madeline reminded her.

"That's so. Then what ——" Betty had a sudden inkling of Madeline's meaning. "Do you think he's really interested in Babbie?"

she demanded. "Because Babbie doesn't like him, and she perfectly hates having men fall in love with her."

"She says she does, you mean," corrected Madeline, "and perhaps she even thinks she does. But she doesn't. No girl does, if the man is worth anything. I like Young-Man-Over-the-Fence myself, probably because he's so optimistic about my literary ability, and I'm sorry I queered him with Babbie by my premature announcement of his devotion. I don't know how I can help matters now, though."

Betty laughed. "He'll help them himself, if he wants to, I guess. He isn't the kind to give up easily. The very reason Babbie was prejudiced against him was because of his determined chin. I'll make out his bill for the food and the other expenses right now, before I forget it."

When Mr. Thayer came in for his tea that afternoon and was informed of the Tally-ho's decision, he objected vigorously.

"Suppose those girls from the college did help you a little," he said. "Give them a spread, if you like, to square things up, and

take my check for yourselves. You really must, you know."

Betty explained that it had been only fun for everybody, and Madeline presented her plan for a club-house.

Mr. Thayer smiled sorrowfully. "I've thought of that, and I want them to have one; but if they have a club-house they must have clubs. They must have clubs anyway, for do you know"—his voice took on a tragic intensity—"not much over half of them can read and write. Last month I got a law passed that prohibits their working in this state unless they can read simple English and write little things like their own names, and now I find there are no evening schools in this benighted town, and if there were, what would old men and grown women do in a regular evening school?"

"Was that the law your father didn't like?" asked Betty.

Mr. Thayer nodded gloomily. "It's a perfectly good law, but it's making me no end of trouble. Miss Wales, I've noticed that you always seem to come to the rescue of despairing mortals. Can't you suggest something?"

Betty shook her head thoughtfully. Instead of coming to any one's rescue she had got to dismiss her extra waitresses again. Nobody had time for lunches and teas just before midyears, and even if the tea-shop should decide to serve dinners a little later, she might be able, with the longer hours, to get on without extra help. Then she remembered something funny that had come in her morning mail.

"I must be queer," she declared, "because people—despairing mortals—want me to do such funny things for them. This morning I had a letter from a father whose daughter isn't popular in college, wanting me to show her how to make friends. And I never even heard of the girl before!"

"Well, you'll do it," Mr. Thayer declared, preparing to take his leave, "and you'll help me out somehow, too. I've got three months' grace from the factory commission, before my employees must begin to attend school. Meanwhile I shall put an architect to work on plans for the club-house you've compelled me to build by your hundred dollar donation. And by building the club-house I put you

under obligations to help me with the clubs. That's even. Good-bye."

"We've gotten ourselves into a lovely fix now," said Betty solemnly, staring after him.

"You have, please say," Madeline corrected. "He doesn't expect me to do anything about his old clubs, after the way I piled the Stockings off on Babbie."

"I should love it if I had time," sighed Betty. "It's the only kind of teaching I know enough to do, just the plain three R's,—and you could feel as if your work counted for something, when they must learn and can't in any other way."

"It would be splendid practice," added Madeline. "I should almost think some of the college girls who are going to teach might like to take classes a night or two each week."

Betty gave a little cry of pleased assent. "Why, of course! Why didn't you think of that when he was here, Madeline? I know they'd like it, and girls who don't mean to teach would, too—Fluffy Dutton and Georgia and their kind. They'd like the queerness of it."

"I might even take a class myself,"

Madeline conceded, "if I were allowed to choose my pupils. I hereby speak for my fascinating little Italian boy."

"It will be a fine chance to practice modern languages, too," cried Betty eagerly. "Some girls will like it for that. But the classes wouldn't get on very fast, studying only a night a week; and every night would be a good deal to give. Oh, Madeline, I know what! He could hire some girls for the big stupid classes that would have to come several nights a week, and that would help with the Student's Aid work."

"You're worrying about those waitresses again," said Madeline accusingly. "I believe you care more about them than you do about tea-room profits."

"You don't really think that, do you, Madeline?" demanded Betty solemnly, "because the tea-room pays me for looking out for its profits, and if I didn't put that ahead of anything else, I shouldn't be honest."

"Of course I don't think it," Madeline told her quickly, with a loving little hug. "You're altogether too honest, and you work lots harder than you ought to. If we decide to

serve dinners, I shall insist on your having an assistant. And that will be more help for the Student's Aid," she added mockingly, and went off to Dramatic Club's dress rehearsal of the Masque of the Twelfth Night Cakes.

A few moments later the carriage lamp above Betty's desk flickered uncertainly and grew dim.

"Oh, dear, I never filled one lamp this morning!" sighed Betty. The stove and the lamps were the hardest things in her winter's experience. Bridget had announced, soon after her arrival, that she couldn't be "bothered wid ony ile lamps," and Nora had remarked pointedly that nowadays you needn't expect any girl to fuss with those old-fashioned ways of lighting. So Betty, valuing Bridget and Nora too highly to take any risks, had quietly assumed the care of the lamps and later of the stove. She didn't dare to carry a light near the kerosene can, and in groping her way to it she tore her sleeve on a nail and got a sliver in her finger. She had pinned together the tear and taken out the sliver, and she was sitting by the open fire, trying to finish up the repairs by smoothing

out her ruffled temper, when Eugenia Ford appeared, looking provokingly spick-and-span and elegant in new furs that her father had just sent her.

"He knew he was mean to keep me here over Christmas," said Eugenia, when she had duly exhibited her treasures. "Is your headache all gone, Miss Wales?"

Betty laughed. "I'd forgotten that I ever had one. That was two days ago, wasn't it? I was sorry to make you miss a lesson."

"Oh, it didn't matter," Eugenia said easily. She was in a very complacent mood to-day. "I told Miss Ayres that it didn't matter. I've had two 'very goods' said to me in geometry recitations this week, and I wasn't sat upon in Lit. to-day. That's the most of a compliment you can hope for in Lit. unless you're a perfect wizard."

"Well, don't get careless and let things go," Betty warned her solemnly. "And when you're cramming, if you find one single little thing that you don't understand, you'd better come and let me explain about it." Betty flushed uncomfortably. The financial side of such affairs she found very embarrassing.

"It won't be anything extra ; it will just be a favor to me. I shall feel so nervous until I know you're through all right."

Eugenia nodded brusquely. "I suppose they're always dreadfully down on people who've had warnings, but I guess I shall get along." She seemed restless and ill at ease somehow, saying almost nothing, answering Betty's questions at random, not even noticing the ploshkin that she had gone into raptures over when she had seen it before, or inquiring for little Dorothy, as she did invariably whenever she came in.

"She's probably worried to death and too proud to let me see it," Betty decided ; but that was an absurd supposition, considering all the tears that Eugenia had taken small pains to dissemble. Finally it came out.

"I must be going," Eugenia announced at last with sudden briskness. "I only stopped to inquire for your headache. Oh, yes—and I presume I'd better take my theme, because it's due to-morrow morning, and I may not be down this way again. Did you read it, Miss Wales?"

Betty's brow puckered in perplexity. "Your

theme? Were you to have one ready for the other day? I thought it was only the last six propositions in geometry that we were going over together. Madeline didn't give me any theme."

"No," explained Eugenia. "I didn't tell her anything about it. I just dropped it on your desk. I thought you'd notice it and read it, and if you found anything fearfully wrong, I could fix it over."

"But I don't understand what theme it was. We went over all those that I assigned; and you revised them, and then we went over them again."

"This was my 'final,'" explained Eugenia.

"Your 'final'!" Betty's tone was full of dismay. "But I wasn't to see that, Eugenia. That's to be entirely your own work, like all the themes you handed in before you were warned. Don't you remember I told you how Miss Raymond called a meeting of English tutors to explain that they were to give no help of any kind on the 'final' theme; and she announced it in classes too, didn't she?"

"Oh, yes, if you take it that way"—Eu-

genia assumed an air of injured innocence. "Most of the tutors don't. You see, Miss Wales, some of the girls are worried to death and bother their tutors for ideas and pointers until the poor things just about write their freshmen's themes to get rid of them. Of course they won't—or they oughtn't to—do that with the 'final.' That's the help Miss Raymond meant."

"So is reading it over and making suggestions giving help," Betty objected. "She meant help of any kind—or at least that was what she said."

Eugenia shrugged her shoulders. "All right," she said. "There's no harm done, as long as you haven't even seen the old thing. It's due to-morrow anyway, and all I expected you to tell me was little things like misspelled words or slips of the pen. I couldn't copy it all over to-night possibly."

Betty always tried to put the best construction on actions that didn't seem to her quite honorable. "Oh, if that's all you wanted, why I don't suppose any one would object. But it's better to keep exactly to Miss Raymond's regulations, don't you think so? If

you try hard, you can find little things like misspelled words for yourself. You will go over it carefully, won't you?" Betty added earnestly. "I heard of a girl once who was conditioned on account of bad spelling. That would be a perfect shame, after all the time we've spent studying really hard things like outlines."

While she talked, Betty was looking through her pigeonholes, where neat little piles of bills and memoranda for the different parts of the tea-room business were kept. After one week of chaos she had decided that order was the first law of business; and since then her desk had been a model of neatness and system.

"Where did you say you left the theme, Eugenia?" she asked after a minute, looking up from her search.

"Right out on top," explained Eugenia. "Isn't it there? Seems to me a drawer was open. Maybe it got slipped in by mistake with something else, when the drawer was shut."

Betty opened every drawer and looked carefully through the contents. Then she

went through the pigeonholes again, while Eugenia waited, anxiety fast taking the place of her serene assurance.

"It's not here," Betty announced at last. "Are you perfectly sure you left it, Eugenia?"

"Perfectly. You see," Eugenia, being thoroughly frightened, became, according to her custom, perfectly frank and open. "You see I knew you'd think it was cheating to help on a 'final,' no matter if all—well, some," she amended hastily, "of the regular tutors do it. So I folded it up and laid it on your desk where I thought you'd naturally pick it up to see what it was. And after you'd begun it, I thought you'd finish out of curiosity, because you're so interested in my not flunking. And if you thought it was a fright I just hoped you wouldn't be able to resist bringing it to me to revise. I guess it wasn't honest, and I never mean to actually cheat," ended Eugenia, with a feeling for nice distinctions, "so I'm really and truly glad you didn't find it before. But it must be there, Miss Wales. It simply must."

"It isn't," Betty answered with decision. "I've looked twice at every single paper."

"Then somebody has taken it."

Betty considered. "You might have picked it up yourself, Eugenia, with your other things, in a fit of absent-mindedness. The maids never touch this desk. The only other person who could possibly have moved it is Madeline. She was writing here, I think, the day you say you left it. She's up on the campus now. You go and hunt through your room, and as soon as she comes home, I'll ask her about it."

"Suppose we don't either of us find it?" queried Eugenia anxiously.

"Oh, we shall find it," Betty assured her. "I'm almost sure you took it off."

"Oh, no, I didn't, Miss Wales," declared Eugenia. "I know I didn't, but I'll go and look. And if I don't find it, I shall come right back here to see if Miss Ayres has it. Oh, just think—what if it's lost for keeps?" Eugenia fastened her sable furs as unconcernedly as if they had been last year's style and squirrel, and rushed off, her eyes big with terror.

Betty went over the desk again, just to be doing something. Just before Madeline ar-

rived, she remembered the secret drawer. The theme was in that, of course! When Madeline declared that she hadn't seen it, and that it couldn't be with her papers, because she hadn't had any on the desk for five days, Betty insisted on her opening the secret drawer.

"I simply must learn to open it," she said. "I knew something would get lost in there, and if you were away, I shouldn't be able to get it out. There, Madeline, that's the way you did it the first time you opened it. I think I shall remember now. Oh, it isn't there! I do hope she's found it herself."

But a minute later Eugenia burst in, arrayed in her roommate's oldest raincoat, furs and complacence alike discarded. "Have you found it?" she cried. "Because I knew I shouldn't, and I didn't."

"Oh, Eugenia! No, it isn't here. Madeline, do come and suggest what to do."

Madeline was as sympathetic as possible, but even her vaunted resourcefulness could find no feasible remedy for Eugenia's plight.

"Ask for more time," she began.

"She won't give it unless you've been sick," Eugenia objected.

"Go home and write your theme to-night. You can do it, with coffee and wet towels. If your matron is fussy about lights, come down to our house."

"Oh, I couldn't," declared Eugenia tragically. "I can't hurry on themes. I'm as slow as a snail when I try to write sense. I spent six evenings on this, outside of copying."

"Then go and explain that you've lost it, and throw yourself on the lady's tender mercies. Go right away, so she won't be irritated beforehand by all the other regular eleventh hour excuses."

Eugenia considered. "I suppose that's the only thing to do. If I hurry I can get there before dinner. Between tea and dinner is her good-natured time." Eugenia pulled up the raincoat, which was much too long for her, and started off.

Half an hour later she was back again, shivering forlornly with the cold and choking with tears.

"I told her. I told her exactly how I happened to lose it, because she asked me, and I never thought how awful it would look. She

says I'm a cheat, and don't deserve more time. She says she'll flunk me in the course, and she hopes I'll flunk enough other things so I can't stay in college. Oh, Miss Wales, what shall I do? I told my father I was all caught up. He doesn't know about midyears. I guess that wasn't honest either, to say I was caught up before I'd passed the exams. If I'm flunked out now I shan't ever dare go home. Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do? What shall I do?"

Betty tucked the forlorn, weeping little bundle into a chair, heaped more wood on the fire that she had been trying to put out, brewed hot tea, and hunted through the larder for tempting "left-overs" that would make up an appetizing little supper for two. When Madeline and the smallest sister came to see, as Dorothy put it, whether the ploskin had caught and killed Betty, she sent them away with a hastily whispered explanation.

"Now first," she told Eugenia, "you're to stop crying or you'll make yourself sick, and then where will your midyears be? And secondly you're to eat what I've cooked, be-

cause it isn't polite to act as if you didn't like my cooking. And thirdly you're to escort me as far as the door of the Davidson. I'm going to see Miss Raymond. I'm sure you misunderstood part of what she said, because she isn't the kind to speak that way. If she has made up her mind to flunk you, I don't know that I can do anything, but I'm going to try."

"Oh, you mustn't bother," moaned Eugenia. "It's no use. I suppose it was cheating. You said it was yourself."

"I ought to have told you specially not to bring the 'final' theme to me," Betty told her. "And if you did leave it here, why, I'm responsible in a way for its loss. I shall tell Miss Raymond that. I can't have you fail because something you left with me has disappeared off the face of the earth."

On their way Betty told Eugenia to walk ahead slowly while she ran up to bid Dorothy good-night.

"I just hate to go," she told Madeline. "I don't know Miss Raymond very well. If it was Miss Ferris, I should know just what to say; but I'm afraid Miss Raymond will think

it was partly my doings that Eugenia brought me the theme. I just hate to be mixed up in anything that isn't perfectly straight."

"Then let her get out of it as best she can herself."

Betty shook her head. "That certainly wouldn't be straight," she declared. "I'm helping her because the theme was lost off my desk—and because she's been so sweet to Dorothy."

After all, the interview wasn't so dreadful. Miss Raymond began by thanking Betty for coming at once to explain her side of the affair.

"Though of course I knew all that you have told me about the part you took," she said. "But one thing more—do you think Miss Ford is telling the truth about her part? You think she really wrote the theme?"

"Oh, yes, I'm sure she did," Betty answered earnestly. "She has queer ideas about what would be fair and honest, but I'm sure she doesn't tell out-and-out lies. Besides, how would she ever think of such a story?"

"It's no stranger than others I've listened to that proved to be the invention of girls

stupider than Eugenia Ford," Miss Raymond assured her smilingly. "But I shall accept your judgment in the matter."

"And give her a chance to write another theme?" asked Betty eagerly.

Miss Raymond hesitated. "I don't see how I can do that, when I have refused half a dozen others who had better excuses. But what's lost generally turns up, doesn't it? Suppose I give Miss Ford three weeks, in the hope that her theme will come to light. Of course I shall trust to her honor not to write another and substitute it for the original."

"But if it doesn't come to light?" Betty knew just how thoroughly she had ransacked her desk.

Miss Raymond considered. "Then what I can do will depend on the reports I get from her other instructors—and from you, if you are to continue tutoring her."

Betty blushed violently. "If you remember my themes, Miss Raymond, I know you think it's perfectly crazy for me to be tutoring in English." And she explained how she had been driven to beginning with Eugenia, and then not allowed to stop.

“When I see the ‘final’ I can judge better how successful you’ve been,” Miss Raymond told her cordially, “but I imagine you’ve done good work. The best writers don’t make the best teachers. What was her subject?”

Betty blushed again. “‘Little Girls.’ I’d kept telling her to take something definite and something she knew about, instead of hope, and Japanese gardens, and things of that kind. But ‘Little Girls’ is a sort of ridiculous title, isn’t it?”

“It sounds rather promising to me,” Miss Raymond said. “I hope I shall have the opportunity of reading about ‘Little Girls.’ Will you explain our arrangement to Miss Ford?” And Betty felt that she was dismissed.

She hurried over to tell Eugenia how far she had succeeded, and Eugenia cheered up perceptibly over the ray of hope held out to her, and even found heart to taste the fudge that her sympathetic roommate had made to comfort her.

Betty finished off her evening with a call on Miss Ferris, who assured her, in answer to

her apologetic account of the situation, that she didn't in the least regret, nevertheless, having practically compelled Betty to tutor Eugenia.

"And Eugenia is quite right; you can't stop now," she declared laughingly, and then grew serious. "This episode is hard on both of you, but it will result in her practicing, if she doesn't fully accept, a higher code of honor. Then you say she has learned to work, and this is her chance to show it. Miss Raymond won't be hard on her if she shows that she means to do her best. You didn't think I expected you to change all her spots in a minute, did you?"

Betty went home, feeling that a great load was off her shoulders. To be sure, she was perfectly certain that Eugenia's theme was lost "for keeps," but nobody, not even Eugenia, seemed to blame her. And something would surely happen to make things come right.

At home something had already happened to make things interesting, in the shape of a telegram from Babbie, who had decided to come up to Harding, although Madeline had

not yet carried out her plan of sending for her. And so she didn't know a word about the ploshkin or the dinner project. It wasn't to discuss those, certainly, that she was coming to Harding.

CHAPTER XIII

MORE "SIDE-LINES"

ON the afternoon of her arrival Babbie had tea, alone and very early, at the Tally-ho. Just after Nora had served her, Mr. Thayer appeared. He came over to Babbie's table to shake hands, as a matter of course, and he lingered over the process until the very least Babbie could do was to invite him to share her repast.

"I met a cousin of yours," she informed him, "at the week-end party I've just come from—Mr. Austin Thayer. I saw a lot of him, and we got quite chummy."

"Austin's a fine fellow," agreed Mr. Thayer cordially, "but he and I disagree about so many things—we don't hit it off at all."

"No," said Babbie serenely, crushing a slice of lemon relentlessly with her tiny wooden spoon—Japanese spoons, for the Japanese teas were the latest innovation at the Tally-ho. "Your cousin Austin thinks you

are 'a very foolish boy,' to quote his own words. We discussed you at dinner last evening."

Mr. Thayer flushed. "And did you defend me just a little?" he asked. "Because if you didn't, considering what Austin has called me now and then, I don't see how there could have been much discussion."

"Well, if you make a point of it, it wasn't a discussion," Babbie told him coldly. "It was an—an exchange of experiences. He told me what he knew about your past life, and I told him the very little I know about your present activities."

Mr. Thayer smiled a perfunctory smile. "It must have been a desperately dull dinner. My affairs are never the least bit exciting. Next time you meet Austin at anybody's week-end, make him talk about himself."

"Oh, he did that too," Babbie explained, "sitting out dances the first evening. He's had piles of fascinating experiences. If I were a man I think I should go in for the same sort of thing exactly. I love the way he pounces down on the Stock Exchange,

straight out of a South African jungle, and after he's made two or three millions calmly departs again to climb Mount McKinley, or motor through Tibet. And when his two millions are spent, he builds a town or sells a gold mine, and then buys a castle on the Hudson and a car and a motor-boat, and tries another kind of fun. He doesn't bother with employees and fiddling little plans for making them 'safer and happier,'" Babbie quoted maliciously.

"No, he doesn't," returned Mr. Thayer with asperity. "They mobbed him once in Chicago, because he'd cornered the wheat supply and the price of bread had nearly doubled."

"Was that the time he made five millions in three months?" asked Babbie blandly.

That evening, while Babbie, in a ruffly pink negligee, sat cross-legged on Madeline's couch, eating fudges and playing with the ploshkin, she explained to her two friends that the week-end party had "bored her to tears."

"There wasn't a possible man there, and Margot kept pairing me off with a fright of a millionaire who was always getting you into a corner and making you listen to wild tales

of gigantic business ventures he'd pulled off. I detest business. Money should be seen and not heard," ended Babbie sententiously.

But the next afternoon she rushed out of Flying Hoof's stall, where she was being entertained at tea by some adoring freshmen, to inform Mr. Robert Thayer that his cousin Austin had sent him kind regards.

"In a note, you know." She fluttered it before him tantalizingly. "We're both invited to another house-party, you see. He wants to know if I'm going to accept."

"And are you?" ventured Mr. Thayer. "That is, if I may ask, by way of showing a cousinly interest in Austin's happiness."

"Most certainly not," snapped Babbie fiercely.

"Ah, I beg a thousand pardons! I was only joking, Miss Hildreth."

"I'm most certainly not going, I mean," Babbie explained amiably, after a moment of frowning perplexity, and swept back to her tea-party, leaving a completely bewildered young man behind her.

He relieved his feelings by telling Betty the good news about the club-house.

"I've bought that big, old-fashioned place across the street from the factory. We couldn't have begun building before April, and it seemed out of the question to delay so long. Besides, this is just the thing, or it will be in a month, when the architect and his minions have finished with it. I told him that you people changed a barn into a tea-shop in ten days, and if he can't alter a few partitions, paper a few walls, and get in the furniture in a month, he needn't expect any more work from yours truly. So bring on your college girls, find out who wants to teach what and to whom, and tell me which ones are to go on the pay-roll and which are ready to give their services. I'll send you a list of the prospective pupils, with ages and nationalities attached." He paused and looked sharply at Betty. "Are you tired to-night, Miss Wales?"

Betty shook her head. "I've lost something, and I'm being foolish and worrying over it."

"You work too hard," Mr. Thayer decreed. "When I'm overworked I always lose my gloves. It's a sure sign. You're not to be bothered with those lists. But the trouble is, I don't know the college girls. There's got to be

somebody for a go-between. Could I hire one of the hire-able ones for a sort of secretary?"

Betty considered. "Midyears are making everybody awfully busy now and it wouldn't do to wait ten days or so, till they're over, would it? Besides, this thing will have to be managed just right to give it a good start. Why don't you ask Babbie? She's awfully good at things like that, and awfully interested in the clubhouse idea."

"Is she?" gasped Mr. Thayer.

Betty nodded. "She says she thinks the finest thing a rich man can do is to look after the men and women who are making his money for him."

"She said that?" gasped Mr. Thayer again. Then he looked pleadingly at Betty. "Would you ask her to take charge, please? I think she'd do it quicker for you."

And he hurried off, leaving Betty to piece together all the things Babbie had said and done in connection with Mr. Thayer, and all that he had said and done in connection with Babbie. Her final conclusions were, first, that Mr. Thayer was afraid of Babbie; second, that Babbie was interested in Mr. Thayer's work,

but not in Mr. Thayer ; and third, that Madeline was therefore mistaken, owing to an over-romantic tendency developed by the writing of a great many love-stories.

In any case Babbie readily agreed to post notices about the opening of the stocking factory's classes, see that the most promising volunteer teachers got the most difficult pupils, interview the Student's Aid officers about the paid instructors, and be present during the evenings of the first week to make sure that each teacher found her class and that things ran smoothly.

"It's a good excuse to delay going South until next month," she said. "Mother is just as bored by Southern resorts as I am, but she hasn't the strength of mind to break off the habit of going to them. So she'll be secretly relieved, and as proud as Punch, too, to think that I'm bossing a big evening-school. Mother's purely ornamental herself, so she admires the useful type of woman. I must write her immediately about the tea-shop's latest departure. Betty, can't you induce Mr. Thayer to serve coffee and sandwiches to the ones that learn their lessons nicely, and then

the tea-shop will be making something out of my school."

"Wait till we get our dinners started, before we begin on nine-o'clock lunches," Betty advised her.

"I shall order the very grandest dinner you can imagine for the opening night," declared Babbie enthusiastically, "so you must manage to start before I leave."

"We can have new menu cards now," put in Madeline. "I never did like the color of these, and besides I think Bob Enderby ought to put a gift-shop in one corner of the design he drew for us. It certainly ought to be noticed in some way on the menu."

"I think he ought to add a night-school too," declared Babbie playfully, "and a notice that Betty does tutoring. If we're broadening out so much, we ought to let people know all about it."

"Just because you happen to be running it, the night-school isn't a branch of the tea-shop, Babbie," demurred Madeline. "Wait until Mr. Thayer actually promises to buy the sandwiches before you consider it a part of the 'eats' business."

"Well, it's an outgrowth of it," retorted Babbie. "The tea-shop is responsible for the club-house."

"Oh, if we're going to put all that the tea-shop is responsible for on the menu," Madeline began, with a provoking little smile, "we should have to put on a picture of a broken h——"

"Come, girls," interposed Betty, hastily, foreseeing another blundering reference from Madeline to Mr. Thayer's devotion to Babbie, "don't quarrel about unimportant little things like menu cards, but let's discuss what we shall serve and what new china we need."

"Oh, new china!" cried Madeline in great excitement. "I hadn't thought of that! I shall go to New York to buy it. Now, whoever said the fat little mustard jars were an extravagance? We shall use them a lot for dinners."

Betty banged the table for order. "Now how many dinner plates shall we buy to begin with?" she inquired in businesslike tones.

Madeline banged the table noisily in her turn. "I know something much more important than dinner plates," she declared os-

tentatiously. "Do let's be businesslike, Betty, and systematic. Your haphazard methods jar upon my order-loving soul."

Betty waited resignedly.

"The most important thing is an assistant for you," Madeline went on. "You can't do more than you are doing now. If we serve dinners, there will be more marketing, more accounts, more to see to all around the place, and longer hours for the cashier."

"Oh, of course Betty must have an assistant," chimed in Babbie, "and a bigger salary. It's not fair for us to be making such good profits when she works so hard."

"You'll make more, even with a good many extra expenses, if the dinners go as I think they will," put in Betty, forcing her associates to listen, while she explained what could be done if the average dinner check was so-and-so, the average attendance so-and-so, and the additional expenses kept down to this and that.

"All right; let's serve dinners by all means," said Babbie gaily. "I hate averages, because as far as I can see they never come out the way you want them, but I'm all for

expansion. Mummy will like it too. She's awfully proud of us. Now Betty can do a go-as-you-please on the details, can't she, Madeline? We only bother by putting in our oars; we're such ignoramuses."

Empowered to choose her own assistant, Betty spent two days anxiously considering various possibilities. If only it were fall, and Katherine or Rachel were free to try this unconventional way of earning a living! And then, just at the crucial moment, when she had almost decided to ask a junior who was working her way through college to come and try the work for the rest of the term, arrived a letter from Emily Davis, with moving pathos behind its story of a bitter disappointment bravely accepted.

"I can't blame my old eyes," Emily wrote, "because they've served me long and well, and I've overdriven the poor beasties shamefully. So now they balk, and the doctor says they just must be humored. They'll hold my position in the school for me until next fall. In the meantime I'm hunting for any honest means of livelihood that doesn't require eyes. I should cry a few tears at hav-

ing to give up this perfectly splendid position that I was so elated to get ; but crying is very bad for the eyes, so I smile and smile and keep on thinking how in the world I can manage to earn my bread and butter until next September. This summer, if worse comes to worst, I can wait on table at a sea-side resort. Please don't think I'm hinting for a chance to do it at the Tally-ho. I should hate to explain to everybody I know at Harding how it happens that I'm back at an underclass girl's last resort—I, who was a star tutor way back in my junior year, and who meant to come to our reunion in June a star teacher, with all the money I borrowed to go through college paid back, and enough left for board at my sister's through a restful summer. And now the oculist's bill is gobbling up everything in sight.

“What a growl ! But this is a safety-valve letter, Betty. As you are earning your living too, I feel extra sure you'll understand.”

“What she means is, she feels sure that I won't offer her money,” Betty reflected shrewdly. “And isn't it just splendid that I can offer her a good position !”

For of course Emily was the very one to be assistant manager. To be sure, Betty hated the clerical work, and had planned to have her assistant take charge of the accounts. But the keeping of those was a small thing compared to having dear old comical Emily Davis back, with her famous "stunts," her cheerful fashion of meeting defeat and failure with a smile, and her marvelous ability to work twice as hard as any one else and yet always appear calm and collected and unhurried. Betty had a feeling that Emily would insist upon attending to the lamps and the stove. She wouldn't let her do it all, of course—she knew too well how hard it was—but just a little help would be such a relief.

Of course Babbie and Madeline were as eager as Betty to have Emily join the tea-room's force, and Emily could not have resisted the combined logic and pleading of the three letters they sent her, even if she had wanted to. So she wrote back post-haste a grateful acceptance of their offer and promised to be on hand within a fortnight.

There remained still the ploshkin project to consider. The tea-room's uninvested capital would just about buy the extra china and other equipments needed for the dinner service. Betty was averse to asking Mrs. Hildreth or Mrs. Bob for more money, and the profits had been divided in January, so they were not available. But Betty had kept her emergency fund intact all winter, as her father had advised, and she had added to it appreciably from her salary, her tutoring money, and her work for the gift-shop department. It was now well on toward spring, and the tea-shop had fully proved its money-making capacities.

"So, if you don't mind, I should like to have the ploshkins made with the money that father gave me, if it's enough—and it will be if Madeline can get them done at about what she and Mary thought would be a good investment. Then I'll sell them here, and give the shop a small commission, as the college girls did when we sold their things before Christmas."

This was perfectly satisfactory to everybody, and Madeline departed gaily to pay visits in

Bohemia, see editors, match china, and get ploshkins manufactured—a potpourri of assorted activities that thoroughly delighted her variety-loving temperament.

CHAPTER XIV

THE REVOLT OF THE "WHY-GET-UPS"

It was the dull season between midyears and spring vacation—a time that makes the ordinary Hardingite restless, and drives the clever ones to all sorts of absurdities and extravagances. The best stunts are always invented at this season, and the wildest pranks perpetrated. This year Prexy guilelessly announced in chapel that "bobbing" and "hitching" with sleds were not, in his estimation, dignified forms of recreation for the "womanly woman" who was Harding's ideal. So with dust-pan coasting also under the ban, and the ice on the skating-rink frozen humpy—just to be spiteful, Georgia Ames declared—the dull season opened ten times duller than usual.

Of course Betty heard all about the "anti-bob" ordinance, and sympathized duly with its downtrodden victims.

"There are getting to be too many old rules

in this place, anyway," declared Lucile Merri-field hotly, as they discussed the matter over their teacups in Flying Hoof's stall. "We're supposed to be sensible, reasonable creatures and to know what's permissible in this rural retreat. I shouldn't go 'hitching' in New York. I should probably wear my hat there when I went out shopping. Prexy doesn't give his sweet creation, the womanly woman, credit for ordinary intelligence."

"He wouldn't be able to if he heard you talk, my dear," Polly Eastman told her soothingly. "Have some more of Betty's Cousin Kate cookies. They're very good for the temper, and not against the rules."

"Are you sure?" demanded Lucile acidly. "There are so many rules now that I shouldn't pretend to keep them all in my head at once."

"Let's get Madeline and make her tell tea-ground fortunes," suggested Georgia. "I'm tired of all this fuss about rules."

But Madeline, who was in the loft writing, had overheard enough of the conversation to enable her to make her fortunes timely, and the "anti-bob" ordinance was not yet disposed of.

"You've got a tempest in your teacup, Lucile," she announced. "It's a frightful brain-storm brought on by the lack of your favorite outdoor exercise. Isn't 'hitching' your favorite exercise, dearie? Well, do you see that? That's a tipped-over sleigh. A brain-storm is better than an early and ignominious death encountered while 'hitching,' Lucile. But you're going to do something very silly during the brain-storm." Madeline frowned portentously over the grounds in Lucile's cup. "I think I see Prexy—yes, the venerable Prexy himself is in here. You'll be called up before the powers, Lucile, to answer for your foolishness, so beware."

Lucile smiled her subtle, far-away smile—it was first cousin to Mary Brooks's "beamish" one. "That will at least be exciting," she said. "Fluffy Dutton, what do you say to a race to see which of us can break the most of their old rules at one go?"

Fluffy shook her curly head vigorously. "I've been up before the powers once, thank you, for too many lights after ten and cutting Greek prose and being back late after Christmas. I don't care for it at all. If he'd glare

and storm it wouldn't be so bad, but when he appeals to your better judgment——" Fluffy shrugged expressively. "He treats you like an equal, and looks at you hard and shakes hands so nicely when he's finished you up. And then you go off feeling like a marked-down bargain-lot of last night's faded violets. No, thank you, Lucile. I'll race you anywhere you like except to interviews with Prexy."

"Good for you, Fluffy." Georgia patted her on the back approvingly. "I didn't think you had so much sense."

"Lucile has just as much, only she's trying to deceive us about it," put in Betty, who had come over to hear the fortunes.

And then Madeline discovered a tall, light-haired suitor in Polly's cup, and being accused of inventing him pointed him out to the satisfaction of the assembled company. And when Polly vehemently denied knowing a single light-haired man, she predicted a speedy meeting, a box of chocolates, an adventure by water, and a summer together by more water.

"Prom. man, of course," explained Georgia

easily, "invited for you by Lucile-of-the-vast-masculine-acquaintance, after your own man has decided to break his arm. Really, girls, there ought to be a rule against proms., because of the broken bones they produce. Well, Lucile's friend will take you out on Paradise, thinking he can paddle, and upset you. And then he'll spend the summer at Squirrel Island, where you always go. That's easy. Madeline, just tell me if there's a suitor in my cup, please. That's all I care about. Your presents and trips abroad don't interest me a bit."

Betty had quite forgotten this conversation when, a week or so later, Polly Eastman appeared one morning at the Tally-ho.

"Don't you want to rent your loft for a little party?" she demanded. "It's bigger than the down-town hall, and it will be so nice to sit down here between times. We want extra-good eats too, so you'll get very wealthy out of us."

"What in the world do you want to give a girl-dance for?" demanded Betty. "By junior year we were all pretty tired of them, except Helen Chase Adams, who never had a

chance to go to any other kind. This is a girl-affair, of course?"

Polly was busily examining the depleted gift-shop table. "I always meant to buy a pair of these candle-shades," she said, holding up one of the Tally-ho's specials. "Will you take the order now? Did you ask who was giving the affair, Betty? Oh, just our own crowd—the 'Why-Get-Up-to-Breakfast Club,' and a few choice spirits who've been invited to join us. Eats for thirty, I think Lucile said; and we want them very grand and quite regardless of expense. About three courses, and all nice and spicy, the way campus food never is."

"I think it's such a funny idea," pursued Betty. "Your house party comes before long, doesn't it? Why in the world don't you wait for that?"

"Nothing but lemonade for refreshments and a crowd of stupidities that you can't get away from," explained Polly succinctly. "Will it be all right about the loft, Betty? I'm due at chemistry lab., and I promised the others that I'd have this business all arranged by lunch-time."

"Why, ye-es," began Betty doubtfully. "You can have it, I think. The gift-shop workroom may as well be closed until next fall, and Madeline's papers are used to being moved around. I suppose a little dance like this is just like a party in a campus room. You don't have to get permission from anyone, do you?"

"Easily not," Polly assured her calmly. "It's exactly the same thing as a dinner down here, or a spread. You've had spreads down here, haven't you?"

Betty nodded.

"Then I'll tell them it's all right." Polly tucked her armful of books more securely under her arm and started off. "Did I say that it was next Saturday evening? We want the eats at half-past nine, before everything but the last dance."

Betty began planning the menu and estimating expenses at once, reflecting as she did so that there was certainly no accounting for tastes, and half wishing she had suggested to Polly that a three course supper wasn't at all in keeping with the best Harding traditions. "The Merry Hearts" had not exactly handed

down their ideals to the "Why-Get-Ups," but the one society had largely taken the other's place in the life of the college.

"This kind of thing makes people talk about the fashionable amusements here and the money it costs to go through Harding College. I wish I'd ——" Betty remembered suddenly that her first duty was to the tea-shop, and went at her figures in earnest, trying to feel properly elated over the big order and the new source of revenue suggested by Polly's idea of renting the loft.

It was Wednesday of the next week, and oddly enough not one of the "Why-Get-Ups" had been in for breakfast, lunch, or tea. They were saving up for their spread-eagle party, Betty thought, until the high-pitched chatter of two Belden House freshmen explained the "Why-Get-Ups'" unusual party, and suggested several other possible reasons why they stayed away from the Tally-ho.

"I'm just broken hearted," one freshman declared in her shrill treble. "You see when I asked Marie to our house-party, she promised to come if she could have a dance with Lucile Merrifield. And now Lucile isn't com-

ing. I thought girls always went to their house-parties."

"Goodness, no, dear," the other told her importantly. "That is, they always have before, but you can trust this crowd to be different. Haven't you heard anything about the fuss?"

The shrill-voiced freshman shook her head sadly.

"Well, of course it's a dead secret," the other went on, "but my roommate is an intimate friend of Miss Eastman's. They asked her to join them, but she decided not to. She told me because she was just dying to talk it over with somebody. That was away back last week. It's leaked out more now, so I'm sure there's no harm in my telling you. Of course everybody will know Saturday night when they don't appear."

"Do go on," begged the other.

At this point Betty, who scorned eavesdropping, made an errand to the kitchen. As early as possible that evening she went up to the Belden. Polly's room was dark, but Betty found the "Why-Get-Ups" gathered in full force in Georgia's corner single. Their greet-

ings were constrained, and they plunged at once into a lively discussion of the last number of the "Argus," which had come out that afternoon.

But Betty refused to delay. "I've come on business," she announced. "I want to know if your house dance is this Saturday?"

"Why, yes, I believe it is," Polly admitted casually, after a nudge from Lucille, "but we're not going. I told you we were sick of weak lemonade and stupid partners. Have you planned our three courses?"

Betty turned upon Georgia. "Why are you all cutting your own house dance?" she demanded.

Georgia grinned sociably. "Bored," she explained briefly. "Dying for excitement. Pining for novelty. Ask Madeline: she understands the feeling."

"But she wouldn't do this kind of thing," protested Betty. "It's so conspicuous. You needn't have filled out your cards,—Madeline never would,—but you ought to go. And you certainly ought not to have an affair of your own that night."

"Oh, tell her all about it," put in Fluffy

Dutton. "I never thought it was fair not to. She isn't a faculty, but she's a public institution. She ought to go into this with her eyes open. Besides when she's heard the whole story, I'm sure she'll stand for us. Mrs. Hinsdale couldn't, of course. I only hope that prep. school-teacher Alice is going to ask for chaperon won't be too curious or too conscientious. Fire away, Lucile."

"Well——" Lucile paused. When you came to tell it to an outsider there wasn't so much of a case as there had seemed to be when they discussed it hotly among their injured selves. "Well," repeated Lucile, "to begin with, we'd all asked men, except Georgia, and she'd asked a prep. girl. And then Dickie Garrison—she's house president—went and made rules against them. At least there had always been a rule against men, but everybody smuggled them in just the same and danced with them too, up in the gallery. But Dickie said to cut it out. We wouldn't have cared, only we were sure she knew about our men and had cooked up this plot at the last minute just to spite us. We aren't very popular with Dickie."

"And then they ruled out asking prep. girls," put in Georgia.

"And finally Dickie came to me," Fluffy took up the tale of woe, "and said what would I think of the next house-meeting's taking up the matter of lights after ten. That was just insulting—to say to me."

"So then we decided to—to revolt," ended the silent, straight-haired Dutton twin. "There's no rule against giving an off-campus party, with men invited. Nobody ever had one before that we know of, because nobody ever thought of it. So we've just kept dark to avoid possible fusses."

"And if we can only get the chaperon business settled, it's all right," added Lucile. "Isn't it now, Betty? We've asked six Hilton House juniors to come too, and I've invited a lot of extra men."

"Including a light-haired one for me," explained Polly gaily, "according to the prophecy of the seeress Madeline."

There was a strained little silence.

"Of course," said Betty bravely at last, "you don't remember when the prom. began. It was in my sister Nan's senior year, and

I've heard her tell how it was started on purpose to give the girls one good chance to have their men friends up all at once and avoid just this kind of thing. It was against the rules then to ——"

"It's not now," declared Lucile hotly.

"Then why didn't you ask one of the faculty to chaperon you?" Betty asked in a queer, frightened voice, for she hated to interfere or to seem priggish.

"Why indeed?" Georgia echoed. "Just what Mary Brooks Hinsdale asked us. She said she guessed it was all right, but a faculty's wife couldn't do anything reckless."

"If you don't want us, Betty, we can take the down-town hall," Lucile explained coldly. "Only we depend on your sense of honor not to give us away."

"Don't be cross, Lucile," commented the straight-haired twin. "Betty's not that sort."

Betty smiled a thank you, and rose to go. "I don't know what to say to-night about the loft," she said, "but I'll let you know the first thing in the morning."

Directly after chapel next day the straight-haired twin appeared, frankly apologetic.

"The prep. teacher turned us down too," she said, "and Georgia plucked up courage to ask the new math. assistant, and she turned us down. We don't know any town women. We wish—Fluffy and I do anyway—that we had told our men about the new rule and asked girls instead. This sort of thing is too much like work."

Betty considered an instant. She had intended to consult Madeline, but Madeline had overslept that morning. "Tell the girls that if they'll put it off till next Saturday they may have it here, and that I'll find a chaperon myself."

"You angel!" cried the twin. "Lucile won't like it because it won't spite Dickie, so particularly, if you don't have it the night of the Beldon House affair, but the rest will jump at your magnificent offer. Betty, will you come to the regular house dance with me?"

As soon as she had received official notice that her proposal was accepted Betty went straight to Miss Ferris and explained the whole thing, as she understood it, from Georgia's candid statement of motives to the Dutton twins' admission of regret.

"But Lucile and Polly are so proud," she added. "If they had to give it all up now they'd only go ahead and think up something sillier to do. So I thought if you'd chaperon it, and they promised not to boast of it — They're all going to the house dance now, except maybe Lucile, and most of the few girls who know about their first plan will think it's given up. So it will create a lot less talk and excitement than if I'd made them find another place, and they'd telegraphed for one of their mothers and had their party this week Saturday, in spite of everything, as they first planned."

Miss Ferris smiled at her. "That sounds like good logic. I'll come; but suppose we don't tell them who the chaperon is to be until they come to their dance."

To arrive at what one has supposed to be a secret and forbidden entertainment and to find the head of the philosophy department waiting smilingly to receive you and your friends — well, it makes you feel at once foolish and relieved. The "Why-Get-Up" party was an undoubted success, but Georgia Ames told Miss Ferris that they were all ashamed of it.

"Because when you mean to be mean, why, it's not your fault if Betty switches you off the track. Of course we all knew that we weren't up here to be giving man-dances. We'll stand by you, Miss Ferris, any way we can."

The "Why-Get-Up-to-Breakfast Club" stood by Georgia's promise. It paid to humor their little whim, if only because Fluffy Dutton's light was out at ten for the rest of the year, and Lucile Merrifield's chapel attendance was perfect. As for the Tally-ho Tea-Shop, it had never seemed like the other places of its kind in town, but now more than ever its unofficial connection with the college was noted and commented upon.

"Isn't there anything that girl can teach?" the president asked, when he heard about the "Why-Get-Up" party. "We'll have to find something to keep her here indefinitely. She knows how to make things run."

But all Betty cared about was that the "Why-Get-Ups" were one and all on the same friendly and easy-going footing with her as ever.

CHAPTER XV

A SEA OF TROUBLES

MR. THAYER'S month having been much shortened by his tremendous energy, the factory classes were successfully started, and Babbie, with her tantalizing fashion of appearing haughtily distant one minute and amazingly friendly the next, was off for the gay Southern resorts that she professed to hate. At some one of them, Mr. Thayer was morally certain, his fascinating cousin Austin would make it a point to find her. White flannels, he reflected glumly, were notably becoming to Austin's style.

Eugenia's three weeks were nearly gone too, and the lost theme had not come to light. Betty had questioned every one who could possibly have seen it or taken it from her desk, and she had hunted through the tea-shop from the remotest corner of the loft to the shed where the kerosene can was kept. Poor Eugenia had turned her room topsyturvy on

three separate occasions, on the principle of "three times and out," and she had begged all her friends to do likewise with theirs, if they loved her one little bit. She had passed her midyears, and was doing her best with all her courses, though she sadly declared it was no use at all, since Miss Raymond had never believed she wrote her theme and would certainly not give her another chance.

"I don't know that I blame her," sighed Eugenia, "only I think she might know that if I was going to make up a lie I'd have made up a better one than that. If I have to take that course over in the 'flunked-out' class that she's organizing to begin next week, I shall d-die. Just think of writing a lot of extra themes on top of everything else—in spring term too, that you all say is so lovely, when nobody expects so terribly much of you. She'll expect more of you, Miss Wales!" ended Eugenia vindictively.

Betty did not dare to hold out any encouragement, but she secretly suspected that Miss Raymond was keeping Eugenia on tenter-hooks, as good discipline, until the last minute, and then meant to let her off easily. Betty

couldn't bear to consider the other alternative ; she should always have to feel partly responsible for Eugenia's misery. The fact that Eugenia assured her sweetly that she wasn't at all responsible and kept on doing nice things for Dorothy only made it all the harder.

And then came Emily Davis, a little pale and worn with work done under difficulties and with worry over the future, but as gay as ever at heart. She slipped in upon Betty unannounced one snowy afternoon.

"Indade an' you're a sight for sore eyes," she cried, rushing at her with a kiss and a hug. "And it's destroyed I am for a talk wid ye an' a sup o' your lovely tay."

Emily's Irish had been a prime favorite with 19—, and Betty laughed with delight at hearing it again. "Poor lady, did you have a horrid trip up?" she asked, as she rang her little bell for Nora.

"Distressin', me darlint, distressin'," Emily went on solemnly. "What wid cryin' children an' worritin' wimin, wakin' the place wid their noise, I could nayther ——"

"Sh!" warned Betty. "Here comes Nora."

But she was just too late. Nora had over-

heard the mimicry of her race's speech. Her Irish feelings were hurt, and her Irish temper kindled. When Betty introduced Emily and explained that she had come to share the responsibilities of the tea-room, Nora tossed her head and said, "Yes'm, and is that all you wanted?" with an air of an offended duchess.

She served the tea with great care, but in a haughty silence that worried Betty and amused Emily.

"Shall I tell her that I'm sorry?" she asked Betty. "Or would that only make matters worse?"

Betty was afraid it would, and promised to explain herself, if Nora gave her an opening, which Nora did with a vengeance the minute Emily had gone off to hunt for a boarding-place and see her old friends.

"I'll be going, when my week is up," she announced briskly.

Betty stared. "Oh, Nora, you wouldn't leave me—just when I need you most, too, to make the dinners go off splendidly, as I know you can. What's the trouble?"

"I don't think I'll like taking orders from the new lady—I forget her name."

“Why do you think that, Nora?” Betty threw out as a feeler.

“She’s not my idea of a lady, Miss Betty, if you’ll excuse me saying it out. I’m sorry to go an’ leave you in the lurch, Miss, but I should always be feeling bothered whenever she was by, and when you’re bothered you can’t do your work right. So this is a week’s notice, ma’am.”

In vain Betty explained that Emily had meant no harm by her imitation. In vain she argued, pleaded, coaxed, and scolded; Nora was firm. She had given her week’s notice, and in a week she would go.

Emily was “destroyed” in earnest when she heard the news; the feeling that she had repaid Betty’s kindness with careless trouble-making—or perhaps it was more the reaction from the strain of wondering what was ahead of her—combined with a bad cold to send her to bed for a few days. With all her helpers gone, Betty found it very hard to find time to hunt for a new waitress. In spite of alluring advertisements and diligent search by herself and her ever-faithful allies, Mary and Georgia, no substitute for Nora was

forthcoming. But Belden-House-Annie, who had no sympathy whatever with her sister Nora's "flighty ways," had sent word by Lucile, who told Georgia, who told Betty, that she had heard of somebody who might do, and that the somebody aforesaid would come to see Betty that same afternoon.

So Betty sat waiting for her, watching the hands of the clock that went round much too fast, considering that the waitress did not come, until the door opened, and her hopes took a sudden bound and then dropped dead. It wasn't a waitress. It was a gentleman. He looked like the kind who would think the tea was cold and the cakes stale, and he would very likely be right too. Nora had grown very careless since she had decided to leave. Betty fervently wished that he had not come, but she went forward, with her cordial little smile, to meet him, where he stood staring uncertainly around the room.

"Did you want some tea?" she asked timidly. "Because if you'll sit down ——"

The gentleman looked her over closely. "Tea? Why, yes, I suppose I want tea. It's the thing to want at this hour, isn't it? You

do a pretty big business here, don't you?" He glanced toward the stalls, where groups of girls were gathered.

"Yes, a good many people come," Betty told him pleasantly. "Would you like a little table in the window or one near the fire?"

He chose one near the fire, overlooking the whole room. He ordered nothing but a cup of tea, which he sipped and sipped, while he stared at the girls who came in and at those who went out, at the china, the decorations, the names over the stalls. These last appeared to interest him particularly, and he craned his neck until Betty feared it would break, to decipher the one at the furthest end of the line.

Finally he got up and strolled over to her desk.

"Nice little place you've got here," he said, staring hard at her, with his sharp ferret-eyes. "Very pretty decorations and all that."

"Thank you," said Betty politely. "I'm glad you like it. We've tried to make it look attractive."

"You—er—the owner or manager or something of that kind?"

Betty explained her position briefly, wondering why she hated so to talk to him.

"And do people drink enough afternoon tea to pay your partners good profits on their investment?" he demanded.

Betty hesitated. Certainly a stranger had no right to pry into the Tally-ho's private affairs in this cool fashion, and yet, since they were doing well, what harm could there be in saying so? "We serve lunches as well as tea, you know," she explained tentatively, "and next week we shall begin to serve dinners."

Just then Lucile Eastman and a crowd of her friends, who had been occupying the stall named after Black Beauty, bore down upon Betty's desk, laughing and chattering over their bill, which was to have been divided because the party was a "Dutch treat," but which Nora had put all together by mistake, and summarily refused to change.

"Now jam is twenty cents," Lucile was explaining, "and toast with cheese is fifteen, and not a single one of us had the right change. Please help us to get it right, Betty dear. Now you go first, Polly. You had sandwiches, and they're twenty cents."

Betty got them all straightened out at last, and by that time the party in Flying Hoof's stall had finished too. But the gentleman, who had been fairly swept aside by the crowd of hurrying girls, waited patiently enough until they had gone, and then returned to Betty and the interrupted conversation.

"Well," he began briskly, "I suppose you wouldn't be branching out if you weren't pretty prosperous."

In spite of her annoyance, Betty smiled at his persistence. "I suppose not," she admitted. "We have a gift department too." She pointed to the table. "It's pretty nearly stagnated ever since Christmas, but a new specialty for it, that we hope everybody will buy, will be here very soon. We're taking orders now, from this sample." She held out the ploshkin for him to see.

The gentleman shook his head scornfully. "None of that tomfoolery for me, thank you. But there's money in it—I know that. Here's ten cents for my tea. And here's my card."

Betty stared blankly from the bit of pasteboard he had handed her to the gentleman whose name it bore. He was smiling a queer,

disagreeable smile, as if, for some reason that she could not guess, he found her very amusing. When he had made sure that his name meant nothing to her, his smile widened.

"Don't know who I am, eh? Got to feel pretty much at home in this barn, haven't you? Feel a good deal as if you owned it, don't you?"

Betty failed to see the connection between his first question and the other; but then, all his questions had been queer. "No," she replied steadily, "I don't know who you are, sir. I'm sorry, since you think I ought to. I'm very stupid about names. We don't own this barn; we rent it. And—and I think I must ask you not to question me any more about our business. I am employed by the others. I can't see how anything I have told you could do us any harm, but I don't think it's at all businesslike for me to discuss my employers' affairs with you."

"Maybe you'll think differently when I tell you that I'm the owner of this property," snapped the man defiantly. Betty gasped. "Thought I was in Italy, didn't you?" He grinned at her cheerfully.

Betty nodded. "In Europe somewhere."

"Thought my agent was an easy mark, didn't you?"

"He has always treated us very fairly and politely"—Betty rushed indignantly to the agent's defense—"and I don't see how——"

"'Fairly and politely.'" The man, whose card read Mr. James Harrison, repeated the words jeeringly. "Well, my agent's got to do more than treat young ladies 'fairly and politely,' I can tell you, to suit me. Do you know what the repairs on this place cost me?"

Betty had no idea.

Mr. Harrison named a sum. "I suppose you do know what rent you pay?"

"Of course," said Betty with great dignity. "We've never been late with it so far."

"You pay by the month. You've no contract—no lease. Isn't that so?"

"Why—y-yes," Betty admitted doubtfully. "I supposed that as long as we paid our rent and didn't injure your property, we could stay."

"Certainly you can stay," he told her affably, "only I'm going to raise the rent. The rent you pay is ridiculous. From the

beginning of next month just multiply it by three, please."

"But—but we can't afford to pay as much as that," Betty told him. "That's why we didn't start in New York—because rents were so high. The first thing we asked your agent, before we even came to look at this place, was the amount of the rent."

Mr. Harrison looked at her coldly. "Well, he was an idiot, that's all. I'm not in the real estate business for my health. This barn never paid decent returns. Now that we've found a use for it, there's no reason why it shouldn't. Think it over. Make up your mind to cut down expenses and profits; and if you should decide to quit, why, I'll buy out your fixtures. I'll warrant I can rent at my own price within a month."

Betty had been thinking desperately. "I don't know very much about business, Mr. Harrison," she said at last, "but it seems to me that if we pay rent by the month we ought to have a full month's notice that you have decided to raise the price. A maid who is paid by the week always gives at least a week's notice, and if we wanted to leave we

should certainly have told your agent at least a month beforehand."

"Very well," he said briskly. "This is the twenty-third. Next month goes at the old rate; after that multiply it by three or quit. Good-afternoon."

"Good-afternoon," Betty told him, with a sigh of relief that he had gone, even though he left such a dreadful ultimatum behind him. But he hadn't gone. He stuck his head in the door to say that he would "call around again" in a few days for her decision.

Left alone at last Betty looked at her watch. Six o'clock—Belden-House-Annie's waitress wouldn't come now. Perhaps it was just as well. Perhaps Nora would stay for the month—the last month of the Tally-ho. They couldn't pay three times their present rent. No matter how successful the dinners were, that was out of the question. The profits, outside of the gift department, had been comparatively small, and the busiest part of the year was now over. If Mr. Harrison persisted in his determination to raise the rent, they would have to stop, or move—and there was no place to move to.

Betty looked around the pretty room, with all its attractive "features," and suddenly realized what the closing of the tea-shop would mean. Madeline and Babbie would be disappointed; Mrs. Hildreth and Mrs. Enderby would lose a part, at least, of their investment. But she—and little Dorothy—and Emily Davis—Betty reached out for a sheet of note-paper to write to Madeline the resourceful, and then dropped her head down on the big desk and cried as if her heart would break.

Why hadn't she thought of all this before Mr. Harrison left? She had, in a confused fashion; but instead of helping her to argue with him her despair had made her dumb. If only he would let them stay until June! Then Emily would be provided for through the summer, and father and mother would be back from Mexico. Dorothy could go home and Betty too, with a nice little sum left over to show for her winter's work. But if the Tally-ho stopped now, where could she sell the ploskins? And with the emergency fund gone, and no salary after next month——

Betty could hear father saying with his twinkling, amused smile, "You oughtn't to have counted your chickens before they were hatched, little girl. It's a bad habit."

But who would have thought that everything could go to pieces now, after such a splendid beginning?

Betty wiped her eyes and composed a telegram to Madeline: "If possible countermand order for ploshkins. Rent raised. Will write."

Then she reflected that a letter would reach Madeline by the first mail in the morning, and as she couldn't countermand an order for ploshkins before that time, a letter would do as well as a telegram. But before she wrote it she must go and have dinner with Dorothy.

She found Eugenia and Dorothy on the floor playing paper-dolls, quite oblivious of the fact that it was past dinner-time.

"I feel like a murderer the night before he's electrocuted," Eugenia explained cheerfully. "To-night I am enjoying myself, for to-morrow I've got to go and tell Miss Raymond that my lost theme is still lost. And she'll point with her awful finger to the

'flunked-out' class, and I shall accept my doom."

Dorothy tumbled over into Eugenia's lap and hugged her sympathetically. "Maybe you'll find it to-night," she said.

"You're sure as sure you haven't hidden it?" Eugenia demanded solemnly.

"Of course."

"Then I think it's in the bay of the ploshkin," Eugenia declared impressively, "and that's too far off to go to to-night, so I may as well be off to dinner. By the way, Betty, I want a dozen ploshkins out of the very first that come."

Instead of the pleased smile that Eugenia had expected, Betty's face wore a positively tragic expression. "I'm not sure that we shall have any to sell, Eugenia. There's some trouble. I can't explain to-night. I——"

Eugenia's little face hardened as she listened to Betty's astonishing announcement. She had not lost her ambition to take a place in Harding's charmed circle, and she had counted on the ploshkin and her connection with it to help her in becoming that envied and enviable creature, a "prominent girl."

“Madeline Ayres and Fluffy Dutton made it, but it was Eugenia Ford’s idea”—that was what she had looked forward to people’s saying. And Polly Eastman was writing a song called “The Bay where the Ploshkin Bides” for Tibbie Ware, soprano soloist of the Glee Club, to sing for her encore number at the spring concert. There wouldn’t be point enough to the song if there was only one ploshkin. Being naturally silly and suspicious, Eugenia now scented a deep-laid plot against her happiness. Without stopping to reason out the absurdity of her idea, she disentangled herself from Dorothy’s caressing arms.

“You don’t need to explain that,” she said. “The only thing I really want explained is where the theme I left on your desk went to. Good-night.”

So that was what Eugenia really thought! Betty sat very still wondering what would come next.

“I’m homesick for my dear mother, Betty.” Little Dorothy, awed by Eugenia’s coldness and her beloved sister’s forbidding silence, was very near to tears.

Betty held out her arms. "So am I," she said, and in a minute more the two sisters, clasped tight in each other's arms, were crying out all their troubles. Betty came to her senses first.

"We mustn't be such sillies," she told Dorothy, with a watery attempt at a smile. "Mother wouldn't ever get homesick for two such big cry-babies as we are. Now come and let me bathe your face, and then we'll go right down to dinner. No, it's too late. We'll go over to the tea-shop and cook a nice little supper for ourselves. That will be lots of fun, won't it?"

"Ye-es," agreed Dorothy faintly. "Can we have strawberry jam?"

"All you want," Betty promised, wishing that she too was at the age when strawberry jam could make her forget her woes.

CHAPTER XVI

THE MYSTERY SOLVED

BETTY found it very hard to keep her mind on the preparations for supper. Dorothy's happy little babble of questions and frantic efforts to "help" with everything, drove her to the verge of distraction. Betty wanted some crackers and coffee and a chance to write to Madeline—Babbie had not yet sent any address, and was, besides, too far away to help much in the present crisis. But Dorothy insisted upon creamed chicken on toast and hot chocolate, and wished to treat strawberry jam as an entrée and have "regular dessert" besides. Betty acquiesced in all her demands not so much from good-nature as because she was sure that another flood of tears would come the minute she said no. But she couldn't make ice-cream, which was Dorothy's idea of "regular dessert," and not a bit had been left over from the day's sales.

"Just remember how you love 'whips,'" she coaxed, and made one out of her share of the cream for the chocolate.

Dorothy watched the proceedings suspiciously.

"Well, but a 'whip' always has jelly in the bottom," she objected.

Betty suggested using strawberry jam.

"Not that kind—real jelly. I shall be sick of strawberry jam if I have it so much."

Betty sighed despairingly, and then smiled. "All right, we'll turn it into charlotte russe," she said, "with this big slice of cake underneath."

Dorothy wanted to know which was Charlotte—the cake or the cream—and Betty craftily encouraged the discussion, so that little Dorothy would enjoy her dessert and not notice that she was taking all the cream away from Betty, which would have distressed her dreadfully.

"And now we'll pile the dishes up, and Bridget will do them in the morning," Betty suggested, when they had finished.

"Oh, let's do them ourselves and s'prise Bridget," objected Dorothy, who was begin-

ning to surmise that Betty was in a hurry to be rid of her. No matter how sleepy she was, Dorothy never wanted to go to bed, and to-night she was wide awake.

"Couldn't you do them and surprise me?" Betty asked. "I have a long, long letter to write to Madeline, and I want to get started, because I'm very tired and I thought I'd like to go to bed when you do."

"All right," agreed Dorothy, and Betty lighted her desk-lamp and two candles, because candle-light is so soothing and luxurious, found a fresh sheet of paper to take the place of the one that was still damp with tears, and had gone as far as, "Dear Madeline, I have some very bad news for you," when Dorothy fluttered back.

"I thought it all over," she announced, "and I thought it would be more of a s'prise for Bridget if I didn't do the dishes. She can't imagine what it is when she sees them all piled up in her clean sink. But if I did them, it wouldn't s'prise you a bit, 'cause you knew I was doing them."

"All right. Now we're all surprised," said Betty absently. "So you see if you can't

think of something nice to do while I write my letter."

"Haven't you written it yet?" Dorothy demanded, with an elaborate show of amazement. "Well, now I'm the most s'prised one of all! I thought I stayed out there ages-an'-ages."

Betty smiled and went on writing, while Dorothy stood staring disconsolately at her.

"It's been ages-an'-ages now," she declared at the end of three minutes by the clock.

"Oh, Dorothy, do be quiet!" began Betty impatiently. And then, as the smallest sister's lips quivered ominously, "Remember, dearie, you're my company, and a company always helps along. This letter I'm writing is on business about the tea-room, and you can help me just lots by being nice and quiet until I get it all written."

Dorothy eyed her sister mournfully. "I thought that when you had company come to see you, you played what they wanted to, and waited till they'd gone home to do what you wanted to your own self. That's what m-mother always said." Dorothy gulped miserably over the "mother."

"Yes, that's one kind of company," Betty explained patiently, "and you are that kind of company too. But you said you wanted to be the other kind—the kind brother Will told you about, that people have to keep them in business. And I told you you might be, so we're Betty Wales & Co., aren't we?"

Dorothy nodded solemnly. "That's why I help Nora clean the silver and put the menu cards around on all the tables 'most every day."

"Of course it is," Betty took her up eagerly. "You help a lot—I couldn't get along at all without my dear little company. But you'll help the most you ever have if you'll be just as quiet as a little gray mouse until I've finished my letter."

Dorothy considered. "I might draw pictures," she suggested tentatively at last.

"Of course you might." Betty handed her a pencil and paper.

"But I haven't any good place to sit," Dorothy demurred. "I ought to have a desk just as much as you."

"Dorothy Wales,"—Betty's voice was very

solemn,—“if I let you sit down here, will you promise, ‘cross your heart,’ not to speak another word until I’ve finished my letter?”

Dorothy nodded her head so vigorously that her hair ribbon came off and had to be tied on again. Then she established herself at the desk, and Betty lighted more candles and moved her writing materials into the stall of Jack of Hearts. The big room was still, save for the scratching of Betty’s pen and an occasional loud “ahem” from Dorothy, whose throat was always affected queerly in church or anywhere else where she was denied the joys of fluent conversation.

As Betty wrote, the hopelessness of the situation grew clearer and clearer. It seemed a waste of words to explain it all, when there was absolutely nothing to be done.

“What do girls know about business, anyway?” Will had said that with his most scornful air, when Betty had first proposed the tea-room project. Well, he was right. A man would have thought about a contract. A man would have managed somehow to make out a case in behalf of the Tally-ho. But how? Betty went over the conversation, trying to

think what she could have said, how she could have answered Mr. Harrison's questions so as to defeat his plans. But she had no inspiration. He was the owner of the barn. If he wanted higher rent, he had a right to it. To be sure, people sometimes wanted what they couldn't get. But he had said —

"I ought to have taken him up about that," Betty reflected sadly. "I ought to have asked him if he was perfectly sure that any other people would pay such a lot more than we have. Madeline would have got him all confused about it, and perhaps he'd have let us stay."

She went mournfully over the scene again bit by bit.

"I wonder what he wants our decorations for," she reflected. "'They're only good for a tea-room. Then he must mean to use this for a tea-room. But if he rents it all decorated, of course it's worth more. Why didn't I think to say that? Why didn't I make him think we would certainly go right on somewhere else? He can't steal our name and our ideas. It's not fair. Madeline must come and talk to him."

And she returned with new energy to her letter, trying to make the case seem as urgent as possible, and Madeline's presence absolutely necessary. Madeline was having a beautiful time in Bohemia; Dick Blake had told her that her stories were improving, and one of them had actually been accepted by an obscure magazine that "paid on publication." Madeline had celebrated this landmark in her Literary Career by giving a dinner at Mr. Bob's latest find in the way of Italian cafés, and she had discovered, over the coffee, that four of her six guests had been honored by the same magazine, and that all were still waiting patiently for the years to bring around the mystic time of publication.

"Who cares? It was a delicious dinner, and just as much fun as if I had really arrived," Madeline had written Betty. "And now the other four are all going to be game and celebrate too."

Betty realized how much persuasion it would take to detach Madeline from four impending celebrations, and begged her with all the eloquence she could command to come to the rescue of the Tally-ho. She was just folding her

letter when a queer little squeal from Dorothy made her jump.

"I'm through now, Company," she called, "so you can chatter away as fast as you like. What's the matter?"

"I opened the secret drawer all by myself," cried Dorothy in an excited treble. "Nobody showed me. I just heard you and Madeline and Miss Mary—I mean Mrs. Mary—talking about how to do it. And I remembered, and after I got tired of drawing pictures for magazines I did it. Look!" and she danced over to Jack of Hearts' stall with the secret drawer in her hand.

"Why, Dorothy Wales!" began Betty in astonishment. "I don't believe I could have opened that myself. Why, there's something in it. What! Oh, Dorothy, you darling, you've helped now, I can tell you! Why, Dorothy Wales, do you know what you've done? You've found Eugenia's theme."

"If you'd asked me I'd have found it before," announced Dorothy with dignity.

"What do you mean, little sister? Did you hide away Eugenia's theme in that drawer?"

"Of course not. But I'd have looked every-

where and when I came to this place, why there I'd have seen it."

"But Madeline and I looked there," explained Betty in perplexity, "and the drawer was empty then. So if you haven't put it in there since, some one else has."

"Here's another paper," said little Dorothy, handing Betty a card. "What does it say? I can't read that queer kind of printing."

"Well, if that isn't the strangest thing!" Betty quite forgot to tell Dorothy that the card said, "Mrs. George Garrison Hinsdale, Thursdays." "Mary put that in there herself the day she opened the drawer—I remember she said we might lose the combination and then, years after, her card would be found there, and people would wonder what the things she wrote on the back could mean. See: 'Perfect Patron, Promoter of Ploshkins, Candle-shades, and Cousin Kate's Cookies.' And that card most certainly wasn't there either, when Madeline and I had the drawer open hunting for Eugenia's theme."

"You didn't look very hard, I guess," said little Dorothy wisely. But Betty was over at the desk, putting back the secret drawer with

Mary's card still in it. Then she went through the combination, and when the drawer came out it was empty again.

"Goodness, but this is funny!" she said, shutting it in hurriedly. "But I think I see how it happens. Now, Dorothy, you open the drawer, please."

And when Dorothy opened it, there was the card. She had used the second combination that Madeline had hit upon, and Betty had used the first. There were two secret drawers, only one of which could be opened at a time. They were side by side, and it took close inspection to notice the slight difference in their positions. When Madeline had shown Mary how to find the drawer she had used the second combination, and it was that drawer that had stayed open all day and into which Eugenia's ill-fated theme had slipped. But when Madeline had looked for the theme, she had happened to use the other combination, and consequently had opened the wrong drawer.

Betty hastily added a postscript to her letter : "Eugenia's theme is found. There are two secret drawers in the desk, and it was in the other."

Then she took Dorothy home, for it was long past her bedtime, and mailed her letter, which must reach Madeline without fail the first thing in the morning, so as to give her the earliest possible chance to countermand the ploshkin order and get ready to start for Harding. She reached the campus on her other errand just in time to hear the college clock toll out the last strokes of ten and to see the shadow of the Belden House matron and her candle stalk majestically down the length of the lower hall. That meant locked doors everywhere, so Betty went home and to bed. She dreamed that Eugenia Ford was throwing the Tally-ho dishes at Miss Raymond, who was standing on a table pelt-ing Eugenia with handfuls of oats pulled from the big horseshoe over the fireplace. And through the door to the kitchen wound a procession of little ploshkins, who hopped along exactly as Billy and Willy Stocking had at the Christmas party.

She woke up later than usual the next morning with a queer feeling that something unpleasant had happened. In a minute she remembered, and resolved not to waste time

in worry, but to get Eugenia's theme to her as soon as possible and then devote herself to persuading Nora to postpone her departure a little.

Eugenia received her with studied coldness. She was "very much relieved" to have her theme back. Perhaps Betty would explain to Miss Raymond.

Betty was quite willing to do that. She didn't blame Eugenia for being vexed about the theme and disappointed about the ploskins. She would have been, in Eugenia's place, no doubt; but when she asked Eugenia if she should be down in the afternoon to see Dorothy, and Eugenia replied coldly that she was very busy, and never even sent a message of thanks to the little girl for finding the missing theme—then Betty was vexed in her turn. Dorothy wasn't to blame for any of Eugenia's troubles. It would be just as sensible for Miss Raymond to be disagreeable to her because her desk had two secret drawers.

But Miss Raymond was very friendly and very much interested in the two drawers, which she promised to come and see for herself soon. And Nora, won by the suspicion

of tears in Betty's eyes and by the honor of being entrusted with Betty's unhappy secret, promised to stay a few days longer, until Madeline had come up and they knew how matters stood.

Madeline arrived that very afternoon.

"Show me the drawers," she demanded before she was well inside the Tally-ho, and to Betty's dismay she utterly refused to talk business, while she sat for an hour opening one drawer after another, and hunting through the recesses of the desk for more sliding panels or hidden springs.

"For if there are two drawers, there may just as well be three or even four," she said. "And who knows what may be in them or how long they've been lost and forgotten? Don't look so disgusted, Betty. I ordered the ploskins the first day I was in New York, and this morning it was too late to change. To-morrow I'll hunt up your dreadful Mr. Harrison and try my blarney on him, though after the way you managed Dick Blake for Eleanor when we were sophomores, I don't see how you expect me to succeed where you've failed."

"This was so unexpected," Betty explained. "He frightened all my ideas away, because he came at me so suddenly. I'm never any good at impromptus."

Madeline sighed. "And that's all I am good for. Now I may struggle over this drawer business for hours and find nothing, and then some day, when I'm not trying, I shall just put my hand out and snap the right spring. It's horribly provoking—gives you such a lazy, purposeless feeling at times."

Evidently Madeline didn't care much about the disaster that threatened the Tally-ho. She could sit and play with an old-fashioned desk, not asking a question about all the matters that Betty had not taken time to write of fully, nor making a single plan for the campaign against Mr. Harrison. Well, if she believed so thoroughly in her impromptu inspirations, why should she bother with making plans? If she only would act as if she cared a little—as if she realized what the failure of the tea-room meant to Betty. But she only played with the drawers, and gave absurd accounts of the Literary Celebrations. The next one

was to be a roller-skating party, and not one of the crowd had ever been on roller-skates before.

"But the first one whose story is printed is going to reimburse the rest of us for the doctors and the liniments we expect to need," Madeline explained, "and Bob Enderby has solemnly promised to ask the editor of 'The Leisure Hour' to come and meet his near-contributors. It's to-morrow night. Now say I'm not businesslike if you dare, to come straight up here and miss it all." Then she laughed. "I may as well 'fess up that it was only the postscript about the secret drawer that brought me. But that doesn't matter, does it? Because now that I'm here, I shall do my full duty by Mr. Harrison."

But the next morning Madeline came back in dismay from her visit to Mr. Harrison's Harding office.

"He's away," she lamented. "The agent was there, and I talked to him; but he can't do anything. He's in deep disgrace now for letting us have so many repairs. And Mr. Harrison won't be back for at least a week; so you'll have to tackle him yourself after all."

"Oh, Madeline, can't you stay over?"

Madeline shook her head decisively. "Absolutely impossible. I've just hired a studio apartment consisting of two closets, miscalled rooms, and I've begun a novel. It was spinning along like mad when you stopped it. I should have to go to-morrow anyway, so why not go now, in time for the roller-skating party? I did want to stay long enough to find the other secret drawers, though." Madeline frowned absently at the old desk.

"Perhaps there aren't any others," Betty reminded her practically.

"Oh, but I'm sure there are. I have a leading." Madeline stretched out her hand, and, just as she had predicted, it hit the spring. A fan-shaped panel slipped to one side, the wall at the back of the opening dropped, and a tiny drawer, deep and very narrow, appeared, the small key still in the lock.

"There!" said Madeline triumphantly, opening it. "Oh, it's stuffed full! Betty Wales, these are love-letters, I just know it! Tied with pink ribbons and scented with lavender. Did you ever imagine anything so

nice? It's surely all right to read them, isn't it?"

"Perhaps we ought to take them to the woman you bought the desk of," Betty suggested.

"But her husband had just taken it for a bad debt, and I remember she said all the family it really belonged to had died or moved away."

"Then I guess it's all right, so long as they're so very old."

They were love-letters, the sweetest, merriest letters to a girl named Patricia from a man who signed himself "R." One or two of Patricia's notes to "R." were tucked in with the letters, but as they all began "Mine," they threw no light on the significance of the "R." Betty liked that; it added to the sense of remoteness, to the story-book atmosphere of "long-ago and far-away" that belonged to the yellowed sheets, the faded ribbons, and the quaint, old-fashioned expressions. Most of the letters had never been mailed. Madeline almost wept with joy when she discovered that they had been put in a hollow tree in Patricia's apple orchard. They were arranged by dates and once there was a gap of six months.

That was because the squire of the village had asked Patricia's father for his daughter's hand in marriage, and Patricia's father had said yes. Patricia was an obedient child, so there were no more letters in the tree, in spite of "R.'s" pleadings, until one day when Patricia could show good reason for sending the squire about his business. And then there was a duel. Was it between "R." and the squire, or "R." and some other disappointed suitor? They were still discussing the evidence when Madeline remembered her train.

"Let me take these along," she begged. "I'll send them back in a day or so, but I simply must know how it all ended." She turned to the desk. "There ought to be a drawer on the other side to correspond to this one."

"Let me try to find it," cried Betty hastily, and after a minute's fumbling she snapped the spring. "It's getting almost tiresome, finding so many secret hiding-places, isn't it?" she laughed.

This drawer was full too, but of dusty, uninteresting-looking documents. Madeline glanced them through rapidly.

"Nothing exciting there, I guess. You can look them over, and if they're about Patricia and 'R.' send them to me, won't you? And if you hate talking to Mr. Harrison, get Emily to go for you, or send Young-Man-Over-the-Fence. He'd like nothing better than to champion the cause of oppressed damsels, Babbie Hildreth being one of them."

"You don't take this seriously enough, Madeline," Betty told her sadly.

"No," agreed Madeline, "I don't, but that's because I have such perfect confidence in your persuasive powers. Good-bye."

The whistles shrieked for noon. Betty hastily straightened up her desk, gave some last touches to the dainty tables, and resolutely forced a smile to meet the usual twelve-o'clock invasion of hungry customers. Never in her life had she felt so forlorn and lonely, but she was too proud to show it. She resolved that if the Tally-ho Tea-Shop must be abandoned at least it should go out in a blaze of glory. At first she had not thought it worth while to begin the dinner service for only a month, but now she decided to inaugurate it at once. She hung up the prettily lettered signs that

Madeline had made: "Beginning to-morrow the Tally-ho Tea-Shop will serve dinners, and will therefore be open until nine in the evening." The appearance of this announcement created no little excitement. Six girls ordered special dinners for the opening night. Eugenia Ford sent a written order by a friend who came in for tea. She explained that she wanted everything "as elegant as possible," because her dinner was in honor of her roommate's mother and father—"very wealthy people." She hoped the waitress would wear a cap. As caps were Nora's *bête noir*, Betty decided to ask the newest Student's Aid waitress if she would mind wearing one just this time, by way of helping to heap coals of fire on Eugenia's pretty head.

CHAPTER XVII

A MAGNATE TO THE RESCUE

EMILY DAVIS had expected to go to work the day that the dinners began, but when she tried her strength she found it much less than she had thought. She sat at the cashier's desk until two o'clock, and then Betty, noticing how pale and miserable she looked, insisted on her giving up and going home to rest.

"I'll manage some way," she assured her new assistant hopefully. "And you'll most certainly catch your never-get-over if you sit here with all the draughts blowing on you, when you're not well enough to be up."

"A stove doesn't give a very even heat, does it?" said Emily wanly. "I'm warm all but one side."

"A stove," said Betty with feeling, "is a relic of the barbaric ages. So are kerosene lamps. Running this place without the stove and the lamps would be simply blissful.

I should feel like a robber when I took my salary."

"You shall have a chance to feel that way just as soon as I begin to earn mine," Emily assured her. "I hate to leave you to-day, but ——"

"Run along," Betty broke in. "I shall need you a lot more after Nora is gone."

But her resolute hopefulness turned to blank dismay when the newly engaged waitress, who had seemed so promising, sent word that she had sprained her ankle. Nora's regular assistant was a stout, stupid girl, who could be trusted only with simple orders and unexacting customers. Betty went over the names of the girls who had engaged stalls, found no unexacting ones among them, promptly arrayed herself in one of the caps that Nora scorned and an apron, sent the stupid waitress after a stupid friend who could probably make change correctly, and planned a division of work with Nora, who was frankly horrified at her mistress's new rôle.

"But the first night must be a success, Nora," Betty explained. "I'll stay in the

kitchen getting orders ready for Mary Jones as long as I dare. But when she begins to look wild-eyed and distracted, I shall put her in the kitchen, and come out myself. It's the only way to have things go off well."

By half-past six the tea-shop was crowded. Betty, peeping in through the kitchen door, was relieved to find very few of her particular friends among the diners. She hoped that nobody would exclaim over her new departure or stop her to demand explanations. She had a presentiment that if any one did she was going to feel, as Nora declared she ought, "most awful queer."

Eugenia's arrival occurred at an unlucky moment, when Nora was too busy to attend to her, and Betty decided that her time had come. After the first plunge, past Eugenia's blank, unrecognizing stare and through a little flurry of amused nods and puzzled glances from other girls who knew her, it wasn't so bad. Except Eugenia's party, nobody who gave her orders neglected to hail her and condole over Emily's grippe and the new waitress's ankle. Betty soon got into the spirit of the occasion, thoroughly enjoy-

ing everything but the many trips to Eugenia's stall, with its hedge of pompous dignity. She was on her way out to the kitchen with a big trayful of dishes, when the door opened and in strode an elderly gentleman, with a militant air and keen gray eyes that twinkled merrily under his bushy eyebrows, as he closed the door with a terrific bang and looked eagerly about him from one absorbed group of diners to another. But a man is a novelty in Harding, and this particular man would have attracted attention anywhere; in an instant he was the centre of interest; in another he had discovered Betty and she had discovered him.

"Well, Miss B. A.!" he called out gleefully, quite oblivious of the staring crowd of girls. "Put down that tray and come and shake hands. Didn't expect to see me tonight, did you? Well, I was almost up here, and I'd promised myself that some time this winter I'd investigate Harding College, so I seized the opportunity. I telegraphed the little tomboy that John's so fond of to meet me and help show me around. Haven't seen her, have you?"

"No, I haven't, Mr. Morton," Betty told him—for of course the noisy intruder was none other than Jasper Jones Morton, the Elusive Magnate of the European trip. "And I'm afraid she won't come, because I had a letter from her yesterday saying that she was in bed with a cold."

Jasper J. Morton's smile clouded. "Too bad, too bad," he muttered. "She'll be disappointed. She likes going off on trips with me. We'll have to send her a consolation present to-morrow. You'll know what she'd like. Now, Miss B. A., I want some dinner at this famous tea-shop, and I want you to sit down and eat with me and tell me all about the business." Mr. Morton threw back his head and laughed, as if he thought Betty Wales in business at the Tally-ho Tea-Shop the very best joke in the world.

Betty led him to a little table in a corner, that had opportunely been left vacant by two girls who were hurrying off to a senior play rehearsal. "But I can't sit with you," she explained, "because I'm waiting on people to-night. The regular waitress has sprained her ankle."

“There’s one.” Mr. Morton waved his hand imperiously at Nora. “She can manage somehow. Sit down.”

But Betty was firm. She explained that the dinners were a new departure, that she was particularly anxious for every one to go away satisfied with the food and the service, and finally she promised to wait on Mr. Morton herself, and to come and talk to him later, when the crowd had thinned. Then she flew to the kitchen after Eugenia’s salads.

Mr. Morton watched her pick up the heavy tray. “Bless me, but she’s a worker!” he muttered audibly, to the vast amusement of two freshmen at the next table. “I supposed from what the little tomboy said that she was playing at business, but it seems she’s in earnest. How I do like to see people in earnest!”

When Eugenia Ford had finished her dinner, she intercepted Betty in a flying trip to the kitchen after a forgotten cup of coffee. “Isn’t that Mr. Jasper J. Morton of New York?” she asked. “I thought it must be, and so did Mr. and Mrs. Valentine, Susanna’s mother and father. They know him very

well, but of course he won't expect to see them here. Would you mind taking us over to speak to him? Why didn't you tell me you knew the Mortons?"

"Why should I have told you that?" demanded Betty calmly. "The subject never came up. John Morton is engaged to one of my best friends."

"Really!" Eugenia's face was a study. "Well, come over and meet the Valentines."

"Not till I've brought Dickie Drake's coffee. Just a second, Dickie." And she was off. It was a master-stroke on Betty's part, to cap the information about the Mortons by showing her intimacy with Dickie Drake, who was a most exclusive senior. It was one thing to speak of her as Dickie—all the college did that—and quite another to address her directly by her nickname. But Betty was not trying to impress Eugenia—which was the reason why she succeeded so perfectly then and a moment later, when, having been duly introduced to the Valentines, she convoyed them and Eugenia across to Mr. Morton's table.

"Friends of yours, Miss B. A.?" he inquired in a dreadfully loud whisper. "Friends

of mine! Nonsense—merest acquaintances. Well, tell me their names again, and then bring 'em along. How do you do, Mrs. Valentine? Mr. Valentine, how are you? Your daughter—this one, no, that one—and Miss Force. Very glad to see so many New Yorkers, I'm sure. Miss B. A., don't forget that I'm waiting for you. I hate to be kept waiting, but you're one of the people that are worth waiting for. Do I know your father, Miss Force? It's quite possible. I know so many people in one way and another that it takes several secretaries to keep me posted on the subject. Now if you'll excuse me, I'll go back to my dinner, which is too good to let cool."

Whereupon the "very wealthy" Valentines and "Miss Force" departed, and Jasper J. Morton chuckled to himself as he wondered if they had noticed that what he had left on his plate to cool was tomato salad. He had reached his coffee before Betty came to keep him company. She wasn't hungry, she explained; she had snatched her dinner bit by bit between-times; but Mr. Morton insisted upon her beginning all over again and "eat-

ing like a Christian," telling her meanwhile the latest news of John's senior honors at Harvard, of which he was absurdly proud, and of the house he was building as a surprise for Babe, next to his own stately summer home.

"Now tell me all about yourself," he commanded, when Betty finally declared that she couldn't and wouldn't eat anything more. "Are you well, and are you happy? It's no use asking if your business is a success, after watching this evening's crowd eat. But I'm afraid you're overworked. Next time you're shy a waitress just telephone me and I'll have one sent up from New York in short order. But if she doesn't get here soon enough, why, let 'em sit a while. Or let 'em run out and help themselves. The help-yourself style of restaurant is getting to be very popular. Now how about your latest 'benevolent adventures'?"

Betty told him about the factory's clubhouse, and promised to take him to see it in the morning, after they had been to chapel and made a tour of the campus. Mr. Morton watched her closely while she talked.

"You're not happy, Miss B. A.," he said at

last. "You've got something on your mind. You don't laugh right out the way you did last summer, and you were thinking about something else while I told you about the little tomboy's new house. Out with it now; what's the trouble?"

"Nothing," Betty assured him.

"You say that very much as if you didn't mean it, my dear young lady," Mr. Morton told her.

"Well, nothing that I want to tell you then," Betty amended, with her flashing smile. "You'll want to do something about it and I don't think you can—anyway I don't want you to try, and you'll only get awfully ——"

"Mad," put in Mr. Morton grimly. "Well, then you'll have a chance to smooth me down the way you did last summer. You can do that, but you can't get out of telling me what's worrying you."

So Betty told the whole story, beginning with Mr. Harrison's unexpected visit and ending with Madeline's hurried one. She explained why she had begun so suddenly with the dinners, and how unfortunate it was that

there would be no time to sell the ploskins, of whose charms she gave a lively description. She accounted for her disappointment purely on the ground of not wishing to have the Tally-ho Tea-Shop cease at the height of its success, saying nothing about the little sister, her responsibility for Emily, or the low ebb of her own finances. But just as she had predicted, Mr. Morton flew into a rage at once. Why hadn't she written him to come and interview that rascal Harrison? Why had she gone into business in the first place without his advice and help? Where was the scamp's office? If he did not meet his engagement to go to chapel with her the next morning she would know what had detained him.

"But, Mr. Morton, Mr. Harrison isn't in town just now," Betty expostulated, not thinking it necessary to add that Mr. Harrison's absence was the chief reason why she had not absolutely refused to confide in Mr. Morton.

"That may be," Mr. Morton sputtered, "but he is somewhere on this side of the globe, isn't he? He hasn't dropped off the earth, and presumably he can be reached by

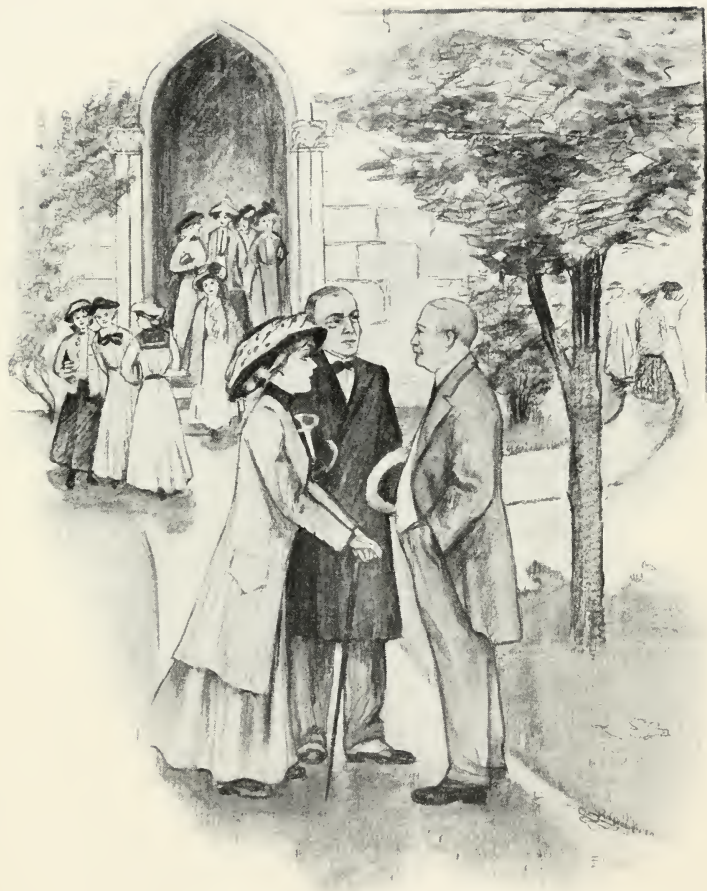
wire or wireless, can't he? You go to bed and to sleep, Miss B. A. I'll settle this scamp Harrison."

"But Mr. Morton ——" Betty began, only to be majestically waved into silence.

"I admire your independence. I always admire independence. But in this case it's absurd. I won't call this man Harrison a scamp to his face, Miss B. A.; I give you my word I won't. But I'll bring him to terms, or my name's not J. J. Morton. You see, Miss B. A., in a case like this my name is a pretty valuable asset. It will scare him a good deal when he finds who's back of this tea-shop that he thought was run by a parcel of little girls."

Next morning the chapel bell was tolling and the last stragglers were hurrying up the hill, hoping to slip in before the doors were closed, when a carriage drove up to the Tally-ho and Jasper J. Morton, descending from it, beckoned wildly to Betty to come out.

"I don't want to miss seeing this famous chapel service," he called, as Betty, who had been watching for him by a window, appeared.



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"I've done your business, Miss B. A. I routed out the agent, got this Harrison's address, and"—he chuckled reminiscently,—
"in three minutes by long distance the whole thing was arranged. The rent and the agent go on just as usual. The agent will bring you a contract, made out for as long as you like. There will be no rent this summer while the place is closed for needed repairs. Is this the right way to chapel? Come on then."

The portly form of Jasper Jones Morton barely squeezed through the chapel door as it slid shut, and he and Betty dropped breathlessly into the back row of seats.

"I like to accomplish what I set out to," he murmured under cover of the opening chant. "And I'd like to meet the president of the college some time when it's convenient."

So they intercepted the president when chapel was over, and the president insisted upon personally conducting so distinguished a financier as Jasper Jones Morton over his domain. Jasper Jones Morton beamed upon the president and upon every inch of the domain, and he made ostentatious notes of the

president's unostentatious hints regarding the needs of the college.

He went over these later, as he devoured an early luncheon by the fire in the Tally-ho. "Now, shall I build them a library annex, or a greenhouse, or a dormitory?" he demanded. "I couldn't give him any idea what to expect until I'd seen you."

"I wish you could build a dormitory for girls who can't pay the regular price for board," said Betty impulsively. "They have to live so far off and in such horrid little places ——"

"Exactly." Mr. Morton cut her short. "Don't I know? Have I forgotten the holes I've boarded in? Now of course I'll put up that kind of dormitory, with an endowment to cover the expense of running it. You've got nerve, Miss B. A. That gift will cost at least twice what the others would."

Betty only laughed, for she was very sure that Mr. Morton did not care what his gift to Harding cost. Besides she was too happy about the Tally-ho's rent to worry about anything else.

"Now if you have that decided, please tell

me how you managed Mr. Harrison," she begged. "I may have to manage him some time myself, when you're too far away ——"

"No you won't," Mr. Morton interrupted with decision. "I have just one rule, Miss B. A., for the treatment of scoundrels: Eliminate them. I applied the rule this morning in the simplest way that occurred to me, by buying this property."

"So you're our landlord now!" gasped Betty.

"I am," Mr. Morton assured her. "Just as soon as the college closes I want this tea-room to close too, so that I can install decent up-to-date systems of lighting and heating and make any other improvements that you or the artistic young lady named—thank you, yes, Ayres, can suggest. Remember I hate half-way measures. I want my building to be the finest quarters for a tea-shop in the whole U.S. Then I guess, when you are tired of running the place—or I might say anxious to try your hand at running some lucky young man—why, you won't have any trouble in finding a successor."

"Oh, Mr. Morton," sighed Betty reproach-

fully, "you shouldn't have done it. Really you shouldn't."

"You certainly didn't encourage me at all," Mr. Morton told her, "so you needn't feel in the least responsible. By the way, send me a sample of that plasher-thing that you're having made in plaster. If those fool images sell here, I don't see why they shouldn't make good in New York. And tell the president what we've decided about the dormitory. Tell him to write me if he favors the idea, and I'll send a check. Good-bye."

"You must wait till I've thanked ——" began Betty.

"Miss B. A.," broke in Mr. Morton sternly, "don't you know me well enough yet to know that the thing I detest most in this world is to be thanked?"

CHAPTER XVIII

A ROMANCE AND A BURGLARY

"GOODNESS, but I'm glad I haven't got to break the news to you that I thought I must," Betty told Emily, when she appeared late in the afternoon. And then she broke the good news instead, and incidentally, now that the danger was all over, explained how nearly the tea-room had come to ruin. She was bursting to tell Emily, who would especially appreciate the idea, about the new dormitory; but the president of Harding must be the first one to hear that news. Betty left Emily in charge of the desk and hurried up to the campus. When she got back, after an altogether satisfactory interview, she found Nora watching in rapt admiration while Emily deftly mended a three-cornered tear in the new blue silk skirt that had been the pride of Nora's heart.

"Shure an' she's a wonder with her needle," Nora informed Betty, and never a word more did she say about her "notice." It would in-

deed have been a callous person who could bring herself to leave the Tally-ho Tea-Shop just when something exciting was brewing there all the time. First there was the news of Jasper J. Morton's munificent gift to the college. The president passed it on at once, so that almost before Betty was back at her desk Lucile Merrifield rushed in to ask for all the details.

"I hear you planned the whole thing," she said, "and we all think it's perfectly splendid. Why didn't any one ever think of it before?"

Of course Betty disclaimed all credit for Mr. Morton's gift, but it was no use, especially when his letter to the president was printed in the local newspapers. He referred that gentleman to Miss Wales "for any further ideas and for detailed suggestions, since it was she who first interested me in Harding College and who originated this particular form of benefaction." Her real friends loved and respected her more than ever for her power to bring such good fortune to pass, and girls like Eugenia Ford were immensely impressed by her evident intimacy with the Mortons and her influence

over a man who was noted for never taking advice from anybody.

"It just happened that I got mixed up in it," Betty told Miss Ferris humbly. "But I am glad that now, when I have the least to give myself, some one that I know can do so much. I've remembered all this year what you told me last fall about helping in one way if you can't in another. It's worked pretty well."

Just as the excitement about the dormitory was subsiding, Madeline stirred things up with a succinct telegram to Betty: "Arrived at last."

Lucile and Polly and the Dutton twins happened to be breakfasting at the Tally-ho when it came, and Betty passed it over to them for opinions about its probable meaning.

"With her usual Bohemian extravagance she pays for seven words that she doesn't send," complained Lucile. "Let's answer it, girls. What shall we say?"

"Which way were you going?" suggested Fluffy Dutton. "That's to the point. And send it 'C. O. D.' Then she'll be more explicit next time."

"Not she," objected Polly. "The charm of her is that she doesn't know the meaning of explicitness. But we'll send it 'C. O. D.' all the same, because we are all too poor to pay."

Polly had not anticipated Madeline's obvious revenge, which was to send a ninety word reply, unpaid, and addressed to "Lucile-Polly-Fluffy-Georgia, Belden House." But she was quick to see her way out of the financial difficulty.

"Georgia didn't do anything about sending it, so she pays," she decreed; and Georgia accepted the decision with her customary bland cheerfulness, only demanding in return the ownership of the telegram, which would make a beautiful trophy for her "memorabil," as the Harding girl calls her scrap-book filled with souvenirs of her college days.

The telegram was certainly a work of art and ingenuity, and it took art and ingenuity to understand it, with no punctuation marks and some words evidently invented by a despairing operator in a quandary over Madeline's perfectly illegible handwriting. But the general drift was that Madeline had been

"on the way to" utter despair,—because the heroine of her novel insisted on eloping with the villain instead of the hero—when she thought of making a story out of Patricia's long-lost letters from "R." While she was waiting for her effort to come back to her, as usual, she scribbled off a college tale about a girl who had a desk with a secret drawer and didn't know it. The first story was accepted—and paid for—by the magazine that had been the goal of her ambitions all winter, and the other had brought her a contract for a dozen college stories to be written within a year, on terms that made a true Bohemian like Madeline feel fairly dizzy with sudden wealth.

This splendid sequel to the hunt for Eugenia's theme reminded Betty of the papers which had filled her drawer, and which, in the rush of other excitements, she had quite forgotten. If they had anything to do with Patricia and "R." perhaps Madeline might write a sequel to her first story and score another triumph. But examination proved that the nearest name to Patricia mentioned in them was prosaic Peter, and the only "R."

a Robert Wales who signed one of the papers in the minor rôle of witness for Peter's signature. Betty was interested at discovering her surname; but prosy old documents make dull reading, even if witnessed by a possible ancestor. However, she finally sent them to Madeline, for, as she told Georgia Ames, you never can tell what a literary person will see in the most commonplace things.

Of course Madeline was overjoyed at the happy outcome of the Tally-ho's crisis, and so was Babbie, who appeared in Harding with the very earliest signs of spring.

"Florida was duller than ever this year," she told Betty. "I've left mother in Washington waiting for really warm weather, and I've come to see about my branch of the Tally-ho. I'm sure it needs my personal attention. Mr. Thayer certainly ought to give the poor stocking-makers ice-cream for staying in and learning their lessons now that it's getting to be nice weather. You're not a bit enterprising about working up business through the night-school, Betty."

"I have to leave that to you," Betty told her solemnly. "The regular affairs of the

tea-shop, and Mr. Morton, are all that I can manage. The ploshkins will be here to-morrow in full force, and Mr. Morton has written to know if we can't think of some small improvements that can be made next week during the spring vacation. He can't bear to wait until summer for everything."

"As if this place wasn't just about perfect now!" said Babbie scornfully.

But Mary Brooks, appearing in the midst of the discussion, took a different view. "You've got to keep making them sit up and take notice of something new over and over and over," she announced. "That's business. The ploshkins will do for one thing, but if the Morton millions are fairly languishing to be wasted on this property, you ought to be able to think of some features to spend them on. Just wait a minute—I have it—a tea-garden! Pagoda effects scattered over the side yard. Lattice work, and thatched roofs, Japanese screens to keep out the sun and the stares of the gaping crowd, and lanterns for evenings. I'm sure it would take."

"It's commonplace compared to what I've thought of," declared Babbie proudly. "What

we want is a Peter Pan Annex in our elm trees. I presume you've never been to the original Café Robinson, Mary, but we have, and it's way beyond any tea-garden."

Betty was in the window, peering out at the Harding elm trees.

"We could," she declared. "I always wondered how those two trees happened to be so close together, and now it seems like fate that they're exactly right for a Café Robinson."

"And easily tall enough for three stories," cried Babbie, joining her.

"We mustn't forget the big one-two-three signs for the stories," chimed in Betty excitedly.

"Nor the basket to pull up with the extra things," added Babbie.

"We'll tell Nora to have some extra things in every order so they can all have the fun of hauling up the basket."

"The view will be perfectly lovely from the top," declared Babbie. "And isn't it fine that our trees are in such a sheltered place, behind the little white house?"

Betty nodded. "If Bob were here she'd

shin up to the top this very minute and tell us what you can see."

"But Babe will surely say she likes the second story best, because she and John made up their quarrel in the second story," laughed Babbie; and then they settled down to telling the bewildered Mary about the house-in-the-trees café that they had discovered near Paris, and how the going-away party held there for Madeline had developed into an announcement party for Babe. And of course Mary agreed that a Peter Pan Annex was the only thing for the Tally-ho Tea-Shop.

"And as Madeline won't let me call my night-school a branch of the business, I shall write her how I thought up this," Babbie declared. "I will also hunt up that comical carpenter that Madeline had such times with last fall, and show him how to build it."

Now carpentry and the supervision of carpentry are no work for a woman; and the Tally-ho's trees were in plain sight from Mr. Thayer's office windows. So it was only natural, when Babbie's slender figure appeared on the lawn for the purpose of supervision, that Mr. Thayer should join her for

the purpose of applying an understanding masculine intelligence and a firm masculine will to the direction of the thickest-headed carpenter imaginable. Babbie had a careless fashion of running out on the rawest day without a wrap. This made it all the more necessary for Mr. Thayer to come over, bringing his sweater to throw across her shoulders.

"I saw your Cousin Austin at Palm Beach," Babbie had explained shortly after her arrival in Harding, "and then at St. Augustine. At Miami he took us on the loveliest cruise, and I drove his car at sixty miles an hour on the beach at Ormond. It was ripping fun. Not many men will risk your losing your head and smashing them up."

"And don't you ever lose your head?" inquired Mr. Thayer blandly.

"Not over your Cousin Austin," said Babbie, with a flash of a smile.

After that Mr. Thayer came oftener and stayed longer. Babbie assured Betty and Emily Davis that they had no idea how complicated a Peter Pan Annex seemed to an untraveled carpenter of Harding.

"We're so afraid it won't have the real French air," she said. "That's why we spend such ages in staring at it from all possible angles."

"And then it must be perfectly secure," she explained on another occasion, just after she and Mr. Thayer had sat for almost an hour in the top story, among the branches that now made a most beautiful feathery screen. "Think how horrible it would be if the railing was too low and some silly little freshman fell out, or if the floor wasn't strong enough and gave way. Mr. Thayer knows all about such things. He's taking a lot of interest. We never could have done it properly except for him."

But in spite of the accommodating slowness and stupidity of the untraveled carpenter, the Peter Pan Annex was finished at last.

"I'm a candidate now for the Perfect Patron's Society," Mr. Thayer told Betty, "so I want to give an opening-day tea up on the top floor for all the owners, managers, assistant managers, and small sisters. It's to be this afternoon at four. I also want another stocking factory party, and hadn't we better

get it off our hands early, before commencement begins to loom up ahead?" Mr. Thayer looked very hard at Betty. "I suppose you are terribly busy?"

"Terribly," returned Betty gravely, "but I think Babbie will help."

Babbie would not.

"I'm going to your Cousin Austin's Adirondack camp," she explained, "to see spring come in the woods. Mother is the chaperon, and I have an awful suspicion that I am a sort of guest of honor. Anyway, the spring part of it appeals to me. And secondly, mother has been solemnly promised a reunion with her long-lost daughter."

Later in the day Babbie, in a kimono, which is the attire of confidential intercourse, complained that "Mummy was as bad as Margot about a multi-millionaire," and that she hated the woods in spring; they were always hot, and smoky from forest fires, there was no shade and no shooting, and the canoes leaked from being dry all winter.

"Moreover," added Babbie wearily, a "so-called camp, with a butler and three other men, and a sunken garden, is going too much

for me. But when mummy really insists, the laws of the Medes and Persians aren't in it." She gave a funny little mirthless laugh. "I suppose one ought to be very sure that one isn't foolishly prejudiced against the popular idea of the idle rich."

So Emily planned the factory party with much energy and originality, and Mr. Thayer was duly grateful. But his rare smile came only when Betty showed him a note from Babbie, inquiring carefully about the date of the party and stating in a postscript, with vehement underlining, that she never wanted to see spring come in anybody's woods again.

"There are mosquitoes, and other things much worse," ended Babbie enigmatically, with the blackest possible lines under the last two words.

"Suppose you let me write her about the date of the party?" suggested Mr. Thayer. "Then you needn't bother."

Evidently the change in correspondents did not displease Babbie seriously, for she was back on the appointed day, with a bewitching smile, flashed out from beneath a bewitching hat, for all her stocking factory friends,

including Mr. Thayer. The party was a sort of spring fête held out on the grounds of the factory, in the late afternoon and early evening. There were folk dances in costume, national songs, and old-country games. Emily had made all the guests feel a tremendous pride in doing whatever they could to entertain the rest, and everything, from the Irish bag-pipe music to the Russian mazurkas, went off with great spirit.

It was while Jimmie O'Ferrel was dancing a jig with all his might and main, and with all eyes fastened upon his flying feet, that Betty, happening to glance across the grounds, saw a bewitching hat slip swiftly from the fence top down on the tea-shop side. But she had no proof that Mr. Thayer was concerned in the disappearance of the hat, until the smallest sister sought her out importantly, a little later.

"Do you want to know what I think?" she asked. "Well, I think Babbie and Mr. Thayer are in love."

"Why do you think that?" asked Betty laughingly.

"Because," explained Dorothy, "I ran up

in the Peter Pan Annex just now to see how small people look 'way down here from 'way up there, and I jumped 'most out of my skin 'cause there those two sat. They never saw me at all, and he had his arm around her and she didn't care. She was smiling about it. So I came straight away. Was that right?"

"Of course," laughed Betty. "You hadn't been invited."

"I was invited to Mr. Thayer's party, though," objected Dorothy, "and now he isn't here. He's over at our house. That's queer."

Up in the Peter Pan Annex Mr. Thayer was saying to Babbie, "I must go back before any one misses me."

"I can't go back," said Babbie sadly. "I tore my dress dreadfully getting over the fence. You shouldn't have made me do it."

"I didn't make you," retorted Mr. Thayer. "I particularly advised you to go around."

"Exactly," agreed Babbie, "and that made me want to go over. Dear me! Do you suppose we shall ever really quarrel on account of my not wanting to give in to your chin?"

"No, because I shall always want to give in to yours," Mr. Thayer told her.

"But I shouldn't let you give in always," declared Babbie. "I should take turns giving in."

"Don't say 'should,'" objected Mr. Thayer. "Say 'shall.' Haven't we settled it?"

"Of course." Babbie gave a comical little sigh. "It feels so queer to be settled—and so very nice. Now go back to your party, and I'll get Nora to lend me some pins so I can go back too. Oh, and we'll tell Betty, shan't we, right away?"

Under the circumstances Betty wasn't extremely surprised, but she was extremely pleased.

"Now our tea-room is as successful as the famous one that belonged to the cousins of the girl who lives over Mrs. Bob," she laughed. "It has produced an engagement, and a literary career to match the artist person's."

Babbie frowned. "You mustn't leave yourself out, Betty. You're mixed up in everything, and I don't believe that other tea-room was half as nice as this or made half as much money."

"Neither do I," agreed Betty happily.

"I'm perfectly satisfied with my profits, though they're not so extraordinary as yours and Madeline's. Every morning when I unlock the door I'm in such a hurry to look in and see that everything is all right and all here. It's so pretty and I love it so, that I'm afraid it will vanish some night like a fairy palace."

It was odd that the very next morning when Betty unlocked the door, she should find that some marauder had been there before her. She had locked her desk the night before, as she always did. But during the night the lid had been forced back, the papers in the pigeonholes tossed out on to the floor, the drawers opened and emptied.

Her face was white and frightened as she rushed over to find Babbie, who was staying in the little white house this time.

"The tea-room has been robbed!" she gasped. "Come over there, quick."

Babbie, who always breakfasted late, was pinning her collar, and she gave a start that jabbed the pin straight into her thumb. "Ouch, but that hurt!" she groaned. "What did they take?"

"I was so frightened I didn't stop to see. I thought they might be hiding in the loft."

Babbie dropped a skirt over her head, and started down the stairs, hooking it up as she ran.

"They wouldn't do that. They'd want to escape in the dark," she called back encouragingly.

But at the door of the tea-shop she paused. "There is something moving up there," she whispered cautiously. "See! Over in that corner by the curtain."

Betty couldn't see anything moving, but when Babbie started in a hasty retreat toward the little white house she banged to the big door and followed. Just then Bridget came waddling breathlessly up the hill.

"Wat's up now, Misses?" she called. "Why are yez afther shuttin' of me out?"

Bridget's fat figure was very reassuring. Simultaneously Betty and Babbie ran toward it, gasping out the news.

"In the loft? Well, we'll finish 'em thin." Bridget seized a brass-handled poker, the latest addition to the tea-shop's stock of antiques. Then she laid it down again, carefully



"COME ALONG NOW"



removed her neat black bonnet, and as carefully laid it on a table. "No use of spilin' that in a fight. Come along now wid yez," she ordered.

Betty seized an umbrella that some one had opportunely left in a corner, and Babbie chose as weapon a tall brass candlestick. Then the procession started, Bridget waddling and wheezing in front, Betty, still white with terror, following, and Babbie, beginning to smile again at the absurdity of the search, bringing up the rear. But they hunted conscientiously, exploring every hiding-place into which a man could possibly squeeze himself and some that would have cramped a self-respecting cat.

"They ain't here at all," announced Bridget at last, removing her eye from a knot-hole in the wall into which she had been spying laboriously, and standing upright with more puffings and pantings. "It's downstairs we go. Thim stalls are foine for burglars, and mebbe they're in me kitchen this minute, ating up me angil-food that 'ud riz light as a feather. Oh me, oh me."

"They aren't here now. I'm sure they're

not," protested Babbie. "Think how absurd it would be for a burglar to hide in here, just waiting around to be caught. I'm going to see what we've lost."

Bridget persisted in completing her search, and Betty would not desert her. But when the fat cook was satisfied and had sat down to fan herself into a semblance of calmness that would make possible the successful cooking of waffles for the "Why-Get-Up-to-Breakfast Club," Betty joined Babbie, and together they straightened out and looked over the papers from the desk.

"There's nothing gone. Of course they wouldn't want grocer's bills, even if they were receipted," Betty declared. "But I left six dollars and thirty cents all rolled up in one of the top drawers. Emily forgot it when she went to the bank. I suppose they've got that."

"Drawer wide open, and one—five—yes, six dollars and thirty cents all here," Babbie reported. "That's very queer. Burglars that hunt as hard as this and then don't take the money when they find it are certainly particular. Well, did they like our old brasses, I wonder, or our plated silver spoons?"

But the candlesticks—except the one Babbie had seized upon—and the Flemish lamps were all in place. The gargoyles grinned serenely from their accustomed niches. The silver drawer had not been tampered with. In the kitchen the angel-food was just as Bridget had left it.

“It’s a mystery,” declared Babbie at last, “a thrilling and impenetrable mystery. When do burglars not burgle?”

“When they are frightened off,” answered Betty prosaically.

“But it wouldn’t have taken a second to dip out that money,” Babbie objected. “It was all mussed up, so some one’s hand must have been in there, since you left it in a roll ——”

“Yes, in a tight little wad,” put in Betty.

“And that some one could have pulled back his hand full just as quickly as empty,” Babbie went on. “I tell you it’s a horrible mystery. I’m going to ask Robert to come over this minute and see about it.”

Meanwhile Emily, who had been doing the day’s marketing, arrived ; but neither she nor Mr. Thayer could solve the “thrilling, im-

penetrable, horrible" mystery, though Mr. Thayer found "jimmy" marks on the shed door, and that, as Betty said, proved beyond a doubt that the burglars had been the real thing.

"Real, but very eccentric," laughed Emily. "Let's hope that all the Tally-ho's burglars will belong to the same accommodating tribe."

CHAPTER XIX

THE AMAZING MR. SMITH AND OTHER AMAZEMENTS

"RACHEL MORRISON? No, not yet, but she's coming. Everybody's coming."

"K. Kittredge is as comical as ever. Ask her about her prize English pupil."

"Do you know, you're glad to see everybody these days. Why, Jean Eastman rushed up to me, and I fell upon her neck. Digs and freaks and snobs and all, they belong to 19— and the good old days."

"Do you feel that way too? I wondered if any one else had noticed the horrid little changes. I suppose things will change, but I wish ——"

"Nonsense! Look at this tea-shop. It's a change all right, and for my part I don't see how we should live without it."

"Oh, but this is different. This is 19—'s very own."

“Where’s Betty Wales, anyway? She’s so busy you can’t get within a mile of her.”

Thus 19—, over its ices in the Peter Pan Annex. The Tally-ho Tea-Shop was 19—’s headquarters, official and unofficial. There they breakfasted, lunched, tea-ed, and dined; there held informal “sings” and rallies, and there on the last evening of the festal week they were to eat their class supper. The tenth year class were to eat theirs in the loft. The fifteeners had engaged the first floor of the Peter Pan Annex, and the six graduates of the very oldest class were to lunch up in the top floor, among the tree-tops. No wonder that Betty was busy and had to be caught on the wing and forcibly detained by 19— friends. Commencement guests fairly beset the Tally-ho at meal-times. Between meals old girls and belated undergraduates thronged the tables. Betty could hardly believe her eyes when she counted up one day’s returns from the Peter Pan Annex. As for ploshkins, the first order had sold out almost before it was unpacked, and every class in college had wanted to adopt the ploshkin for its class animal. But Betty explained that 19— had already secured it.

Madeline had had that happy thought, of course, and Kate Denise, who was chairman of the supper committee, had capped it by ordering miniature plothkins for favors and a mammoth one for a centerpiece. Then Madeline had written a plothkin song which was so much cleverer than "The Bay Where the Plothkin Bides," that the Glee Club groaned with envy. There was also a 19— song called "Tea-Shop," and one called "The House of Peter Pan," so that Betty's enterprises were much in the public eye, if she was not.

It was dreadfully hard to stick to work, when you knew that 19— was having a "Stunt-doers' Meet" under the apple-trees on the back campus, or Dramatic Club's Alumnæ tea, also with "stunts," was on in the Students' Building. The only consolation lay in the fact that your dearest friends calmly cut these surpassing attractions, to which some of them had traveled thousands of miles, just to sit by the cashier's desk in the Tally-ho Tea-Shop, and talk to the cashier in her intervals of comparative leisure, waiting patiently while she made change, found tables for helpless or hurried customers, took "rush orders" to the kitchen

when the waitresses were all too busy, and in general made things "go" in the steady, plodding, systematic fashion that her gay little soul loathed. But she realized that she had made a success of the Tally-ho just by keeping at it, and she was going home next week with little Dorothy and "money in her pocket," in Will's slangy phraseology, leaving Emily to take charge of the improvements which Madeline and Mr. Morton had planned on a scale of elegance that fairly took away Betty's breath, and of the remnants of business that would be left when the hungry Harding girls had departed, and sleepy silence reigned on the deserted campus.

Eugenia Ford came in one afternoon early in commencement week, looking very meek and unhappy.

"I'm going home to-night. I was foolish to plan to stay over, but a senior I know asked me to, and I thought of course she meant it. And she only let me entertain her youngest brother part of one morning, and made me give her my ticket to the senior play."

"What a shame!" Betty sympathized.

"But I was to blame. I was a goose," Eu-

genia repeated. "I ought to have known that she only wanted to get something out of me. If I rush up to people all of a sudden, when I've never noticed them much before, I generally want to get something out of them. It's naturally the same with other girls."

Betty laughed. "Better stick to the ones who are always nice to you—your real friends," she advised.

"But then you won't get on," objected Eugenia wisely. "They say you've got to scheme a lot to be in things here. You've got to make yourself known."

"Why not just try to be worth knowing?" Betty suggested. "My friend Rachel Morrison was as quiet and—and—unpushing as could be, but she was so bright and nice and thoughtful for other people and so reliable that everybody wanted her for a friend."

Eugenia sighed. "I'm not bright or thoughtful for others. I—oh, dear, this isn't what I came to talk about, Miss Wales. I—I stopped to say good-bye to Dorothy. I—she—we made up. I mean—we hadn't exactly quarreled, so we couldn't exactly make up. But I felt so ashamed. Being mean to little

girls makes you feel so ashamed—even if they don't know about it. Miss Wales, I've heard about the dormitory for poor girls—Morton Hall. When I went home in the spring my father said that as far as he could see you'd taught me about all the sensible things I'd learned this year. He asked me what you'd like for a present. I couldn't decide, but when I heard about the dormitory I wrote and asked him to send you a check for extra things, you know, for the furnishings, or to pay part of some girl's board. I thought perhaps you'd rather have that—from us—than something for yourself." She put three checks into Betty's hand. "Two of my best friends sent the others. It was what they had left from their spring term allowances. Susanna would like hers to go for a picture in the house parlor. Molly doesn't care."

Eugenia rushed through all this information so fast that Betty had no chance to interrupt, and at the end she was speechless with surprise. She glanced at the checks. The smallest was for a hundred dollars. Together they would provide endless "extras" for

Morton Hall, or help dozens of poor girls to make both ends meet.

"Oh, Eugenia, you are a dear," she cried impulsively. "And your father is a dear too, and these other girls. But why not give it right to the college yourselves?"

"Because you'll think of something nicer than they would to do with it. Anyway it's a sort of a present to you—father's part. You're just to say it's from friends of yours. We don't want our names mentioned. You're the one who put the idea into my head. We're not doing it for anything but to please you, and Susanna and Molly because they liked the idea, and what was the use keeping over their allowances?"

Betty was glad of this explanation. She had tried to choke back an ugly little suspicion that this gift might be a part of Eugenia's campaign to "make herself known," by having her father's name linked with Mr. Morton's as a benefactor of Harding. Now she was reassured on that point, and she thanked Eugenia again, trying to make her feel how much the money would accomplish.

"I suppose that's so," Eugenia agreed,

"and we shan't any of us miss it. Lots of the girls could give away more than they do, Miss Wales, only they never think of it."

"It's the same way about helping the ones who are rather left out to have some good times," Betty put in eagerly. "It doesn't take much effort or time from your own fun, and it means such a lot to them."

"Yes," Eugenia agreed soberly. "I'm going to try to be more like that next year. It's horrid to be as snippy as most of our crowd are. Some awfully nice girls are left out of things for one reason or another. We should all have more fun, I guess, if we all had it," ended Eugenia rather obscurely. "Good-bye, Miss Wales, until next fall."

Betty was wondering busily whether she should be back next fall, for mother had just written that father's business was improving fast and that he hoped to have the family together again soon, when the supper committee appeared to inquire about the shape of the 19—table and to consult the president about the seating arrangements. Betty was deep in the problem of how to get all the speakers on one side of the table and yet not

separate them from their friends, when a strange gentleman walked in and came straight up to Betty's desk.

"Miss Wales?" he inquired in businesslike tones.

"I am Miss Wales." Betty stood up behind the desk, and Kate Denise and the rest withdrew to a window until the man should have finished his business with Betty.

"My name is Smith," he went on. "I represent Furbush, a Boston antique shop. You've heard of it, I presume?"

Betty had not heard of Furbush's.

"Well, that's not vital," Mr. Smith told her smilingly, "because we buy on a cash basis, so it's not a question of our credit. I should have said that I'm up here buying old furniture. I heard you had a rather good desk that you might like to sell, and some pieces of brass."

"Yes, we have those things, but we don't care to sell any of them," Betty told him shortly. The idea of any one's coming to buy the Tally-ho's most prized features, and in commencement week too, when every minute was precious. Mr. Smith's hand was

on the desk, but now he looked down as if he had but just discovered the fact.

"Oh, this is the desk I was told about, isn't it?" he said, and came around to Betty's side to see it to better advantage. "It's a good piece—a very good piece. I'll give you a good price for it, Miss Wales. Just name your figure."

"I couldn't, for the desk belongs to the firm—the tea-shop firm," Betty answered. "And if we should even decide to sell,—though I don't think we shall—two friends of ours are ready to give us the full value of the desk."

"Now what would you consider the full value of the desk, Miss Wales?" Mr. Smith asked, in a tone that was meant to be half persuasive and half scornful of Miss Wales's knowledge of antiques.

"I don't know exactly, and it doesn't matter at all, because we don't wish to sell the desk or anything else that we have." Betty's tone was meant to be wholly anxious for the immediate departure of the importunate Mr. Smith.

"I'll give you four hundred dollars for

that desk, Miss Wales. That's about five times what you paid for it, I guess, and twice what your friends would give. Furbush's can pay top prices for a thing they like, because their customers are the top-price sort."

Betty was inwardly amazed, both at the sum Mr. Smith offered and at the accuracy of his guesses about the price Madeline had paid and the advance Mrs. Bob had offered. But she reflected that if Furbush's, of which she had never heard, would pay four hundred dollars for the desk to-day they probably would pay that or nearly that later in the week. Babbie was off walking with Mr. Thayer, whom she was keeping very much in the background because only Betty and the other two B's were to know of the engagement until class supper night, when Babbie meant to run around the table with the other engaged girls. And Madeline had not yet torn herself away from her beloved studio apartment, where her latest diversion was papering her study with "rejection slips" from over-fastidious editors. The desk certainly could not be sold at any price without Madeline's consent. So in the face of Mr.

Smith's munificent offer, Betty preserved a stony silence which finally evoked a low whistle from that gentleman.

"All right," he said, slipping his hand lovingly across the carved panels and the inlaid fronts of the little drawers. "If you feel that way about it, Furbush must do without. Now have you the same objections to selling me a cup of tea?"

"Certainly you can have tea here," Betty told him. "If you will sit down at one of the tables you will be served directly." Then she turned her attention to Kate and the others, and forgot all about Mr. Smith, who chose a retired nook in Flying Hoof's stall, ordered tea with three kinds of sandwiches, pulled a book out of his pocket, and explained to the waitress that he liked to eat slowly and read, without being disturbed.

The supper committee worked out its seating plan and departed, highly indignant that Betty wouldn't come up to the campus with them to pay calls on the lesser stars of the senior play cast, who were on exhibition in their make-ups.

"I'm lucky to get off to-night for the

play," Betty told them sternly, and in the pause before dinner she tried to concentrate her mind on preparing a menu for the next day. She needed to consult Bridget about several items, and as the tea-room was quite empty and she would only be gone a minute she slipped out without calling in Emily, who was busy in the kitchen, to take her place at the desk. When she came back she was startled to find her chair occupied by Mr. Smith, who had opened several drawers and was poking the fan-shaped panel, trying vainly to push it to one side. Betty stared at him for a moment in amazement, then she called out loudly, "I thought you had gone, Mr. Smith," keeping meanwhile close to the kitchen door which separated her from Bridget, Nora, and Emily, for she had no idea what a man might do when you caught him robbing your desk.

But Mr. Smith was not even disconcerted. "Oh, no, Miss Wales," he began easily. "Don't you remember I haven't paid for my grub? I'm not the sort of man to go off without paying my bill. I'd finished, and you weren't here, so I was taking a last lingering

look at your lovely desk. Seems to me as if there might be a secret drawer behind one of these panels." He tapped the panels gently, one after another, with his knuckles.

"If we ever decide to sell you the desk, Mr. Smith, you can examine it as closely as you like," Betty told him with dignity. "But now I must ask you to leave it alone."

"Oh, very well," Mr. Smith answered absently, still fingering the carved panel in the center.

As Betty watched him indignantly, a dreadful thought came into her head. The three checks that Eugenia had given her were on the desk. She had tucked them carelessly under the blotter, meaning to take them out again as soon as Kate and the others had gone. Betty did not stop to consider how useless they would be to Mr. Smith. She only reflected that he was certainly dishonorable, and probably dishonest, and that the checks were a sacred trust. Mr. Smith was absorbed in the arrangements of the desk. Betty slipped silently through the kitchen door and approached Bridget.

"I'm not sure, but I think there's a burglar

in there," she whispered. "He's at the desk, and he won't get away from it. I want you to scare him into another part of the room, and then bar the door until I've found out whether or not he's stolen anything. Do you understand?"

"Aisy," returned Bridget calmly, wiping her hands on her apron, and seizing a poker and a rolling-pin she marched boldly into the tea-room.

"Scat!" she hissed into the ear of the astonished Mr. Smith, who jumped back like a frightened rabbit when he saw the poker and the rolling-pin brandished dangerously about his head. In a minute Bridget had him prisoned in Flying Hoof's stall, in front of which she danced back and forth, waving her improvised weapons frantically.

"I've got him," she called triumphantly to Betty. "An' if he's a burgular fur shure, I'll kape him safe while Miss Emily do be runnin' for the perlice."

It took Betty only an instant to put her hand under the blotter, and there, just as she had left them, were the three checks.

"Oh, Bridget, he's not a burglar," she cried.

"The money is here all right. Let him out the door. I'm sorry, Mr. Smith," she added with dignity, "but you certainly acted like a thief, so you mustn't blame me, since I knew that there was a large amount of money in the desk, for treating you like one."

"Indade it's a good whack yez deserve for troublin' me lovely young ladies," declared Bridget, reluctantly moving to one side to let her prisoner pass out.

Mr. Smith, scowling angrily, walked across to the desk that had been the cause of all the trouble, and threw down the slip Nora had given him and the change to pay it.

"It's a pity if a gentleman can't satisfy his idle curiosity about the date of an antique desk without being taken for a sneak thief," he declaimed angrily, as he started off.

"It's a pity when a gintlemin ain't got enough bisniss of his own to mind so it'll kape his nose out of other people's private propity," cried Bridget after him, and then she turned her attention to comforting Betty, who had been dreadfully frightened by the episode.

"I almost wish the desk was sold," she declared with a sob in her voice. "It's always

making us trouble with its queer old secret drawers and the people that try to steal out of it—and don't."

"It's a foine desk that burglars can't burgle, I'm thinkin'," Bridget declared consolingly.

"But it attracts burglars," Betty objected, "and being frightened is almost as bad as being really robbed."

Madeline, who came that evening, fairly gloated in the mysterious robbery and the strange conduct of Mr. Smith. "It's like living in a detective story," she declared. "Mr. Smith was hunting for something, and so were the burglars,—something so valuable that they turned up their noses at six good round dollars. Those old papers can't be valuable. Therefore it stands to reason that there must be something else in there that we haven't found—jewels, maybe, worth a king's ransom. As soon as I've embraced dear old 19—, I'll have another hunt."

But embracing dear old 19— was a more absorbing process than Madeline had counted it. Class supper night, the grand wind-up of Harding commencement, arrived, and she had not given another thought to the hidden treasure.

CHAPTER XX

A FINAL EXCITEMENT

AT first Betty had not seen how she could possibly be spared from "business" on the most strenuous night in the Tally-ho's history, with three class suppers being eaten at once in its precincts, a chef from Boston lording it over Bridget in the kitchen,—or trying to, and a little army of strange waitresses to be shown the way about. But 19— was firm; its president must and should sit through the whole supper on the right hand of Eleanor Watson, who was toast-mistress again this year; must present the mammoth ploshkin to T. Reed's adorable young son, and the silver loving-cup to the real class-baby, the daughter of a certain Mary Jones, who had never in all her college course done anything less commonplace than her name. On the day after commencement she had married a Harding lawyer, and her

living in town made the display of her very small baby possible.

"It's not every first year reunion that has one right here on hand to be inspected," declared Katherine Kittridge. "So here's to Mary Jones, if she wasn't a highly exciting member of our highly exciting class."

So Betty finally yielded to 19—'s demands for her own and Emily's release from duty, put the management of the suppers into Nora's capable hands, and resolved to wear the rose-colored satin dress that she had bought in Paris and to forget for the one night that she was anything but a "lady of leisure" come to her class reunion, just like Bob and Babe and Roberta, without a care in the world or a thought beyond the joy of being "back" with 19—. And partly, no doubt, because the supper was so good and so well served, she succeeded. Eleanor was lovelier than ever, and her little speeches cleverer; Bob, on her other side, was jollier, Helen Adams more amusingly sedate, K. more delightfully absurd. The toasts were as "superfine" as all 19—'s stunts, the songs went with a fine dash, the ploskins made a

decided hit, and T. Reed's little T.—it stood for Thomas instead of Theresa—was so dear and comical, trying to pull his big ploshkin off the table, and finally insisting on a chair for it between himself and “Mother T.,” as everybody called her now. Betty realized suddenly that she hadn't had many “good times” this year, and that she had missed them. Then she forgot everything but the perfectly splendid time she was having right now, in the old care-free Betty Wales fashion. She counted the minutes jealously, and sighed all to herself when the last toast was over—K's comical eulogy of “Our Working Women.”

But with the end of the supper the night's fun was only well started. Up the stairs to the loft, bearing the ploshkins solemnly above their heads, climbed 19—, to sing to the little tenth year table; then out to the Peter Pan Annex to salute the fifteeners and pelt them with green carnations. The third year reunion was up in the gym; the seniors were in the Student's Building. Off trailed 19—, to the tune of the ploshkin song, to return *en masse* the serenades that had en-

livened its own supper. Up-stairs the tenth year people were not half-way through their toasts. Down-stairs Nora turned the lamps low, so that they would burn until 19— came back for its forgotten wraps and its last good-byes. It was a breathlessly hot night, so Nora left all the windows open, and she and Bridget, their duties ended, went home to well-earned rest.

It was long after midnight when 19—, having serenaded all the suppers, all their favorite faculty, all their “loved spots” on the campus, came back in scattered ranks and without music, for they had sung themselves hoarse, to the Tally-ho. The other classes had left, and the tea-shop was dusky and silent. Betty happened to be marching in the front rank with Babe and Roberta.

“I ought to have come back ahead and lighted up for you,” she said. “I thought Nora would stay until we got here, but it’s terribly late, and I suppose she got sleepy.”

“We can hurry ahead and do it now just as well,” declared Babe, and the three walked swiftly up the winding path and flung open the heavy door.

Though the lamps were turned low, they gave light enough to see by easily, and there, sitting at the desk, bending over the pigeon-holes, was a tall woman wearing a dark dress and a dark, drooping hat, that, in her present attitude, completely hid her face. The three girls discovered the intruder at exactly the same minute.

"More Blunderbuss," murmured Babe, remembering the mysterious robberies of senior year. "Do you know her, Betty?"

"No," Betty answered quickly.

"Then I'll just hang on to her till we see what she's taken," cried Babe impulsively, and launched herself fearlessly at the stranger, while Roberta screamed; a relay of girls appearing in the door just then rushed to Babe's assistance, and Betty, not knowing what else to do, turned up all the lamps.

The tall, black-gowned woman was unusually strong, but she was no match for eight stalwart and determined members of 19—.

"I give up. Don't smother me so," she cried after a minute in a queer, deep voice. Her hat had been knocked off in the struggle, and the short hair and unmistakably mascu-

line features that were revealed matched the deep voice and the manly strength.

"Why, she's a—a man," cried Roberta, and redoubled her shrieks of terror.

The man, still held firmly by his captors, struggled to his feet. "Shut up, can't you?" he demanded angrily of Roberta. "Call the police if you want to, but don't wake all the dogs and babies in the neighborhood, and for pity's sake"—to the others—"don't squeeze my arms so. It's not ladylike."

Almost unconsciously the girls loosened their hold a little, and the prisoner, making one supreme effort, dashed straight at the terrified Roberta, who stood near the door, and in another moment was out in the dark, running like a deer for the factory fence. When he climbed over the top, they could just see that he had left his skirt behind.

"Well, this is a crazy ending for a sedate little class supper," declared Babe, sorrowfully inspecting a great tear in her lace-trimmed skirt.

"Wasn't it queer how, when you knew it was a man, you couldn't hold so tight?" questioned Christy Mason.

"We ought to have chased him," cried Roberta, to the vast amusement of the rest.

"It wouldn't pay," Betty put in, "for there's nothing of value here that he could take away, and nothing in the desk that any one would want." She stopped to examine it. "Why!" she cried in dismay. "It's been sawed off, all the top part, and put back again. Look, Madeline!"

Sure enough, the top of the desk had been sawed off just below the drawers, and then cut into three sections, which had finally been laid in place again, so that at first sight the damage would not be noticed.

"The vandal!" cried Madeline. "He's ruined our prize feature. And what was his idea? Oh, I see! He couldn't find the springs, and this was his hateful way of getting into the secret drawers. Do let's count them. Two—four—that's all. Then there wasn't another drawer filled with a king's ransom in pearls for him to make off with. That's certainly a relief."

"Oh, Madeline, do tell us what you mean," came with one voice from the crowd of wide-eyed girls; and with many promptings from

Betty and Babbie Madeline told the story of the secret drawers through all its exciting stages, ending with her theory of the hidden jewels as a possible motive for all the queer robberies.

"But that was evidently a little too wonderful," she added, "though for that matter the real explanation may be even more remarkable. I await suggestions."

These came thick and fast, but the best one was from Christy Mason. "Those papers that Betty found are very likely to be what they want to decide the ownership of some big estate or valuable lands. Old wills and deeds are often very important. But why don't they ask for them, instead of trying to steal them?"

Madeline stared. "That rubbish! Why I think I—— Well, it doesn't matter, because the waste-basket is as safe as any other place while I'm away. When I packed to come up here I think I tossed them into it, but I'm perfectly sure I didn't empty the basket. I never do till it overflows. I'll rush off on the six ten to-morrow—no, this morning, and I'll telegraph you, Betty; Dick will

know, or father's lawyer, if the papers are the prize package. Good-bye, all you dear old 19—'s."

So 19—'s collective farewells were said amid wild excitement, and half the class waited over to be at the Tally-ho next morning when Madeline's telegram was delivered: "Papers safe in waste-basket. Two thousand dollars reward."

This was thrilling, but tantalizingly incomplete; 19— departed gaily with its half-loaf, having made Betty promise to indite a round robin to the class explaining the whole affair.

"For it's very much our affair," Christy declared. "And don't you write until you can explain every single thing, Betty."

It was only a day later, as it happened, when Betty had the whole story. It seemed that the deed signed by "Peter" and witnessed by Robert Wales was wanted, exactly as Christy had guessed, to determine the ownership of a property worth many millions; and the lawyers of the rightful heirs had offered a large reward for its recovery. Meanwhile a daring adventurer, who was

trying to assert his claims to the estate, had hired a disreputable detective agency to find and destroy the deed. Their clever work had traced it to its strange hiding-place, and they had made three desperate attempts to get hold of the paper. The fact that Mr. Wales was a relative of the rightful heirs—Robert and “Peter” were cousins—had made them suspect that his daughter would know of the search for the paper and refuse to give it up; but they had never guessed that the girls would have discovered and emptied the two inner drawers, of the existence of which nobody else knew but their client. “Mr. Smith” did not represent any Boston antique shop, and his knowledge of old furniture was confined to an exhaustive special course in the arrangement of sliding panels and secret springs. But though this had failed him he was a resourceful sleuth, as is proven by the fact that just an hour after Madeline had taken the papers to Dick Blake he appeared at her studio apartment in the guise of the building’s window cleaner; and it was due only to Madeline’s prompt recognition of his resemblance to the lady in black of the night

before, that in less than an hour more he had been arrested, charged with despoiling the Tally-ho desk and also with entering Betty's room in the little white house with intent to take the papers if he could find them there. For Betty had gone home to discover her possessions in great confusion, and Dorothy had told of waking up to find somebody in their room who said she was the washerwoman waiting for Betty to come and give her the clothes.

"And when I said 'you're not our wash-woman 'cause she's Mrs. Gibbs,' she said she was Mrs. Gibbs' sister, and Mrs. Gibbs was sick. And then I guess I was asleep again," Dorothy ended comprehensively.

From Betty's rooms Mr. Smith had returned empty-handed to the Tally-ho, where he had previously succeeded in opening two drawers; and this time he completed his search in the most conclusive fashion that occurred to him by laying open the whole interior of the desk.

It was a detective story ready-made, Madeline declared, and promptly wrote it up, only to have one editor tell her that it lacked reality and the next assure her it was commonplace.

"You certainly never can tell how things will take," complained Madeline sadly. "That's what Mr. Morton says. He's as nearly cross with you as he can be with his dear Miss B. A., because 'those fool splashers' that he got some shop to order a few of are catching on so splendidly. It's certainly fortunate that Bob Enderby thought of the patent, for it seems there's a small fortune in ploshkins."

"Betty Wales and Co." had certainly enjoyed a successful year. Will's salary had been raised three times, and Nan had made a fine record and been asked to take a party of girls abroad for the summer. But between tea-shop, ploshkins, and "hidden treasure," Betty was what Will called "most disgustingly wealthy." It was great fun to be able to rush down town in Cleveland and buy the Japanese screens and the hammock that mother wanted for the piazza of the little cottage they had taken for the summer in a lake-side suburb. It was better still to be accepted joyously as the family cook. Now that she had plenty of money in the bank for summer clothes and other expenses, and a steady income from

ploshkins, it was not necessary to waste time counting up how much her cooking saved the family. The only disappointment came when father absolutely refused to take her "ready money," after what he had said in the fall about how every little would help.

"I can't do that," he told her, "and I don't need to now. We've pulled through the worst of our business trouble, though we shan't be back on Easy Street for a good while yet, I'm afraid." And he sighed a little.

But Betty only laughed. "Who wants so particularly to be back on Easy Street?" she demanded. "It's fun to see what you can do when you try. I like being part of Betty Wales and Co. I like being the cook. I shall like helping in any other ways that turn up." Betty smiled a little far-away smile. "Lots of queer things have turned up this year. I certainly do wonder what I shall get into next."

