

*Pink Magic*

**Margaret Lee  
Runbeck**

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# PINK MAGIC



*Margaret Lee Runbeck*



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All characters and situations in this  
book are purely imaginary. Any  
resemblance to anything on earth  
is strictly an optical illusion.



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*This book is affectionately dedicated  
to six of my friends  
who are wonderful and wise, but whose ages  
add up to less than a hundred*

TWO JOANS LOUISE KATE MARTHA  
and  
MISS BOO



# Pink Magic

## *Chapter One*



Up to the time I went to Mexico to study Art, I had never been in love, except with a horse.

This fact is almost unbelievable when you consider that I am sixteen years and three months old. But it is due to a gruesome but unavoidable circumstance. You see, I am five feet eight inches tall, and weigh a trifle over one hundred and hum-um pounds, *nood*. Also, not to mince matters, I wear glasses.

Lots of people don't believe in numerology. But I am definite proof that there is much truth in it. Because numbers like those I've just admitted certainly affect what happens in a girl's life. Particularly her love-life (or is there any other life?).

My size has always been a big problem in my family. And big is the word. Mummy says that when I was born I was conspicuously normal, but from then on I kept getting more conspicuous and less normal every year. Due, I suppose, to the very scientific diet I have always been kept on.

Mummy herself was an underprivileged child, having been born in 1908. She never was given any vitamins, minerals, or cod-liver oil, or even spinach. As a result, she grew up very beautiful.

Petite is the word Mummy always finds being used about herself, and to me it is the most wonderful word in the language. All my own troubles can be traced to bulk. Just brute bulk. And, to make it even worse, brains.

But Mummy is an ideal woman. And for a great hulk of bulk like me to have to live constantly in the shadow of something petite like Mummy is agony. I find that sentence has a serious non sequitur in it. But then, up until this last month, my life was one long non sequitur.

From the start I made the mistake of inheriting myself from Daddy, and that shows you right there how clumsy I was, to pass up Mummy's lovely little chromosomes and pile up a mountain of Daddy's. From the beginning I

have been somebody who stubbed my toe against mountains, when molehills were just as handy.

This last paragraph sounds as if I didn't appreciate Daddy. He's a wonderful person. For a man, that is. But as a woman he'd be very inconvenient. And most disappointing to anyone who made the mistake of thinking of him as one.

All the things which show on me, I got from Daddy. All the nice invisible things which don't show came from Mummy. . . my romantic nature, my clinging-vineness, my pretty conceits (an eighteenth-century word seldom used now, and too bad, since it is very nice equipment for romance).

Mummy not only lets these qualities show in plain view on her personality, she definitely uses them as other women use make-up. On her they look good. But on me. . . well, on me they're about as decorative as mascara would be on the eye of a potato.

I often think, "If only people looked like themselves." If the outside of me looked like the inside really is, I'd have long dreamy hair such as is found only in Italian masterpieces, or in Baudelaire's poetry, lotus fingertips with nails which always stay clean, the roe's nose standing in a field of lilies as mentioned in the Song of Solomon, and hot lips.

But instead, I look wholesome. I look like a close-up of a child in a scene where everything else is photographed in long shot. This is a technical motion-picture term I learned from Estrellita about whom I'll tell later.

Mummy's way of saying it is that I look like I'm being seen through a telescope.

"Never mind, darling. You were made for bigger worlds to conquer," Mummy says whenever I try to squeeze past something and upset it. That is Mummy's pretty way of expressing unpretty fact. Not accurate, but endearing. Me, on the contrary, am not endearing, but I am embarrassingly exact. I call a spade a spade and let the chips fall where they may. Quite often they fall in front of me, and I, being nearsighted, trip over them and land flat on my face.

But enough of philosophy.

What I intend to tell you is how my life was completely transformed in four weeks. How I was made over, from an all-too-wholesome child into a dangerous woman with power to change other people's lives, in four short weeks. Without even having to mail in a box top.

Thinking back over the whole thing, I realize it was all Fate. Last year I didn't believe in anything. But this year I know that Fate plainly has picked me out to be one of her pawns. I am not sure what a pawn is, but I am sure I *am* one.

Fate obviously planned the whole dramatic month from beginning to end. From the beginning when I stepped on one pair of my glasses and the horse stepped on the other pair, both of us grinding them to powder, clear through to the end you can trace the delicate hand of Fate. My foot and the horse's foot might not be instantly recognized as the delicate hand of Fate, but that is a figure of speech.

It began. . . as one's very life must. . . with one's father. My father is different from most men, being a scientist. That is why I have my cursed, unfeminine brains, I suppose. Brains are just an occupational disease in my family. My father, I might as well admit, is Elmo Thorndike Prowder, the anthropologist, whose book published this year on the sex development of the race has been widely sold and narrowly read.

My father is very bitter about this, having been betrayed by his publisher into allowing a provocative title to be put on some very dull but imposing statistics and tables. Sex, as my father sees it, is a dull but imposing subject, suited more to tables than to any other type of furniture. This is the kind of joke which infuriates Daddy when he encounters it in a review of his monumental work. I tried it out now, just to see how it feels.

At any rate, bitter though he is about the hoax his publisher played on him, we have enjoyed what he calls catastrophic prosperity ever since the *New York Times* ran up the temperature of its best-sellers' list by putting Daddy's book at the top of the thermometer.

Mummy, naturally, has never seen it as anything but a delightful "I-told-you-so!" Mummy, who after all is in a unique position to know, says she always knew he had it in him.

At any rate, it was Daddy's desire for a very quiet summer in Maine which started me on my great adventure in Mexico. Daddy finds popularity very unnerving. He can take everything, he says, except the women. An unnecessary admission, surely, in a man of Daddy's age, which must be hovering precariously near forty-five, when women, to put it delicately, become anachronisms in a man's life.

Mummy's reasons for wanting me to study Art in Mexico were much more complex, of course, since Mummy, I'm sure it is unnecessary to stress,



is all woman. Mummy always advances three or four unshakably sensible reasons for doing what she wants to do, but her real purpose always lies at the bottom of her subconscious, submerged but unaltered, like a coin on the floor of a lake.

“This is the right summer for Lambie to grapple with Art,” Mummy said. “Next year, God willing, she’ll have other things on her mind.”

It would have made Mummy very unhappy if I’d said, “*This* year, God willing or not, I have other things on my mind.” So of course I didn’t say it.

I suppose right here I might as well dispose of the Lambie business as painlessly as possible.

I have fought a losing fight for years against that loathsome name. The alternative, alas, is equally grim, for my parents selected singularly obnoxious people to name me after. Ursula F. Prowder is written on my Mexican tourist card, and one of my frequent nightmares is that someone is making me tell what the F. stands for, before a large roomful of my peers. When people definitely crowd me into a corner about it, I pretend it is a family name. . . Fulsome, or Fenwicke, or Fitzsimmons.

But even that dodge leaves me leading with my Ursula. My best friends, of whom I’ve never had more than one or two, and they were also misfits, problem children or geniuses, have never been able to make anything affectionate-sounding out of the name. Some people at Miss Winslow’s tried to call me Urs last winter. Then one smartie-pants put a *w* in front of it. So, much as I don’t like Lambie, I answer to it. But I do draw the line at Lambie-Pie.

But back to my summer. “The sixteenth year is the hardest, darling,” Mummy said confidentially. “You’re just neither fish nor fowl this year. So keep your mind on Art.”

“My mind’s stuck on it like a band-aid,” I said gloomily.

“If we were going to some really isolated place for the summer it wouldn’t matter.”

“I could get over my leprous condition in secret,” I said bitterly.

“You know what I mean. We must be realistic about it,” Mummy said. “The Garland girls will be about, and that will be just unnecessarily painful for you to see. So Art’s the thing for you, my pet.”

“And besides,” I said cruelly, just to even up for her being so realistic about me, “you’d like to enjoy Daddy alone this summer. I compete.”

“Exactly,” said Mummy, who has also heard of the Oedipus angle. “I’d like to keep my eye on him alone. And not go cross-eyed trying to watch you both.”

Art, as a matter of fact, was not exactly a new escape mechanism for me. I’ve been crawling behind it for years, whenever I didn’t feel comfortable in what was happening around me.

“Lambie’s so ghastly talented, Mummy often says to people. We don’t know which side of her to develop.”

Privately, I’ve always intended that if I should turn out to be the complete flop I thought I most likely should. . . from a human-relations aspect, I mean. . . I’d just make-believe I’d given up everything else for Art. Just the way when I used to be dragged to dancing school, I used to make-believe I was madly interested in the bugs on the bushes outside the window, in case nobody intended asking me to dance. Art. . . bugs. . . it’s all the same. Only one’s more dignified than the other.

But actually who would want to be a Great Painter if she could be a Great Loveress? Now that I know I *can* be the G.L., I can frankly admit this deep subconscious deception without shame.

So, because the Garland girls always have their terraces and their tennis court crowded with fascinating men, so that I have to go around in ragged dungarees pretending I’m above such time-wasting and think they’re all silly little bee-itches, and because Mummy has faith that by another summer my bulk will be more captivately distributed about my frame so that the sight of the svelte and smirking Garland girls won’t give me a neurosis, I made-believe I was nuts about Art. Particularly a month of it in Mexico.

## Chapter Two



Hardly had we left the Back Bay Station than I could see the trip was going to be definitely super. Mrs. Candee, who was to be the chaperon for us three “younger girls” (as we were simperingly called), *is* of course a schoolteacher, but not in the strict meaning of the word, for she is a divorcée. In a very prim way, naturally. She is fairly old. My guess is about twenty-nine, though Horty insists she must be all of thirty. But at least she once was exposed to a man, even if only temporarily and unsuccessfully.

There were two other “girls” for this part of the trip. Horty Evans, whose mother couldn’t bother with her this summer while she is in Reno, Nevada, picking up the usual commodity for which that area is famous. She is going to try a new marriage. But Horty says it will be the same old chassis with a new paint job.

The other girl is Corney Baker, who is a ripe seventeen, with tired, experienced eyes. I tried to pretend I was also seventeen, but Horty said, “Listen, Lambie-dumpling, Candee told my mother all the facts about you, so don’t get delusions of grandeur.”

Horty is a very athletic-type girl, but it has never stood in her way, since she doesn’t seem to run to muscle but rather to slow curves. Her hair is a bit alarming when you first see it, but you soon get used to it. It is jet black underneath, with gold on the top layer. There is a mourning border of black on each side of the part. Her head in fact is a kind of gold-and-black-striped tiger pelt. This is because there was a bad rainy Sunday last winter at Miss Dean’s School, when nobody knew what to do with themselves. Miss Dean had hysterics when nine brass blondes came down to supper.

It would have turned out all right, except that the parents were so reactionary they wouldn’t stand for the upkeep, and everyone had to let her hair grow back just any way it wanted to. Horty says the two months she was a pure blonde were “the best years of her life.”

“I’ve been a pure blonde all my life,” I said, “and I’ve never found anything so wonderful about it.”

“There’s such a thing as being too pure a blonde,” Corney said.

I couldn't follow the reasoning in that remark; I should think the more blonde the better. But our acquaintance was too young for arguing. Indeed, what a wonderful world it would be if all acquaintances were considered too young for arguing!

At any rate, when Horty's eighteen next year, she's going to have a lawyer write a letter to her mother, saying she is of age, and she can own and operate her own scalp as she pleases. But this summer, she is frankly a mess, if you aren't in the "know" enough to appreciate what her peroxidized hair stands for. You might mistake her for a repentant waitress when you first saw her, but when she opens her mouth, you know she is Junior League to the bone. It's what Daddy calls "provocative contradiction."

We heard about the Dean débâcle at Miss Winslow's, and the only thing we could do to match it was to have our ears pierced. Not spectacular, of course, but at least permanent. We considered some modest tattooing strategically placed, but there was no reliable tattooer north of Scollay Square, Boston, or south of Bath, Maine, and Miss Winslow's School is just halfway between.

Horty, naturally, does not regret the Sunday afternoon, although she has to pretend some tripey remorse to her mother. Matter of fact, most of our better schools heard all about it, and it gives those nine striped blondes a certain distinction. Next year they'll be coming out in nine of our nicest cities, and their hair is a kind of badge of daring among kids who know what's what.

Horty has very nice black eyes and good eyebrows, and I imagine she wears clothes well. I say I imagine, because naturally in Mexico nobody wears clothes much.

All this description of Horty is ipso facto, because of course it would have been impossible for me to speak in such an experienced and worldly fashion at the time I was furtively observing her and Corney, during our first hours together. As I dimly remember, *then* I was terrified of them both, so I was scowling at them from behind my glasses, and trying to give the impression that I thought they were pretty silly, and even immature. That was more than a month ago, when I was Somebody Else. Since then I have overtaken them in sophistication, if not actually outstripped them. (No pun intended!)

In a frightened blur I saw them as two of my natural enemies. Not safe and tiresome, as adults are. But people I'd not want to trust. For they obviously had *Appeal*. And they would soon recognize that I had none, and

would begin reviling, ridiculing, and finally, what is worse, ignoring me. It has happened to me so many times when I have been forced to venture out among my contemporaries, that I can feel the cruel cold breath of scorn blown on me the moment I am looked at by any girl who has dated and who knows her Way Around.

I knew it would be impossible to impress them in their own field, which was obviously sex, and that they would have no interest in my field, which is everything else that is left after sex has been removed from the world. But what, in heaven's name, is left? That has always been my dilemma.

"I hear you're a wonderful student," Corney said accusingly. "That's super, I imagine."

"On the contrary," I said haughtily, "I loathe the whole ghastly process so much. . . education, that is . . . that I'm trying to dash through it as quickly as possible. To get it over with, you know."

"Umm," they said vaguely, seeing through me perfectly, and not being interested in the slightest.

Corney, so named because her father is a professor at a certain university, is an entirely different type from Horty. Smaller and deadlier. Brighter, hence not so good-natured. She is very dark and pretty in a fragile misleading little way. She has an appetite which would choke a horse, as the saying goes. Nothing she eats seems to show on her the way it does on most normal people. Her waist is twenty when she breathes and eighteen when she doesn't, which was supposed to be an asset in the last century, and is becoming so again.

She has a small refined lazy little voice, except when you are alone with her (just girls, I mean); then she quite likely scrapes her words off the bottom of her throat, or peels them off the roof of her mouth. Her profanity would take the varnish off a merry-go-round. She says she learned it from a riding teacher she was in love with two years ago at Miss Makepeace's in Connecticut.

She wears her hair parted in the middle, and draws it down demurely in a dark curtain on each side of her face. Her eyes are wide and gray. She is the perfect madonna type. Outside, that is. Inside, she is a swearing, sweating female wrestler.

Naturally she hasn't the slightest interest in Art, but she had heard that Mexican men are terrific. So she persuaded her parents to let her study in this special course connected with the University of Mexico.

Both Corney and Horty had fat bulging billfolds with leaves of double cellophane in which they have dozens of boys' pictures, past, present, and future. You can tell how each boy rates by his position in the billfold. The farther-back ones are almost forgotten, but are present only to give confidence on the days of discouragement, when you want to count over your achievements and buck yourself up.

Horty broke up with her boy just before she left home. He's a sad character, unnerved by the war. He is twenty-two, which is the oldest man any girl I've personally known has ever gone with. He would have got overseas in another week if the war hadn't ended. Although he told Horty he just wanted to be free, she thinks it is really a case of another woman. Sometimes she was pretty sunk when she thought about him, and breaking up and all. It just shows how the war has ruined the world, she says. She only heard from him five times the whole month.

Corney's billfold had more pictures in it than Horty's. You'd know that to look at them, for Corney is the obvious valentine type that practically any boy would find his head swimming about. Horty is more of an acquired taste, like camembert cheese.

Also Corney has much more skill in handling men. For instance, Corney says no matter how much in love she is, she never goes steady with anybody.

"I go semi-steady," she says.

"With how many boys at once?" Horty asked, without a gleam of humor.

"Well, sometimes with three boys and sometimes with four. Depending."

I tried to pin them down about just what semi-steady involves, but it ran into decimals, and I've never enjoyed mathematics. Especially in the summer.

They showed me their billfolds as soon as the train pulled out, and I was terrified for fear they would ask to see mine. I intended to say that my mother stole it that very morning. But they didn't ask me. When I realized that was because they knew all too well that I didn't have any pictures, I felt very depressed. Anybody would know to look at the big sprawling size of me that I haven't any love-life. It is a gruesome thing to have your love-life show the minute anybody looks at your figure.

But although I was pretty discouraged and inferior-feeling, I felt myself reviving with every ten miles I traveled away from home. I felt my old self dropping off like a garment, as I think it says in the Bible. Or Shakespeare.

Anyway, my unfortunate environment was fading from my appearance. At home everyone thinks of me as a plump, clumsy, unattractive child, the way I was a couple of years ago. That Lambie Prowder. But here I was being born into a new world, where my empty past wouldn't matter. It was a daring and dangerous thought, and I sat by the window watching the fields and towns fly past, and thought about it until chills went up and down my backbone.

I made up my mind that the first thing I'd do was lose my round straw hat that Mummy made me wear. I got up, stepping on Horty's toes in my excitement, and went out of our compartment.

"Excuse. . . I've got to go to the john," I mumbled.

"We've a private lavatory right here, Lambie," Mrs. Candee said, but I pretended not to hear her.

I plunged down the aisle of the pullman, noticing all kinds of men reading newspapers or looking out windows, and burst into the Ladies' john at the end of the car. Without a moment's doubt, I stuffed the hat down the john, hoping it wouldn't get stuck in the trap door. I felt better the minute it disappeared. It was only a symbol of what I intended to do to my entire environment. If not my heredity.

As I came staggering back to our own drawing room, I happened to notice a very unusual woman. I was looking at the man with her, of course, and then my eye sort of slid off of his face onto hers. I nearly gasped because she was so beautiful. She looked something like that great actress from Italy, Valli, only much more aristocratic and romantic-looking. The man with her was also dark and rather foreign-looking, but a common type. The thought occurred to me instantly that he might be a faithful retainer of her family sent to travel with her. Later, when we became acquainted and I asked her if this was true, she admitted that it was. That shows you how intuitive was my understanding of Estrellita from the first moment I looked at her.

She must have seen me gazing helplessly at her, for she looked up, then glanced down quickly to hear what her companion was saying, and then again raised her lovely eyes to my face. Then she smiled.

It was not an American smile. I do not know how to describe it, except to say that it came out of the Old World. And out of another century, when romance ruled. I stumbled back to our compartment, just as Mrs. Candee was starting out to look for me.

“Lambie. . . I’ve promised your mother you are not to wander about by yourself,” she said sternly.

I muttered I-don’t-know-what, and sank back into my place by the window. The wide wonderful world lay before me, and mystery had already beckoned to me. One short walk down the aisle of a pullman, and I had blundered into an unguessed enchantment. My hands were quivering with excitement in my lap.

Horty and Corney were getting out their cards to play a little gin. I looked at them with pity. For the first time in my life, I looked at two girls with appeal, and wasn’t afraid of them. Somebody dangerous and beautiful had been attracted to me, and had smiled.

The next couple of days were practically wasted flying through America on a beeline to the Mexican border. We could understand perfectly why Candee made a mess of marriage, for she was certainly a woman of strong character. Never once, except in a hideous group, would she allow us to venture out of that compartment. She said very grimly that she had promised our parents, and that was that. No matter how scathingly we looked at her, she did not relent.

For at least an hour before each mealtime, Horty and Corney would work on their appearance, going over their skin with a magnifying mirror in case some little blackhead had invisibly popped out since they looked last, turning up their eyeballs in hideous gymnastics while they studied each hair of their eyebrows, and putting on at least three mouths before they finally got one that suited them. But all of it was in vain, for as Horty said, what man could possibly get a load of one of us, when we were all lumped together like a bunch of bananas. Candee walked behind us through the cars on the way to the diner, and she kept us moving at breakneck speed. Men barely had time to get their eyes up from the sports page before we were gone.

Even in the dining car, we didn’t have a chance. Candee wouldn’t hear of us breaking up and sitting two and two at a table (though that would have done me no good, as I would certainly have drawn *her*). We had to wait at the end of the dining car until a big family table for four was vacant. It was nauseating.

The only break we got at all was a portly sexagenarian who must have been all of forty, lolling against the window waiting for a single place. He straightened up and smoothed down his disappearing hair when he saw us come in.



“Well, you girls look like you’re out on mischief bent,” he said with a leer.

“We’re bent anyway,” Horty said, before Candee could leap in with one of her wholesome girls’-camp smiles.

“How do the four of you manage to get out with no chaperon?” Old Faithful said, knowing perfectly well what the situation was, considering Candee’s crows’-feet, but trying to be cute.

“Why, *I’m* the chaperon,” Candee said, breaking out a couple of dimples and a blush.

“Oh, come now. . . I can’t believe that,” he said, looking ardently at her. “I think you’re pulling my leg.”

“*Please*, leave us not get anatomical, shall we?” Horty murmured, but neither Candee nor the decrepit Lothario noticed her. They went on with a few more clumsy attempts at humor, until the head waiter motioned to us that our table was ready.

But, tiresome as it was, I think that encounter gave us an idea. Later, while Candee was in the john, we talked it over.

“It seems like a terribly roundabout way of doing things,” Horty said, “but I think the only chance we have of getting to know Anybody, is to fix Candee up first.”

“She’s much too old,” I said.

“Yes. But she doesn’t know it.”

“Besides, there’s no age limit,” Corney said. “Look at your mother, Horty.”

“Yes, look at her,” Horty said. “But in her case, it’s partly financial. She’s got to live, you know.”

“You mean she’s a woman of shame!” I gasped. (I admit this now, only to show what a long way I had to come out of the dark clouds of innocence. Now, of course, I know all about women of shame; in fact, I would not even call them by such a stuffy literary term. . . . One thing about being naïve I have noticed is that it is just the opposite state of mind from what people usually believe it is. Naïve people suspect things of being much worse than they are. When you don’t know much, you think everything is much wickedder and more romantic than it turns out to be. It would be a great

disappointment to me if sin itself is only a rumor, after all. But on with the story.)

After they had got through hooting with mirth at my stupid faux pas, we discussed our plan for getting Candee occupied in some way that would give us a chance.

That led us into a discussion of love, as practically everything does. But this was a somewhat scientific discussion, having to do with the different ages' ability to feel love. Horty doesn't believe anyone over twenty knows much about love. Except motion-picture people who must live in a constant atmosphere of it for their Art's sake. Corney is very academic about it, and believes that the system has dried up entirely by the time it is thirty, but that people sometimes get away with pretending. I frankly do not know. I feel sure my own system is at its peak this summer.

It seems very disgusting to me that elderly people should want to think about love. There ought to be *something* else for them to do. I cannot think of anything just now, but I'm sure I could work out a useful program to occupy them, as long as is biologically necessary.

Well, as I say, the trip looked like a complete waste of time, except for a few important conversations Corney and Horty and I had. It was not easy for us to talk freely, since we were confined in a small space with Candee, who likes to preserve an appearance that we all understand each other. But she did fall asleep occasionally, with her reading glasses on. And then I learned many enlightening things. I did my best to give the impression that I am experienced. Only reticent about discussing my experiences. I would have died rather than admit to them that I had never dated in my life.

But when we reached the Mexican border, Fate obviously took over.

It was very exciting. We woke up early. . . about nine o'clock. . . hearing all kinds of foreign voices angrily shouting back and forth at each other. The train was standing still, and once in a while a foreboding whistle tooted.

We looked out the window, and all lands of people were walking along the tracks, carrying luggage and looking most disturbed. At first I hoped it was a wreck. Not a serious wreck, of course, just something which could be an Experience.

Candee was jerking and yanking at her girdle, and telling us not to be excited, which of course was silly, for this was the first real chance we'd had to be excited and we were certainly going to take advantage of it. Corney

was brushing out her long dark hair, and I could see her planning to run down the tracks scantily clad, but ravishing.

It turned out to be nothing very dramatic, however. Only a pullman strike, which wasn't going to permit any pullmans to come into Mexico. The distracted train officials were unloading all the passengers from their reservations, and fitting them unwillingly into day coaches. We were overjoyed, naturally, that circumstance had unclasped the strangle-hold Candee had on us. From here on we knew she would be unable to act as an iron curtain between us and life. Once we got ourselves absorbed into the other passengers, anything might happen. Or, to be more exact, Anybody.

In a few minutes we had gathered up all our scattered possessions and had stuffed them into bags. I am naturally very systematic, so I seized a bag and put everything I could lay my hands on into it. Candee, a somewhat categorical-minded woman, was quibbling about putting possessions into their proper owner's luggage, but this was mere hair-splitting at such a time. The important thing was to get out and see the excitement, hoping for violence, if possible.

The adults, as usual, were disturbed and grumbling about the lovely emergency, entirely missing the point. One old man, with his shirt insecurely anchored in his pants, was declaiming against labor, and saying he would send a report of the whole thing to the embassy. Nobody was paying the slightest attention to him, except several equally ineffectual old dodderers. Financiers and capitalists, obviously.

In the midst of the confusion, I saw Estrellita once more, and my bones turned to jelly because she looked so beautiful. Her fine sensitive face had fear written on it, and I wanted to go over and reassure her that everything was going to be all right. Two men, one a very crude-looking American, were talking to her. I looked around for the bodyguard who had been with her two days before, but he had disappeared. Later, when I asked her about him, she said he had abandoned her, and she feared he might be connected with some plot. She thought he might even have brought about this trouble, but she asked me not to mention it to anyone.

When we were finally herded into the day coaches, I managed by sheer brute will-power to get us into the same coach with Estrellita. I sensed that she was unprotected now, and all my chivalry demanded that I be at hand to protect her if danger arose. I think she recognized me, for once again, when I was crowding behind her, she smiled at me over her shoulder.

When I overheard her speaking to someone else, I was amazed that she had no accent. Later, when she and I got acquainted, her accent came back to her, and when I asked about this, she said that whenever she talked to Americans of the lower classes, she made a heroic effort to speak as they speak so that there would be no class discrimination against her. Of course her stage training made this possible, but she admitted that it required great concentration for her to speak without accent.

During the first hours in the day coach, everybody was babbling to everyone else, the way people do. Everyone wanted to tell exactly where he was and what he was doing when he heard that the train had been stopped by labor bandits (my inspired name, which the whole day coach soon was using).

Horty and Corney had quickly looked over the available men, and were very much disappointed to discover that most of them were traveling with families of one kind or another, or else were old and impossible. It is a wistful fact that men you only catch a forbidden glimpse of always seem more stunning than they are when you can sit across an aisle and study them.

There was, however, a baseball team from Texas on its way down to play a few games with Mexican teams. But after a few attempts to draw them into something, Horty and Corney gave them up as definitely on the bumpkin side.

But while they were still barking up that tree, I got acquainted with Estrellita. We had not talked for fifteen minutes before I realized that she and I had more in common than anyone I ever had met. Everything I believe, she agreed with almost as soon as the words were out of my mouth. She was the first to remark how very much alike we were; I probably would have been too shy to have pointed it out.

“We look not alike. . . no?. . . and yet, inside. . .” she said with her adorable tilted-up accent.

She asked me all about my family and seemed very much interested. Her mother, she said, was an Italian countess, who had gone back to Italy a few months ago to dispose of some of the ancestral jewels. Her father is connected with a secret department of the U.N., but she preferred not to talk about that. She herself had been working in Hollywood, but only to amuse herself. She told me a great deal about motion pictures. Several of the big studios had wanted to star her, but she cannot permit that because of her family’s importance in the Old World. She has allowed them, however, to

give her some small parts, on condition that they never will let her name appear on the screen. Her name, I forgot to say, is Estrellita de Varis, and I personally think it is the most beautiful name I ever listened to.

While we were talking, far into the afternoon, several men kept passing our straw seat and trying to signal to her. But she ignored them all, like the aristocrat she is.

“Waat d’you say, Babe?” one red-haired man said, leaning over and speaking nauseatingly close to her face.

“Bleaze,” she said, “do not force me to call the official.”

He looked like a surprised goldfish as he backed away. Then, because she is such a kindhearted person, and cannot bear to have anyone hurt or slighted, she winked at him.

“Okay, whatever you say,” he gulped, and went spraddling down the aisle. (I cannot find that word in the dictionary, but it is a phonetic description of his locomotion.)

Estrellita was going to Mexico City to visit some old friends of her family, very conservative people who have a hacienda in the hills. She warned me that I must not tell the others about it.

“But I will come to your funny little students’ hotel, and keednap you some day and show you the beautiful houze of my friends,” she promised me.

Horty and Corney tried to muscle into our conversation, but Estrellita was not interested in them.

“Forgeeve me for saying eet, Ursula, but they are gommon and gauche, your leetle playmates,” she said gently.

By the end of the day, we were old friends, tried and true. I asked Mrs. Candee if I might have permission to have dinner alone with Estrellita in the crowded dining car. She thought it over a minute, and then said that since Estrellita was not a man, she couldn’t see any objection to it.

As we were coming back through the day coaches, after I had had the pleasure of being her hostess, Estrellita said to me, “What is that lomp in the middle of your chest, chérie?” Usually when people mention lumps they are referring disparagingly to my figure. But I knew Estrellita would not be as crude as that. I glanced down at myself. Her quick eye had detected the lump of bills which I had pinned inside my bra. I laughingly explained.

“You must not ruin your luffy form with such things,” she said very seriously.

I explained that I’m inclined to be a little absent-minded about my handbag, and that Mummy had suggested that I keep my big bills pinned on me.

“Perhaps you will want me to keep it for you, until we part?” she said with the sweetest possible smile.

When we came to the next coach’s vestibule, I reached inside and unpinned the money and gave it to her.

“Nize and warm,” she said. “You are a nize warm young thing.” She took the wad and tucked it into her own purse.

“It will be safe there,” she said. “When we part I will geeve it back to you, chérie.”

“It’s three hundred dollars,” I said. “I’m going to bring back presents for my parents and such people.”

“You are generous, no?”

“To people I love,” I said boldly, not having the faintest idea what I meant, but thinking it sounded rather well.

“Perhaps I can help you find suitable geefts in Mexico. You will be very busy studying the Art, yes?”

“We could go shopping together,” I said dizzily. “Now that Candee has given me permission. . . I imagine we can just spend oodles of time together.”

“I must not interfere with the Art,” she said sternly. “I only want to be an influence for good for my leetle friend.”

I could not tell her then. . . or ever, of course. . . but somehow, in a way I cannot explain, she had already become a great influence for good to me. A torrent of goodness, and a desire to be protective, to help her and protect her, was making me feel all battered with emotion inside. And in another way, also, she was an influence for good, for already in a few short hours I had outgrown much of the silliness about boys which had possessed me. It did not seem important now that I had never had a date. I wanted only to give my life to humanity. . . maybe I would go to Italy and help the little starving children she had told me about. I saw myself, a kind of big healthy Florence Nightingale. I was glad, for once, that I am big and strong and strapping. I

knew I could stand any hardship. Especially if Estrellita, too, could devote her life to working with me.

Everyone had to sleep in the day coaches, but for once I was not pleasantly stimulated by the discomfort and inconvenience. Candee made us curl up all together on two coach seats, turned to face each other, so that our feet were all mixed up with the rest of us. I pretended to go to sleep immediately so I wouldn't have to listen to a lot of silly gabble from the others. In the privacy behind my eyelids I thought thrillingly about all the wonderful vistas of experience that had opened up to me.

In the morning a terrible disappointment faced me. It was not pure disappointment, however, because I did have a little note from Estrellita, something tangible she had given to me. It was passed to me by the conductor.

The note said:

I met an old family friend on the train. His chauffeur had brought his car to meet the train, and he has invited me to riding with him. I would liked to asking you to drive with us, but

I was afraid of that Monster guarding you. Do not fear, chérie, I will find you at your hotel.

It was signed merely E. But she had drawn a simple little crest beside her initial. My blood ran hot and cold as I read the lovely quaint note.

## Chapter Three



I have decided not to bother describing mere landscapes, like a guidebook. I leave these descriptions to others, and concentrate on the great invisible scenery of the heart. Besides, most of the time I have been so engrossed in what is happening that I have not noticed external things. I can easily bone up on that from some travel book just before I go home, so that my parents won't be disappointed in my trip. Adults are often grossly materialistic about such things, I find.

But one piece of scenery I must comment on. That is the appearance of our party as a whole. Pretty sad, frankly. A few married couples, but obviously not Great Romances. Tame little arrangements, I should say, by which mediocre males exchanged the protection of their names for small creature services, such as mending, listening to dull anecdotes, encouragement before and after miniature combats with the outer world, housekeeping, and, of course, sex. There always seems something furtive and too good-humored about such marriages as these, which I have observed. If there is anything heroic and large about them, it is despair, frittering itself away in small tedium instead of making some great tragic protest, such as one finds in classic drama of the past.

Most of these married couples are also schoolteachers, since they seem the only people. . . except the emancipated rich. . . who are free to travel. The other lone females of the party. . . all with glasses either on or in handy pockets. . . all looked exactly alike to me. One of the most difficult problems that the young have to solve, in making the necessary adjustment to the rest of the world, is that old people all look exactly alike. This, of course, is because biology has lost interest in them completely, and wastes no effort in differentiating between them. Anonymity is their drab lot. George B. Shaw has said that love is the exciting fallacy that there is some great difference between one person and the rest of his sex. Middle-aged people illustrate this facetious point in a pathetic way. When love has passed, so has individuality, it seems to me.

At any rate, all of the twenty or thirty people in our party resembled each other. Six wore pants, but that seemed to make little difference. They all had pale, sagging faces propped up above the ears by their spectacle frames,



while the bottom half of their faces seemed to be sliding into their necks. They all were noxiously cheerful, with a cowardly eagerness to please each other. Their figures were either economical and stingy-looking, as if they had been made as cheaply as possible out of gray odds and ends of anatomy, or they were bulgy and droopy. Both the thins and the fats, however, pushed varying degrees of paunches in front of them as they walked.

We were introduced to all of them by Candee, and when they came to my last name, their eyebrows all flew up in humorous mischievousness, and their weak little eyes asked a quick question of Candee, who always looked roguish and demure, muttering something like “Exactly,” or “That’s right,” as if I were too feeble-minded to realize they were thinking about Daddy’s book.

“Well! So this is Lambie Prowder,” they’d say with horrid heartiness, and I could practically see them galloping upstairs to their rooms and seizing a sheet of paper to write some waggish description home to one of their dull colleagues. No wonder poor Daddy has to have a quiet summer. . .

Horty and Corney were not unconscious of it, either.

“If you were the type, your name would give you quite a start ahead of the rest of us,” Horty said. “The mere mention of your name sort of brings up the subject.”

“But it’ll never do her any good,” Corney said conclusively.

I could see they were already discouraged about me; or even worse than that, they didn’t consider me eligible enough even to be discouraged about. For all practical purposes, I was as bad as an adult.

But they had their own decks all cleared for action, to borrow a nautical phrase.

Horty said to Candee, “Mother said she had told you about Mrs. Truesberger.”

“Mrs. Truesberger?” Candee looked puzzled.

“Yes. Her dear friend who lives down here, who’s going to have me out to her house,” Horty said glibly.

“Why, no, she didn’t mention it.”

“Oh, I’m sure you’ve just forgotten, darling,” Horty said winsomely. “You know. . . they went to Vassar together. . . class of nineteen ought thirty, or some such date?”

“I’m sure I’d have remembered if she had mentioned it,” Candee said bewilderedly.

“Well, no matter,” Horty said, sounding mature and sensible. “Of course she may forget to invite me after all. But my mother *hopes*. . .”

Afterwards Corney said, “What’s this Truesberger deal?”

“Just a plant. In case.”

“Good idea. I wish I’d thought of it.”

I let my stupidity show, by mistake. “You mean there isn’t any such person as Truesberger?”

They both imitated my voice. “No, there isn’t any such person, Lambieburger. . . but there’s liable to be. In case we can turn up Anybody.”

“You mean a man?”

“We don’t mean a mouse, Sweetie-pet.”

The first two weeks of this whole experience, they were pretty insulting to me. That was one thing that made the final deal so heavenly. They always assumed . . . and rightly. . . that I was a complete blank in all matters of importance. And what is even more annoying in people that I had terrific brains about everything that didn’t matter. I have never been sure which is my worst handicap, my ignorance or my brains. Anyway, Corney and Horty found them equally repulsive, and never let me forget it.

Until, in spite of themselves, they began liking me. And of course the only reason they really liked me was Kimball. Their feeling about me just bounced off of their feeling for him.

The first few days in Mexico City were plain H—— To begin with, I was financially embarrassed. The School had provided us with two meals a day, and we ourselves were supposed to buy our third meal. But by the time I had paid my taxi fare and tips from the railway station, and a few other such minor items, I was practically without funds.

I knew that Estrellita would come to our hotel as soon as she possibly could, but in the meantime I just had to pretend I wasn’t hungry. And for someone like me to pretend I am not hungry is to pretend I have died and been buried. But at least my hunger was a constant reminder of Estrellita, in the midst of people who didn’t understand her, and who made fun of my friendship with her whenever I happened to open my mouth about her.

“What on earth did that floozie see in Lambie?” they sometimes asked Candee in my very presence.

“Never mind,” Candee said fatuously, “Lambie is a very lovely child.”

At first, of course, I had tried to explain to them how much we had in common. . . how alike we were under all the surface differences, how noble she was, and something about her aristocratic background. But I saw I was merely casting pearls before oysters, or whatever the platitude is.

The School was being held in a most interesting old hotel, which was originally built as a palace, as everything old in Mexico seems to have been. It later became a nunnery, although it was a bit festive-looking for that. Inside was a huge patio, around which all the rooms were built. A brick gallery ran around the second floor, and a weary fountain muttered to itself in the center of the patio. Tables and umbrellas were placed around the patio for meals to be served on. In the mornings we did our painting here, attended by an instructor who came from the University. There were a few other guests in the hotel, but not really Anybody.

The very first night in the old hostel, something rather terrifying happened to me. Candee and we three girls occupied a little corner suite. There were two very high-ceilinged rooms connected by a huge bathroom with whimsical plumbing and a floor that slanted so that you had to climb a hill to get to the shower. When anybody took a shower, the stream ran nimbly across our bedroom floor to a puddle under my bed. We had long windows with a decrepit rusty balcony looking out onto the street and the Alameda. Candee slept on a day bed in what was supposed to be a sitting room, and we three slept interchangeably in a double bed and a single bed. At first, when nobody liked me, they made me sleep in the single bed, but later on, when Horty and Corney wanted to ask me about things, they sometimes even quarreled about who was to sleep in the double bed with me. Delirious situation!

Well, the first night we were in Mexico City, I was pretty tired (and hungry). Candee was supposed to go to the airport and meet a late-comer, and Horty and Corney decided to go with her, just to see if Anybody turned up.

“I think you’d better come, too, Lambie dear,” Candee said.

But I knew there’d be the matter of sharing the taxi fare, which would be embarrassing for me. And besides I wanted to read a copy of Guy de Maupassant in the original which I had found down in the lounge. The

serious deficiency in Miss Winslow's French Department is that its vocabulary omits so many vital words. Vital to de Maupassant, at any rate.

"No, I think I'll brush up on my French," I said.

"It's not French we need here, Dope," Horty said. "If you want to brush up on something, it'd better be Spanish."

"In a pinch my French may help," I said with dignity.

"Speaking of pinches. . . I got a nice one today," Corney murmured dreamily.

"French is the language of diplomacy," I reminded them stiffly.

"You're not apt to meet any diplomats, Lumpie-dumpling, pinch or no pinches," Horty said. But nevertheless I stayed behind.

"No matter who taps on the door, you're not to answer," Candee said. "And if the telephone rings. . ."

"My mother talked to me," I said stiffly.

"I'll bet she did," Corney remarked, "but it was wishful thinking on her part, I'm afraid."

"Now, girls," Candee murmured, reprovingly, as she did in my defense a dozen times a day.

But my mother had talked to me, very seriously, and I knew all about the dangers of Mexico, where an entirely different standard of safety exists. My mother, who sometimes reverts to a sugary Victorianism which she must reach way back into her grandmother's girlhood to find, had one of those twilight sessions with me which make everybody's skin crawl with discomfort.

"Now, Ursula, before you start on this trip, I must speak frankly about something."

"Yes, Mummy," I said, feeling lace pantalettes sprouting under my skirts.

"You know you're very precious to your father and me."

"Of course, I'll be very careful crossing streets," I said glibly, hoping to throw her off the scent, if possible.

"No, darling. This is another kind of safety I'm thinking about."

“I won’t eat any fresh fruits or uncooked vegetables,” I said imploringly, giving her a chance and hoping to heck she’d rescue herself while she could. “I’ve heard all about the dysentery problem down in Mexico.”

“That’s true, dear. But this is something else,” Mummy said doggedly. “You know, you have something which is much more precious than you could possibly realize, and you must take the greatest possible care of it. Once it is lost, a girl’s life is forever marred.”

Mummy’s face wasn’t looking at all like itself now. It was a nauseating picture of parenthood, in its most muggy phase. She went on gulping out ready-made euphemisms and figures of speech, until I thought I’d toss up my cookies. And I sat there gazing at her owlishly from behind my glasses, wondering just how low the human spirit could abase itself.

“You know what I’m talking about, don’t you, dear?” she said at the end of a prickling five minutes.

“No, Mother,” I said in a pant.

She looked as if she could slap me, but I continued to look as obnoxious and guileless as possible.

“Now you listen to me,” she said crossly, “I’m telling you that you’re not to speak to one single man.”

“No, ma’am,” I said, rejecting the quip about how-about-a-married-one?

“You’re not to be alone in a room with a man, or in a taxi. You’re not to go out on the street by yourself, even in the daytime.” Her face was very red and angry now, and I suddenly felt a fiendish desire to torture her.

“But, Mummy, why not?” I asked in a seven-year-old angel voice.

“Because I tell you not to,” she said, resorting to the most egregious violation of child psychology known to man or beast.

“But what would happen to me, Mummy dear?” I asked with breathless innocence.

“A man would get you,” Mummy said. “Some horrid man. And he’d. . . well, he might. . . Lambie, *try to use your intelligence.*”

“I am trying,” I said in a whimper.

“Latins have very strange standards. They assume that if a young girl is unchaperoned, that she is. . . that they can. . .” Mummy was distressing

herself almost to the perspiration point. “I couldn’t bear it if anything happened to you. If, through your stupid innocence, some man. . .”

“Stole the three hundred dollars you’ve given me to spend?” I said very loudly, looking her frankly in the eye.

“Exactly,” she said, looking back brutally. “Well, you get the point anyway.”

Of course I did. I was born knowing the point, naturally.

So after the girls and Candee had gone, I amused myself imagining what I’d do if some hot-breathed Latin did come to my door, and take a passkey out of his pocket, and. . . A few minutes of this imagining, combined with even the loose translation of de Maupassant (thanks to Miss Winslow’s prudery), finally had me really scared. I decided that even though I was pretty sleepy, I’d better stay awake until the others came back about midnight. And I certainly should leave on the lights. I wanted to shove the bolt on the inside of the door, but I was afraid to get out of bed. Finally, however, I made it, shaking in every limb. The bolt clanged with the sound of doom as it slid across the crack of the door. Then I ran and jumped back under the covers, shivering and shaking deliciously.

Finally I realized I had fallen asleep, for I was waking up. The room was blazing with light, and to my horror someone was rapping on my door. I cowered under the covers. The rapping came again. And at the same moment the telephone rang. I was afraid to answer it. The rapping continued, and someone rattled the door. Then in a moment came something even more frightening. A man’s voice, a very Latin voice, put its lips to the keyhole, and spoke to me through the door. He spoke in a husky whisper, filled with passion.

“Lemmie, open the door,” he said. “Lemmie, please open the door.” And under that, I heard him cursing in Spanish.

How had he discovered my name? My intelligence was acting with clear, incisive analysis. He must have intercepted some of my mail. . . he must have discovered who my father is. . . he must have read some of Mummy’s written caution and have deduced that I am a protected and beloved child. My heart was pounding so it shook the whole bed. Perhaps he was a kidnapper, looking for ransom. . .

“Lemmie, please.” He was continuing now, and speaking more loudly, throwing caution to the winds.

Now there seemed to be others around my door, and the rapping went on. Perhaps he had brought a gang with him, a kidnaping ring, working internationally.

“Lemmie. . .”

Then something horrid and vulgar happened. American, I’m sorry to say. A loud man’s voice called out from the next room.

“Hey, lady. . . *let him*, for Pete’s sake, so the rest of us can get some sleep.”

I burrowed down under the covers, pulling them up over my head, so that I need not listen to the terrible scene. After a few minutes, I came up to listen, and there was scuffling and noise, and then footsteps retreating down the stone stairs. Perhaps the police had finally come and apprehended him. At last I fell asleep.

In the morning when I finally waked up, I was alone in the room and the lights were still blazing. I got up cautiously and dressed, trying to decide whether or not I would tell the others about the terrible thing which had almost happened to me. They might think I was making it up; perhaps I had better just say nothing about it at all.

I brushed my teeth, and went down to breakfast, feeling pale and still somewhat shaken.

Horty and Corney and the great smear of anonymous fellow students over twenty-five were all gathered in the patio eating their breakfasts. They hailed me derisively when I came down the steps from the second floor.

“There she comes, the lug,” Horty said. “Fine roommate you are!”

Candee, looking rumpled and weary, was only slightly more pleasant. “Ursula, my dear, what a healthy sleeper you must be.”

“What d’you mean?”

“Why, we raised the dead last night, trying to get into our bedrooms. But we couldn’t wake you up. We had to manage without toothbrushes, or anything else. We had to sleep just anywhere. . .”

“And you, Sleeping Beauty, had *bolted the door*,” Corney said disgustedly. “We rang the telephone right beside your ear. The night clerk went up and tried to force the bolt. He called you and called you until the people in the other room got furious. . . You must sleep like a log!”

“I do,” I said with embarrassment. “My mother told me I’d never get into trouble, if I could just learn to sleep like a log.”



## Chapter Four



Every time I passed the clerk's desk in the hotel office, I asked if anyone had called for me.

"For Gosh sake who would be calling for *you*, Pettie-Wettie?" Horthy or Corney would hoot, if they happened to overhear me, which they usually didn't because I was pretty careful.

"I have friends," I would say haughtily.

"I can picture them. Some buck-toothed drip from that kindergarten you go to," they would say loudly, so that everyone within hearing would snigger indulgently.

I knew that, sooner or later, Estrellita would come, or would telephone. I worried quite a lot about how I would manage to meet her, if she asked me somewhere for tea or something. I knew positively that even if I didn't work up a good plausible alibi, I would just walk out and let Candee think anything she wanted to. There is a wonderful, desperate recklessness that comes over even the meekest of us when there is something we really want to do. I knew that nothing would stand in my way when Estrellita gave me a sign. Besides, the matter of having no money was pretty awkward.

Naturally everyone put my thriftiness, which they couldn't help noticing, down to the basest cause. Just plain stinginess.

"You certainly had me fooled," Horthy said scornfully. "When we started out I thought you were going to be a good guy. It's all right to be economical, but you overdo it."

Our first days on the train, I had been so anxious to have them like me that I had bought them all kinds of things, magazines and candy and fruit. Every time we stopped at some railway station, I was the first one off the train, with my money clutched in my hot little hand. I had even paid for their sending telegrams back to boys they knew. Just so I could find out what kind of things girls with appeal telegraph back to boys. But it was not worth what it had cost me, actually, for they wrote their telegrams practically in code.

SINCERE BEST LOVE HORTY

*Four Saturday nights in a month* DON'T FORGET YOUR  
PROMISE TO FAITHFULLY ABSTAIN

HAUNTINGLY CORNEY

I pointed out to Corney that she had a rather badly split infinitive in her telegram, but she said to heck with it. However, I noticed that when she copied it to send to another boy, she repaired the grammar so it read, "Don't forget your promise to be faithful, if not actually to abstain." As usual my smartness just turned around and bit me, for Corney's second telegram cost me more than her first. I can never learn to let grammar, like a sleeping dog, lie.

Probably the boy who got the telegram wouldn't know the difference, anyway, as he is only a Harvard man.

But be that as it may, I certainly was in no position now to be generous to anyone. I never realized before how restrictive a thing is poverty. It seems one bumps into it at every turn, like a too-tight garter belt. Money is something one can high-mindedly disregard, except when one hasn't any. Money you haven't is constantly present by its absence. It is a most uncomfortable, nagging companion, one's poverty, interfering with everything you want to do.

However, Daddy says that whatever we experience serves to help us understand our fellow man (in case you want to understand him, that is, which seems a waste of time to me when one's own self is so much more of a puzzle, and so much closer at hand). But I certainly got fed up with understanding the very poor, during those first days.

I had never noticed it before, but it seems that everything costs money.

I had to resort to my innate ingenuity in inventing dodges to cover up the fact that I didn't even have bus fare. After our morning painting lesson and before lunch, we usually took a bus to some public building to see a mural of Diego Rivera. (Which, by the way, is standard equipment in Mexico's public buildings. They may forget to put in a gentlemen's john, but they never omit a Diego Rivera mural.)

My method was to wait until everyone was assembled downstairs in our hotel; then I would come charging downstairs in a great hurry, quite obviously having forgotten my handbag. When Candee would discover this, I would offer to run back upstairs and get it, but she would say no, I'd just

make everyone late, so she'd pay my fare, and I could pay her later. This pattern has almost infinite variations, naturally. And someone notoriously absent-minded as I am can make use of them quite convincingly. Except, of course, with congenitally suspicious people like Corney and Horty, who seldom think anything but the worst of everyone.

"Seems to me you forget your handbag a little too often," Horty said. "You had better draw on that art that conceals art you're always recommending to us."

If Estrellita had been registered at some hotel, my problem would have been simple. I could have phoned all the hotels one by one until I located her. But I had completely forgotten the name of the family she was visiting, as I began to fear she must have forgotten the name of our pension. It was a horrible situation, and I could well imagine the agony she was suffering, picturing my difficulties. But I knew she would find a way to reach me, if I could just hold out.

Then something very tragic happened. The things for which children must forgive adults! No wonder most of us loathe and detest most of them, going smugly on their way doing exactly what they please, and circumventing us at every turn. Practically everything children want to do, grown-ups have a fine legitimate reason for preventing. It makes you grind your teeth down to nubs to think of the injustice of it.

We came in from sketching in the yard of a little seventeenth-century church, where all kinds of people (except interesting boys) had gathered around us to watch, and there was that dough-faced Candee waiting for me. I could tell by her offhand manner that she had something on the tip of her mind.

"Oh, by the way, Ursula," she said, "I had to handle a little social matter for you while you were gone."

My heart leaped up with hope. Such is the beastliness and degradation of poverty that I am not honestly sure whether I thought first of the joy of seeing Estrellita, or of the relief of seeing my money. But, at any rate, my heart leaped up.

"Yes?"

"Your friend Miss de Varis, or whatever her name is," Candee said, drawing it out as loathsomely as possible.

"Yes, what about her, please?" I said, with the drip of sweetness which you have to use toward adults in such a moment.

“She telephoned.”

“And?”

“She wanted to invite you to go horseback riding with her.”

“Oh, how super!” Now there was no doubt in my mind which I was thinking of, for of all things on earth, I love horses best.

“Naturally I told her,” Candee said, with that exasperating cheerfulness adults assume when they are being the biggest stinkers.

“You told her what?”

“That it would be quite out of the question.”

“But Candee. . .”

“I promised your mother,” Candee said, shutting her mouth with a click like a Scotchman’s change purse.

“But I’ve got to see her,” I gasped feebly.

“Nonsense. She’s nobody you’d ever meet in the world. I haven’t the slightest idea why she would bother with *you*, dear. But I’m certainly not going to permit. . .”

“Did you take her phone number?”

“Certainly not,” Candee said pleasantly. “I made it perfectly clear to her, and that was that.”

Now I really was faced with a problem. Estrellita had tried to return my money, and that tallow-headed respectablarian had put her big foot in my destiny. I didn’t even have money enough to go looking for Estrellita in a systematic way. I couldn’t hire a detective, or put an ad in the personal column of a newspaper. I didn’t even have money enough to put through a telephone call and ask Information to help me trace the haciendas owned by persons who might know distinguished Italian families. It was a desperate situation, and I was utterly helpless.

Daddy says there never has arisen a circumstance which brains won’t get you out of, if you can just keep cool and use them. And sure enough, a temporary answer came to me. More or less accidentally, too. Unless you believe in Fate, as I do.

Obviously guided by my friend Fate, I found an inspired answer to my problem about the fourth day of my dilemma. Just before noon, we were scheduled to charge forth in that gruesome group to see several public

buildings, including, as usual, one of the palaces where Maximilian and Carlotta once lived. (Next to the Diego Rivera murals, the Carlotta and Maximilian palaces are the things you most frequently bump into in Mexico.)

As we were trudging back across the big square from the Cathedral, our paid guide suddenly got an inspiration, and squads-righted us in the middle of traffic.

The way guides operate in Mexico City, especially for cultural groups like us (Heaven forgive the words!), is this: You have to hire two (a kind of Petrillo arrangement, no doubt). One knows his stuff, but doesn't speak English. The other doesn't know anything, but can interpret glibly whatever his little bitty brain can understand.

The first guide gazes up at a mural and waves his arms excitedly for three or four minutes while a torrent of impeccable Spanish (I have no doubt) pours out of him. When he finally collapses, breathless, the English-spikking guide says brightly:

“Above you shall be seeing a most interrusting exmple of Rivera's early mesterpisses. Nottus the ret and the grin, and the feck that social insignificance has begun to dawning in thees artis' at this early times.”

Well, at any rate, we were crossing the street, taking our lives in our hands as always in that country where drivers seem to mistake horns for brakes, and feel perfectly safe as long as they keep their thumb on the horn and their eye on whoever is in the back seat of their car.

“Señor Sebastino zays he wunts you shall be seeing the National Loan Builting. . . a very fine and fatherly part of our Government,” the interpreter said, trotting breathlessly beside our official guide.

“Clep your handbags firmly under your arms, Señoritas. This is very dangerous strit.” Those who had 'em clasped 'em. And I swung along freely.

We went into what looked like a big wholesale furniture building, except that in the center of it were hanging from the ceiling all kinds of elaborate crystal chandeliers. One could only picture with horror the financial emergency that had chased the head of a house up on a stepladder, and made him yank the chandelier out by the roots.

The interpreter in his peccable English (I wonder if that is the opposite of impeccable) was explaining the unique way the pawnshop works. It seems that the Government owns the loan business, just as it does the even huger lottery business.

“Our Government luffs its pipple,” our interpreter said with suitable teethwork to show both sarcasm and tenderness delicately blended.

“The Government has their welfares always at heart, the spikker says,” he added, taking no personal responsibility for the idea.

Their welfare, in this place, means giving up extraordinary quantities of furniture. Everything you can imagine, from the most intimate crockery to the most luxurious knickknacks, is crowded into this place, each with a big card attached, bearing the owner’s name, and his date of pawning same.

“Everything is uppen and abuf-board,” the guide said. “Same dilling for reech or poor.”

If the owner decides not to redeem his possessions, a suitable slight profit is written on to pay for the kindhearted government’s trouble, and twice a week there are sales held in a cozy little theater in the center of the floor.

But while they are denied the presence of their furniture in their homes, the owners need not be without the use of certain of their belongings. On certain days they may come down and use their Singer sewing machines. What would civilization be without these ever-present Singers? What salesmanship they represent! No village is too small or too backward to have its high quota! (I find with a thrill up my backbone that I am imparting quite a lot of travelogue in this chapter.)

Former owners may use everything, our guide pointed out rather roguishly, except their beds; they may rock in their rocking chairs; they may write a letter at their desks; they may tell time by their clocks.

The Singer sewing machines, however, are the real Cinderellas of the deal. They are the last to leave home, but also they are the first to come back when prosperity sounds the midnight gong. And, furthermore, on Mother’s Day a touching thing happens.

Señora Aleman, the President’s wife. . . (I thought for days that Viva Aleman must be the name of some breakfast food, for Aleman’s name is painted on every nook and wall, under all bridges, inside all privies, down all wells, as ever-present as God Himself. Running second, but far behind, is Coca-Cola. Aleman and Coca-Cola have the situation well in hand.) But to continue. Señora Aleman on Mother’s Day redeems every Singer in the land. On Saturday they all go home from the Loan Building for the holiday. A few weeks before Mother’s Day, they have come into the pawnshop in droves. But that only shows how fallible is the populace even of a country

whose Government luffs its pipple enough to be the Shylock for its hocked furniture.

We had to fight our way between the worshipful bodies of the more prosperous Mexicans bent over the cases of diamonds and watches. While I was learning all the quaint facts I have been telling you, and hanging over the counters where every possible kind of jewelry was for sale, I had no thought of there being any personal application for me in it.

Horty was saying, "Be a good chance to pick up a nice stomacher. But of course you never spend any money, do you?"

That woke me up. Why, of course. It was perfectly obvious to me that Fate had brought me here to point out the solution to my troubles. I had no Singer sewing machine. But I did own a good little Gruen, given me when I stopped chewing my fingernails!

With my reputation, no one would think a thing of my "losing" that watch. In fact, I was not at all sure I *hadn't* already lost it, not having seen it in the ebb and flow of my possessions for a few days.

As soon as I got back to the hotel, I located it, after a terrific upheaval. I was delirious with relief.

Getting back to the Loan Office was a minor problem which melted before my ardent ingenuity. The Hotch Sisters, two giggly spinsters from Toledo, had somehow missed the morning excursion, washing out their underwear or writing a letter to their spinster mother, or something. So at luncheon I talked up the wonders of the trip, and then volunteered to take them to the big square and show them all the sights which were so fresh in my mind.

"That is, if Candee thinks you're responsible enough chaperons," I said with the elephantine archness they both affect. They asked her, and she said but natch, and wasn't it nice I was getting to be so considerate. Of older people. I looked down at my roast goatmeat, demurely.

They insisted on paying my taxi fare down, although I shamelessly fumbled in my empty handbag. I ran them around the Capitol building, and through the pleasant little garden which was once Carlotta's, and which now is stampeded over by the children of the government employees who patronize a day nursery there. I hurried them up one corridor and down the next, and spearheaded them into a group of Iowa schoolteachers looking at a statue of a Mayan deity gazing at his navel. And then, with skillful maneuvering, I slipped out and disappeared. I knew that in five minutes

there would be pandemonium in that corridor, while Miss Hester Hotch burst into tears, and Miss Clara Hotch lost her temper thinking I was probably being attacked in a corner, and she not there to see it. (The lurid imagining of the elderly pure!)

I bolted out of the building, down the street with the oldest publishing office in the Western Hemisphere on it, darted around a couple of wrong corners, redoubled, and straightened myself out, and then came out in the street where the Loan Office is.

I was breathless and perspiring by this time, with my Gruen clutched close, and a prayer on my lips that this wouldn't turn out to be one of the afternoons when the Mexicans, for no good reason, don't do business. The same loiterers were in the street, selling tortillas to each other, and looking, presumably, for a chance to pick each other's pockets. I ran between them, and up the steps of the building. The same conglomerate scene of catastrophe cheerfully accepted. Baby's toidy-chairs were hobnobbing with damask love-seats. Sprinkled conspicuously through everything, Singers were waiting doggedly for Mother's Day.

I had no idea where to go. The buffalo herd of plump prosperous Mexicans were still bent over the cases of diamonds and watches. Suppose they had more than they could use, and had passed a law that no more watches were to be taken in! My stomach heaved up at the thought. But this was no time for faint heart, much less faint stomach. I went over to a guard wearing a too-big General's hat, nine pounds of gold braid, and a double-barreled revolver.

"Estades spik English?"

"Yes, Señorita," he said, in perfect Brooklynese.

"Look, Bud. I've got to get some ready money. I want to put this watch in hock."

He looked at me, weighed the watch in his hand as if he hoped it might be filled with diamonds, and finally said, "You live down here, Babe?"

"Oh, sure," I said. "I'm studying at the University."

"Okay. You come with me."

We went upstairs, he pausing to spit on the landing. I was afraid to do much talking, for fear I'd work myself out of the deal.

We came into another big hall, almost the size of the one below, where the dead furniture is stacked until its bereaved family can reclaim it. Here



we were witnessing the very death scenes themselves. All kinds of people, with treasures clutched to their chests, were being interviewed, and unanimously protesting the prices being offered to them. There were dark-faced peasants with rebozos over their heads, and babies sleeping on their backs. Peons, in what always looks like white pajamas, were holding their sombreros respectfully against their chests. Chic women in metropolitan clothes gripped their handbags in such a way that you knew something valuable was within. Some had bills of sale for what they were trying to pawn, other had florid descriptions which they wanted to reel off to uninterested clerks. My pal from Brooklyn signaled to one of the men behind the counter, and he brushed aside a couple of angry little men who were working on him, in favor of me.

Two sharp explosions of Spanish, four black eyes looking me up and down, and then the guard said:

“Where’d you get that watch, Babe?”

“Why. . . I’ve always had it,” I said.

More cross-fire of Spanish, and then suddenly the guard put his face very close to mine.

“You steal it, honey? Don’t be scared none. You tell Poppa, and we fix it up. Mebbe we still get you the money for it.”

Before I could protest, he had the watch out of my hand, and was showing more than casual interest in it. “Mebbe I have to turn you over to the police for a little while. Or if you want to play ball with me, mebbe I. . .”

I grabbed it out of his hand. Not gently, I’m sorry to say, for I never do anything very gently, I’m afraid. Before I could stop it, we were in the midst of a brawl. All kinds of prejudiced bystanders appeared and closed in around us, offering their unsolicited opinions. All of them, I could see, were against me.

The impression was growing that I had stolen the watch from the guard. So convincing was his accusing that I almost believed it myself. He was shouting and waving his fat finger at me, and the man behind the counter was agreeing with him. Everyone was yelling in irate Spanish, and though I couldn’t understand a word, the pantomime was so good I could see he was declaring that I had snatched the watch and should be clapped into jail. I myself was shouting feebly.

Then a cyclone broke into the knot. A slight, red-haired boy came in, leading with his right.

“What’s all this about?” he said to me, evidently having heard some of my helpless bleating in English.

“I’m only trying to hock a watch,” I said, as if that were the most normal thing in the world a girl could do.

“So what? It’s your watch, isn’t it?”

“Of course it is. I’ve just mislaid my spending money. . . for the moment, that is. . . and. . .”

“Certainly,” he said soothingly. “Liable to happen to anybody. You have to understand these guys. I’m in here with one of our men from the ranch. They’ve tried to cheat him on some riding tack he’s put up. He’s got the money now.”

Outside the circle I could see his “man,” a timid-looking small Mexican, now broadly beaming.

“You sure you want to put this watch up?”

I explained how important it was to me, without, of course, involving Estrellita. The crowd began loosening its links around us. The guard with a mighty, despondent shrug had washed his hands of the whole matter. The clerk behind the counter was calmly returning to the business I and my Gruen had interrupted. The guard walked off cheerfully, holding no grudges against anybody. “Nice try, anyway,” he was no doubt saying to himself.

We didn’t get as much for the watch as I had hoped for, but at least it was enough to keep me respectably in bus fares, and such meals as I simply couldn’t avoid.

“Now don’t lose this ticket,” the red-haired boy said sternly, when he turned it over to me at the end of the transaction. “The loan’s good for six months, and you get a rebate if you redeem it earlier.”

We walked out of the building together, with his “man” trailing courteously behind us, his riding tack clanking vindictively as he walked.

“I’d better drive you home,” the competent boy said. “Youngsters aren’t supposed to be charging around the city alone. You know that, don’t you?”

We got into his car, an excellent convertible, and he put his finger on the horn so that I knew that although he spoke perfectly American English, he must have grown up in Mexico. I asked him a few things about himself, and he tossed off the answers indifferently. He didn’t ask me anything at all

about myself, but that didn't surprise me. No boy ever asks me anything about myself.

We pulled up at the curb amid the clutter of taco bakers, the hand-organ man, the boy with the huge basket of pan de dulce (sweet rolls, that is) on his head. He jumped out of his side of the car, ran around and opened the door on my side before I could realize we were in front of our hotel.

"G'bye," I gulped, "and thanks a million."

"G'bye, yourself," he said, "and stay out of trouble now."

He was back in the car and had started his motor before I fully realized that I had practically had an adventure with A Boy. My knees were like jelly beans, as the full import struck me.

At that moment Horty and Corney, ambushed behind Mr. and Mrs. Killigant of Kansas, came out of our hotel. Their mouths had flown open and their eyes were popping.

"As I live and breathe!" Horty said.

But Corney is a much more direct woman.

Corney ran to me and threw her arms around me, so that anyone could plainly see she was my trusted confidante and best friend. Also anyone could see, outlined against the mountain of my figure, that she is petite and chic. I was the supporting cast in that moment, and Corney was the ballerina.

"But Lambie, where have you been, darling?" she cried, rolling her lovely dark eyes toward the car, which had pulled away a moment too soon to take in the sight of this touching tableau of friendship.

Under her breath she said to me, "What's his name? And where on earth did you get him?"

"Why. . . why. . . I met him. . ." I said.

"*His name*, dope," Corney said through her teeth. "And when are we going to see him again?"

"Why. . . I didn't ask him his name," I faltered, blushing through my dim-wittedness.

The Killigants were walking ahead, but now they turned and motioned to the two girls imperatively, as if some danger were going to jump out and attack them in broad daylight.

Corney imitated my voice in a mean little whine. “She didn’t ask his name.”

But Horty was quick on her feet. “Okay. But you know who he is, don’t you?”

“No. Who?” I gulped, thinking he was probably some movie star I should have known.

“He’s dear old Mrs. Truesberger’s son.”

Corney’s eyes gleamed with anticipation. “He certainly is,” she breathed.

“How could he be the son of Mrs. Truesberger?” I gasped stupidly. “You said she didn’t exist.”

“She doesn’t, pet,” Horty said. “But unless my pretty eyes deceive me, her son certainly exists.”

“But. . . but how will you find him?”

“We’ll find him all right,” Corney said. “There are only thirty thousand Americans in Mexico.”

## Chapter Five



A strange ironical perversion. (Maybe I mean perverseness.) Now I not only had money, but I didn't actually need it. For during the next few days Horty and Corney just couldn't do enough for me. They fought over who would take me to luncheon, and who would pay my taxi fares. For the first time in my life, I was popular. For the first time in my life, I had something which girls with appeal wanted from me. I was their Big Chance. It was exhilarating and bewildering, and I frankly didn't know what to do about it.

Naturally, I couldn't tell them where I had met Redhead. I maintained a provocative reticence, and that infuriated them, only they couldn't afford to be furious. They had to be cajoling instead.

"I quite understand your not wanting to tell *Horty* about all this," Corney said. "Hortense is my best friend. . . or, rather, she was until we started on this trip, dear. . . but I have to admit that she's pretty crude and flat-footed about things. She barges in where fools fear to tread."

"Horty's nice," I said, dumbly, not wanting to say anything which could be quoted to my detriment.

"Nice, yes. But always looking after her own interests," Corney said. "Now me, for instance. All I want is to see you get ahead, Lambie. I'm older than you, and I've had more experience, and I just want to help you any way I can."

Horty's tactics were more direct.

"Listen, pal. I certainly underestimated you."

"In what way?" I asked, as if I didn't know.

"Well, I could see you were trying to throw your weight around and make-believe you knew something . . . but I frankly thought you'd probably never even dated in your life."

"Did you really?"

"But here we are. . . two smooth experts, and you, the Baby Mountain. . . and who Gets Acquainted?"

I just looked demure, and went on with my painting. She scrubbed away at hers, with her mind definitely on something else. And the something else was Me.

“Come on, Lambie dear. Give,” she said.

“Give?”

“You heard me. Who is this character? And where did you meet him?”

I let my shock of hair fall over my face maddeningly, while I went on being lost in my work.

“Umm?” I said absent-mindedly.

“Who *is* he? And when are we going to connect with him?”

“Horty dear,” I said, looking up at her with my azure eyes filled with Art, “don’t let’s distress ourselves with what is none of your business, shall we?”

She looked as if she could beat me over the head with her paintbox. But she controlled herself admirably, thinking that was the only way she’d ever get anything out of me. I had a delirious sense of power. If I had known anything about him, they’d have got it out of me, of course, in the first hour. But since I couldn’t possibly tell them what I didn’t know, the suspense stretched out deliciously. At first they believed I was just too clever to tell them his name. But they ultimately abandoned that theory for a more exciting one.

“You mean you actually don’t know his name?”

“I actually don’t.”

“But he knows yours?”

“He begged me to tell him.” What he had really said was, “Here, you, what’s your name? I’ll write it down on this application. I’ve filled out dozens of them. Our workmen on the ranch, half of whom can’t write, hock things every week.”

“He knows where to find *you*,” Horty said with crafty predatoriness, “but you don’t know where to find *him*.”

“I don’t need to know,” I said with maidenly confidence, as if at that very moment I could hear Young Lochinvar’s hoofbeats coming down the road.

Horty narrowed her eyes. “For your own good, chum. Let me tell you something. Never leave the initiative to a man. You’ll never get anywhere that way.”

“Won’t I, dear?” I said smugly. “Well, we’ll see.”

Of course I was not by any means as confident as I sounded to those two. I wasn’t confident at all. I knew perfectly well that he would never look me up. Why should he? Who was I? A bungling child he had rescued. While he. . . he was a man of the world . . . all of nineteen years old, if I’m any judge.

“Do you know where you could meet him again?” Horty prodded me.

“Of course,” I said glibly, “he’s waiting for me. And hoping.”

She swallowed that with a gulp. But she swallowed it.

“Okay. Now listen. If we arrange it so Candee has her mind on other things, will you slip out and see him?”

That really put it up to me, but I was equal to it, having lied more or less all my life.

“Now Horty,” I said frankly, “I have to do this in my own way. You and Corney think you know all about boys. Well, I know a few things myself. And this is my way.”

“My gosh,” she said in amazement. “You mean you’ve got some kind of system?”

“Certainly,” I said. “You and Corney have a certain kind of skill. . . a kind of pink magic, let us say. It works with youngsters. But I’m not interested in youngsters. Pink magic. . . curls and prettiness and all that pink stuff. . . is just too puny for what I’m looking for.”

“What *are* you looking for?” she gasped.

I hadn’t the faintest remote myself, so after a thoughtful pause, I said, “Well, I just don’t think you’d understand if I tried to tell you.”

She took up her paintbox and the daub she was doing, and went over behind the fountain to think that over. The next few hours, she and Corney conferred and conferred, obviously trying to think out some strategy.

I, in the meantime, was nearly driven crazy by trying to think out some strategy of my own. I couldn’t see how I had ever been so stupid as not to

find out who he was. . . and where. I had had my chance in my hand, and as usual I had muffed it.

The more I thought about him, the more attractive he seemed to me. At first I couldn't quite remember what he looked like, except his hair. But gradually he came back to me until it seemed he was the most real person I ever had known.

I told so many lies about him in the next few days that I was not at all clear myself about what had really happened and what I just wished had happened.

For the sheer delirious pleasure of having her hang on my words, I told Corney quite a tale about where we had met.

"You see, it wouldn't have happened except that the man was beating the donkey," I said dreamily.

"Maybe you'd better begin at the beginning, darling."

"He was such a little donkey, and he had such a heavy load of gas stoves on his back."

"Gas stoves?"

"They looked like gas stoves. He was tottering along down a small side street, near Sanborn's, and the big brute driving him suddenly began beating him with a stick. I saw red."

"Oh, is that what you called him? Red?"

"No. I mean I got furious."

"Oh. Well, get on with the story, Lambie."

"I saw red. Before I knew what I was doing, I had flown down the street, and had taken the stick away and I was about to turn on the man. . . and then suddenly He was there."

"In his car?"

"No. He jumped out of his car. He grabbed my wrist. He took the stick away and spoke harshly to the man. Everything went black for a few minutes . . . I don't know exactly what happened. But when I came to again, I was leaning against his chest, and he was murmuring to me. . ."

Horty's version was slightly different, having to do with a poor beggar child, and a woman who was robbing the child, etc.



The more I talked about him, the more real he became to me, and the more I decided that I had been at least brushed by the wings of love. Love is a very funny thing. If necessary, it can grow on nothing, like an orchid in the air.

He got to be my consolation for my bad painting. That in itself was a remarkable switch. Always before, Art had been my consolation because I had no love to think about; now I thought about love because I couldn't bear the agony of finding out that I had no talent.

Señor Mariano left no doubt about that. Every morning, when he came for the lesson, he all but held his nose at my work.

"You sketch too easy. It dunt mean nutting, Señorita. You show off. You spoiled child. Too much praise; too little working."

"My parents have been told I'm very talented," I said in a little whimper.

"Parents. . . parents," he said scornfully. "Who tells parents the trut' about their children? You have a monkey paw. It imitate what it sees. It imitates itself. I t'row up."

"Then you think I can't be an artist if everything else. . ."

"I think you cannot be an artist unless every other artist on the planet is whipped out wit' an atomic bomba."

But he did try to teach me. I drooped around through the hours, abandoned, discouraged, and inspired. He also said insulting things to Horty and Corney, but in their case it didn't matter. They had appeal.

They haunted Sanborn's on the theory that all Americans in Mexico check in there at least once a day. If they had seen him. . . or any other red-haired boy, probably. . . they'd have run right up and resumed their acquaintance where it had been interrupted, they said.

"But natch!" they cried in amazement when I protested. Their knowing me certainly constituted an introduction, they said. It would be mere splitting hairs to look at it any other way.

That gave me something new to worry about, for he might very naturally mention the Loan Office and inquire if I'd found my mislaid spending money. As you can see, I was living in a maze of chills, thrills, and spills.

I sometimes thought to myself, "If this is a sample of the way adult life is going to be, I'd just as soon loiter awhile in being neither fish nor fowl." But of course few adults live their lives along the dangerous margins of

drama; most of them, emotionally speaking, are entirely safe in a nice feather bed, with the covers pulled up to their chins.

But even with all the agony and suspense he had caused me, I could not help loving him. I thought of him day and night, and I schemed to be by myself so I could dream about him. I tried to remember his voice, and it seemed to me. . . the ten or twelve sentences he had said. . . to be rich and deep and melodious.

During these days I was spending much time taking an intensive course in what I had scornfully spoken to Horty of. Pink Magic. . . or the art of Effective Girlness. I decided I would get the theory well-grounded now, and hope for practice later.

We often used to have deep philosophical discussions. These usually concerned methods of getting what you want out of people. It was very plain to me why I had made such a singular failure of my life, being barely able to crawl out from under the avalanche of privileges I just hate, and starving to death for a crumb of what I desire. I have always attacked the problem in a logical way, with reasoning. It stands to reason that since desire has so little to do with reason, this is an absurd and useless approach.

Horty's way is to grab what she wants. To wade in and snatch it from whoever happens to have it. To knock down whoever stands in her way. Sometimes, she says, she wins her point by sheer amazement. But even when she doesn't win immediately, she has a surprise tactic which is pretty good. When she is accused of doing what she *has* done, instead of denying it as most people do, she frankly admits it. She says she looks people honestly in the eyes and says, "Well, for gosh sake, imagine the brat doing a thing like that!" Then she says she goes all-out on good sportsmanship. Maybe she'll say, "Here. . . you better take this back. I don't deserve it, grabbing like that."

Nine times out of ten, she says, this throws the victim, usually a parent, teacher, or some other adult, completely off guard. It seems to bring a rush of weakening sentiment to the head. Likely as not, the whole thing will end with the victim begging Horty to take whatever the contest has been about, and Horty, for sheer love of the art, protesting. Horty, who as you can see is an idealist, says you can get anything you want out of people if you just appeal to the best in them.

Corney, on the other hand, is much more subtle. First place, what she's trying to get out of people usually falls into the romance department. She says getting your way with men is child's play. Usually what they want most

in the world is to have some girl impose on them, abuse them, trample on them, and then forgive them. For having been underfoot in the first place, I suppose.

Corney says she used to make the mistake of disregarding other girls. And even adults. But not any more. She says girls are very useful to each other, so the first thing you have to do in any competition is to tie their hands with some misleading little friendliness or favor. Corney says that all females are deadly afraid of the ones who have Appeal. Also they are so flattered when one with Appeal chooses to look at them that they are completely in her power. She says the fallacy they seem to operate on is “birds of a feather flock together,” so, when an attractive girl so much as crooks her finger toward the vast majority of the not-so-attractives, they practically swoon with the unexpected flattery of it.

Corney says you don’t *have* to be a heel to be popular. But it helps.

She says you can get anywhere on charm, and if you haven’t got it, it doesn’t make much difference what happens to you, because nobody will care, anyway.

I tried my best to get her to give me a definition of charm, and she said that wanting the definition of things was about as far from charm as you could get.

Horty, however, said she thought charm was being able to get other people to make excuses for you. Corney said, no, it went a step farther than that; it meant not having anybody suspect you needed excusing. Charm, she finally decided, is being a law unto yourself.

Horty said: “Heck, Corney, I think it goes even farther than *that*. It’s doing whatever you want, any way you want to do it. . . and having people tickled to death you thought of it.”

I know how far I am from attaining any of this. But I’ll work at it. If it kills me.

One Friday evening when we came in from Cuernavaca where we had seen Cortez’ wonderful palace in the Borda Gardens (where Carlotta and Maximilian once lived), the Diego Rivera murals in the City Hall, and nine million four hundred thousand and sixty-three silver earrings pushed under our noses by vendors, there was a letter for me. Not a tame letter from the United States, with nothing more exciting inside than Mummy’s instructions about being sure the water is boiled before I drink it, and that tomatoes have been scrubbed with Sudso, but an unstamped letter in a big thick-papered

envelope. My name rather dashinglly written across the front. Everyone had inspected the letter before it was given to me, and I cannot imagine how Horty had refrained from snatching it open before I had a chance to.

“You’ll show it to me, anyway,” she said. “So I might as well have opened it. Then I could have my advice all ready for you.”

“I won’t need your advice,” I said icily, while my insides were in hot turmoil. “I ran my affairs for years before I saw you.”

The fact was, I couldn’t bear to open it in their presence. I knew my face would be a battleground of emotions, and it was all too sacred to me.

I ran upstairs and locked myself in the john. With trembling fingers I tore open the envelope, expecting that he would ask me to come out to his family’s house, perhaps. . . expecting he’d ask me to write to my father. . . expecting *anything*.

But a cold plunge of disappointment poured through me. The letter was from Estrellita, whom I had completely forgotten I was looking for, high and low.

Chérie,

If you know where you can put your hands on fifty dollars, I can get you a wonderful piece of antique jewelry. Something unusual. Call 39-40-82 and we’ll arrange a way for me to pick up the money.

Lovingly,  
ESTRELLITA

I felt sick all over as I read it. This shows you how much my present had blotted out my past, even the highest peak of my past, which, up until a few days ago, had been Estrellita.

The kids began banging imperatively on the door of the john. I waited a minute, trying to decide, and then I tore up the letter into bits, and flushed it away. They could hear me doing it.

“You’re out of your mind,” they shouted in to me.

I came out in a few minutes, looking like a woman of mystery, slightly tear-dampened but determined.

“I’ve made up my mind,” I said firmly. “I came here to study Art. My parents would be very much disappointed if I frittered away my big

opportunity just to run around with a boy.”

Horty said, “Now I’ve heard everything.”

## Chapter Six



By Sunday I was a star-crossed lover. I had to be urged to eat. Even when the food had already been paid for.

“One good thing ought to come out of this,” I said to myself. “Your hips ought to improve, my girl.” But I was really far above thinking about my hips.

Sunday morning we drove out in hired cars to Lake Xochimilco where the floating gardens are. Everyone was spinsterishly gay in our party, but the chattering was as unintelligible to me as if I had inadvertently strayed into the monkey cage at feeding time. However, I tried to enjoy what was happening. When the great joys are stilled, the minor ones must sing. (I think that must be a quotation, it sounds too lovely for me to have thought of spontaneously.)

As soon as our cars stopped, we were surrounded by quaint people, all with unquaint bargaining instinct showing on their faces. They had perfumed wooden boxes, the usual silver jewelry, serapes, and flowers. Flowers were everywhere, for this is the weekly festival of flowers. Urchins hardly old enough to have left their mothers’ breasts held up elaborate corsages to us, orchids and gardenias, roses, carnations, and scores of others. There were corsages for every degree of sophistication, from snarling dragon-faced brown orchids, through bridal whites and mature purples, on down to clusters of tiny roses laced with forget-me-nots. There were baskets of flowers as huge as laundry hampers, and nosegays small enough for a doll to carry.

“Restrain yourselves, girls!” our leader kept crying out to us. “Wait. . . if you possibly can. . . it’s so much more romantic out on the water.”

But nobody could wait, such mad impetuous girls we were, flinging pesos riotously. By the time we had got down to the edge of the water and our flower-decked boat, we were covered with corsages. A wild greediness was on us, for no woman ever has had enough flowers, especially corsages. And these were such extravagant ones, and so ludicrously inexpensive. Even I bought one, six large gardenias and a green orchid, looking like the skeleton of a horse’s head such as Georgia O’Keefe paints.

So completely had I ensnared myself into my own prefabricated dream that I found myself wondering if Redhead would have thought it was my type. I don't know how to explain the delusion one practices on oneself. At the same time I could face the empty facts of my "affair" and also could inhabit my wishful thinking as if it were true.

Our boat, rocking gently beside the landing dock, was charming. The prow was banked with flowers, and a great arch of carnations, irises, delphiniums, and snapdragons said "El Carmencita." It was a flat-bottomed boat, wide enough to hold comfortable chairs, and a long table, also a group of muchachos who played constantly, and smiled with their faultless teeth even more constantly. A romantic-looking boatman poled us slowly around the lake. Everything was beautiful and sentimental-looking, except the persons on our boat. I refrain even from describing them. Suffice to say, they were all old people around thirty, in whom dreams must have died long since.

All around us on the water were other boats, some with family parties, but many of them with groups like us, alas. Small skiffs, almost buried in flowers, circled silently around us like dragonflies. Other barks, not so silent, offered us picture postcards, silver bracelets, or, even more mundane, Coca-Cola. The lake itself is a dream of loveliness.

We had our lunch on the boat; we tossed money over to marimba bands who pulled up beside us and offered to play anything you want, Señoritas. . . en Eengleesh, even.

The scene was made for lovers. And we were schoolteachers.

But after luncheon, it looked as if things were going to pick up.

"I've provided a nice surprise, girls," the leader said in her pleased way. "I thought you'd like to know something of the history of this wonderful place. So we're going back to the dock now, and pick up a man who can tell us."

Horty said, "I can't believe it. A man." She was just being sarcastic, of course. But when she saw him she nearly collapsed.

He was very handsome, all in white, with flowers jauntily stuck in the band of his sombrero. He was fully equipped with a clipped romantic mustache, glittering eyes, and a sudden flattering smile. Instantly Horty and Corney took a violent interest in the historical data.

They swarmed over to the end of the boat where he was quietly standing, saying, "Oh, Señor. . . can't you tell us something about this enchanting

spot?”

He looked at them and smiled handsomely. “Allow I should tell you about Lake Xochimilco.” His voice was sheer tête-à-tête, which put up an invisible screen around just you and him. They settled themselves on each side of him, turning their eager little faces up to his. The bifocal faces of the Anonymities made a dismal rim to frame the touching picture of youth in search of knowledge.

“Two three hundred years ago this lake was all inhabited by Indians,” he said gently. “Poor Indians who had no farmlands of their own. But they have great loves of farming, and also, in addition, they need to eat foods. By chance they found out that this water in Xochimilco is very fertile for growing vegetables, flowers, and also herbs.”

“Herbs!” Corney cried, more to be certain that his eyes were not wavering from her face than for any other reason.

He continued, as if he had not been interrupted, however. “So these poor Indians pile up dirt on rafts and barges which they make of logs. These they cultivate, while floating. They keep meantime making bigger and bigger barges, and wishing to keep them in one place, they begin experimenting with ways of fastening the barges from floating. They tie on rocks, also stones, to hold down the barges in the shallow water.”

Here he interrupted himself, with a torrent of authoritative Spanish directed to the front of the boat, where the poleman was bending and pulling. The poleman obligingly dug his pole in to the bottom and then raised it so that we all could see how shallow the water is. The guide thanked him earnestly and continued with his story in English.

“Finally the poor Indians found that the best way to keep the barges from floating around too free was to plant them with trees whose roots go down into the bottom of the lake. So they make a new kind of tree. They marry together a poplar tree and a willow.”

“Now that’s really romantic!” Corney cried, clapping her hands together in girlish delight. The guide was touched by her pleasure, but he made no comment. In a moment he continued solemnly, pointing to the high rounded mounds around which we were slowly circulating.

“The same poor Indian families own the gardens today. They are not permitted by our Government to sell them, so they continue in perpetuity, to be farmed or leased away, as choosing.”



Everyone exclaimed over the quaint story, and the emasculated husband members of our group pointed out the huge bouquets of flowers tied to the trees of some gardens, an armful of red carnations, a huge bouquet of blue delphiniums.

But Horty and Corney had heard all the history they could take. Their appetites, never lethargic, were whetted now for more masculine conversation. They beckoned the white-clad guide to come out on the back platform of the boat, where they wanted something else explained to them. He, alas, was too respectful and dignified to go until the poleman urged him in Spanish. Then, blushing most beguilingly, he excused himself to the rest of us, and went back to where Corney and Horty were ready like two starved lady-spiders beaming at a fly.

“Oh, Señor, I’m sure there are so many more things you could show us,” Corney said, wide-eyed and innocent, making room for him beside her. “My parents want me to learn all I possibly can about Mexico while I’m here. Its customs. . . its life. . . even its night life, perhaps.”

He sat down beside her, but he looked unhappy about it.

“Please, Señorita, I speak only guide-talk. Maybe I say again? No charge, please.”

“Oh my sacred aunt!” Corney said. “He’s nothing but a juke-box.”

We came back to the city early in the afternoon. The leader of our group had arranged for us to be invited to the Rancho des Charros, to see some gentlemen horsemen who amuse themselves with fancy riding every Sunday. Our party split up, since some of them decided they’d rather go to a good American movie.

“You know they have Spanish titles. . . it’s an excellent way to improve your Spanish,” they said dutifully.

“It’s an excellent way to see a good movie,” said Horty, who is occasionally afflicted with honesty. So she joined that wing of our group, but Corney and Candee and I and some of the Anonymities went out to the private riding club. Naturally I’d rather see horses than the best movie on earth. And Corney, I realize now, wasn’t letting me out of her sight.

The Rancho des Charros is out in one of the more fashionable suburbs of the city, not too far from Chapultepec Park. There is a big cavalry hall, and also a pleasant riding ring, surrounded by high grandstands. This afternoon the grandstands were practically empty, only a few well-dressed parties of gay people, each obviously belonging to one of the gentlemen riders. The

riders were extremely picturesque individuals dressed in tight smooth trousers, short ornamented jackets with silk blouses, and utterly debonair felt sombreros. The horses were magnificent.

I scarcely know how to explain what now happened, except to stress the fact that up to this point I have never looked at a man if there was a horse present. And also I am criminally nearsighted.

We came into the grandstand and chose places in the very front row. We were conspicuously the only strangers in the place. Everyone else was visiting back and forth, calling out in graceful, comradely Spanish. It was the only time since we had left home that we had been in what might be called an exclusive or privileged atmosphere. I'm sure it made most of us a bit homesick, after the rough and tumble of tourist life.

The exhibition riding was most informal, with lots of laughter and bantering between events. At the time we came in, the riders were engaged in a Latin variety of bulldogging. One horse and rider would come out of a box at the far end of the field at the same time that a bull was released from an adjacent stall. While both animals were running at full speed, the rider would swing down and seize the bull's tail. The rider then tried by skillful wrist work to throw the bull to the ground before the bull could get himself free. Some of the time the bull won, and occasionally the man won, and the bull would go down in a cloud of dust, while the horse and his triumphant rider would come swinging down before the stand nonchalantly, to a sparse sprinkling of applause. My concern naturally was for the horses; I do not think it is a good sport for them, but these were evidently trained well for it.

Corney, as would be expected, was posing along the balustrade of the grandstand, pretending to be utterly fascinated by everything, and wishing she'd worn one of her off-the-shoulder blouses.

Riders were continually leaving the group and coming over to call up greetings or jokes to their parties all around us. So we thought nothing of it when the tallest and best-looking of all, a charro wearing caramel-colored clothes trimmed with silver, and mounted on a handsome Palomino horse, came trotting over toward us. When he was directly under us, he swept off his big sombrero, and to my amazement I saw that his hair was red.

"My friend Miss Ursula Powder. . . are you not speaking to me?" he called up merrily, while all the starch went out of my physique, and I nearly swooned at his feet.

“Why. . . why. . . I. . .” I could only gasp like a fish, while Corney, electrified in every limb, was breaking out her most alluring smile. But he did not even glance in her direction.

“I’ve been hoping to get in touch with you,” he said.

“I’ve. . . I’ve. . . been wondering when you would,” I mumbled.

“I guess you never stay home at your hotel. What luck to find you here today!”

Someone called to him then, and with a gallant apology to me, he rode off to take his turn. Needless to say, the whole scene was a swimming aspic to me. Candee was simply breathless.

“Why, Lambie. . . you didn’t tell me you knew people down here!” she said. “And such lovely people, if I may say so.” Even Candee, practically old enough to be his mother, was tucking up stray ends of hair, and taking off her glasses to look prettier.

I murmured something about Daddy, whose very name certainly covers a multitude of sins.

“Oh, I see,” she said with satisfaction. “Someone your father knows. How splendid!”

It is amazing how different levels of living can exist side by side, completely unaware of each other. Here, while I had been in a turmoil of excitement and drama (not to mention the Horthy and Corney aspects of the situation), none of the old folks had had the slightest inkling. It is like the dog whistles which call signals on a frequency which the human ear cannot pick up. A terrifying and wonderful thought. . .

Well, at any rate, there I sat drenched with thrills and weakness. Wondering what was going to happen, and how I would prevent the still Unknown from saying anything awkward about our meeting. Not realizing then how completely I could trust his good breeding and, even more than that, his discretion.

As soon as his event was over, he rode to the back of the field. All of this next, because of my near-sightedness, had to be relayed to me play by play in a hoarse undertone by Corney, who was almost as undone as I was myself.

“He’s calling his groom over to him. . . he’s writing a note. . . I guess he’s going to send you a message, Lambie. . . *he never once glanced at me*. . . what a man!. . . the groom is walking over toward us now . . . oh, I

think I'll suffocate with excitement. My whole insides are churning, I give you my word."

But the groom, probably the little chap with the clanking tack he had got out of hock a week ago, was not coming up to us. He turned to the right of us, and although we tried not to stare too obviously, all the nine pairs of eyes in our party swung in precision unison like the legs of the Rockettes at the Music Hall, and fastened on a small group of men and women who were receiving the message.

"Oh. . . he's sent it to another woman," Corney said. "She's beautiful, Lambie. . . you might as well face it."

The woman glanced over at us, and Corney said she smiled, so in a watery kind of way I smiled back. In a moment she got up from her seat and came over and spoke graciously to us.

"I must introduce myself," she said. "I'm Mrs. Dwight Colby. My son Kimball has asked me to come and speak to you, Miss Prowder."

It was all pretty much of a turmoil. I clumsily got to my feet, and that shameful old relic of a curtsy which I can never remember I don't have to do any more, had me bobbing and muttering before her.

"I'd like so much to meet your friends, my dear," Mrs. Colby said pleasantly, when she saw that all my fumbling and mumbling wasn't going to lead to anything. So I introduced Candee, and vaguely included the others, some of whose names I don't even know, due to the fact that they and their names all sound alike to me. And of course I introduced Corney last of all.

"May I sit with you a bit?" Mrs. Colby said. "Perhaps I can tell you something about the various riders and their horses."

"The horses by all means," Corney said.

Mrs. Colby devoted herself especially to Candee, which was very smart, for by the time she was ready to issue her invitation, Candee was softened up completely.

"Do you think it would be possible, Mrs. Candee, for you to come with these two charming girls to dine at our hacienda on Tuesday evening?" she said with a radiant smile.

Candee, of course, was enchanted. "I also have one more girl with me, Mrs. Colby," she said, "Hortense Evans. You know, her father used to be national amateur tennis champion. . ."

Candee dithered away to a mouthful of bubbles, the way she does, and Mrs. Colby said how splendid, and by all means. They finally got specific about details, when the car would come for us, etc., and Corney and I sat there in a starry-eyed dream, squeezing each other's hands and barely able to breathe.

So now I really had a date. Never again would I have to look at myself in the mirror, hating my hugeness, and my unruly shock of straw-colored hair, and my big owlsh spectacles, and say, "There you are, you lout. Sixteen years and three months old, and you've never dated."

I thought my heart would burst with happiness.

Now I had no secret shame to hide from the world. Now I no longer had to pretend, and think up stories, and make-believe I had my mind on higher things. Now at last I was normal!

I wanted to weep and dance. If I'd known how to go about it, I would have said a prayer of thankfulness. To Fate, of course.

Now that this wonderful thing had happened to me, my freedom became retroactive, and I made up my mind that when Candee had begun her gentle snoring in the other room, and Horty and Corney and I were alone and safe in our private, marvelous world, I'd just tell them the truth about myself.

All evening everyone regarded me with new respect. I was used to being an infant prodigy. I was used to having adults smile significantly at each other about what I said. But to be a femme fatale. . . ah, that is bliss! Several of the Anonymities tried to draw me out about the Colbys, and where I had got acquainted with Kimball, but I was maddeningly indifferent about confiding.

"Oh. . . things just happen," I said loftily.

But at last we were alone, the three of us, and the never-ceasing noises from the street. . . the man who went by with a portable doorbell ringing at one-thirty, the hand-organ man who played round and round, the streetcars that passed our hotel with their motorman's foot banging on the siren, the taco baker calling out his wares. . . all closed us into our soundproof privacy. Even if Candee had wanted to eavesdrop, it would have been impossible to make out what we were whispering back and forth above the clamor.

Tonight we were all sleeping together in the double bed, so that nobody would miss anything. We hadn't even bothered to open the single bed.

"Listen, you kids," I said, "I might as well tell you frankly. . ."

“You don’t need to,” Horty said. “We all agree. He belongs to you, and we’ll keep our hands off him.”

“No. That wasn’t what I was going to say.”

“Well, speak up, honey.”

“It’s something else. Something you won’t believe.”

“After today, we’ll believe anything,” they each said, almost in the same words.

“Well. . . I wanted to tell you that I’ve. . . I’ve never dated before.”

The bed suddenly shook with giggles. They probably believed I was just kidding.

“No, I mean it,” I said soberly. The giggles subsided at last.

“You’re telling us,” they said.

“You mean. . . you suspected it?”

“Cert.”

“You mean. . . it shows on me?”

“Natch.”

“Where does it show?”

“All over you. You’ve got it sticking out all over you.”

“Oh my gosh,” I said disgustedly.

“But never mind now, honey. From Tuesday on. . .”

“Yes. From Tuesday on. . .” I breathed deliriously.

Life was going to begin for me on Tuesday. And never again would I have stupid little-girl things to worry about. From there on, all my troubles would be big and important and lovely.

## Chapter Seven



I don't know how I ever got through Monday and Tuesday. I lived like a puppet, pulled downstairs by breakfast, pulled into the patio by the painting, snatched out across the city to the University to hear a lecture which might as well have been given in Sanskrit, although I automatically wrote down page after page of notes to impress my parents. All of it was only my docile body acting mechanically. My mind was off on its own planet, gazing out at a new universe.

Corney and Horty dissected every feature of Kimball Colby, like the vultures they are. But they approved of him whole-heartedly, and still the wonder grew that he had been attracted by me.

"He's so *smooth*," they said, implying, and rightly, that I myself am a pretty rough diamond.

"He's so *easy*," meaning that I am a handful of cactus.

"He knows his way around," referring to my colossal clumsiness.

"But nevertheless," I reminded them.

"Yeh. That's perfectly right, Lambie dear."

Over and over again, the thing which most impressed Corney was that he had not so much as glanced at her. Monday afternoon she went over herself with more than usual care, lying on her stomach on our bed for a good hour, while she explored her skin and her eyebrows and her hair with her big magnifying mirror. Plainly, she just couldn't understand it. Neither, incidentally, could I.

"Maybe he's the eccentric type. . . maybe he's a kind of P. T. Barnum. . . you know what I mean?" Horty suggested.

"I've thought of that," Corney said. "But he doesn't look like a man who would enjoy oddities."

"Maybe he's jaded," Horty said.

"Yes. I think that's it."

“Exceptionally attractive men like Kimball have everything thrown at them on a silver platter. They get pretty fed up,” Horty said expertly.

Corney considered that. “Perhaps it’s something the way terribly rich people go in for simple living.”

“I wouldn’t know about that,” Horty said. “We’re only in the three-servant bracket ourselves. And fighting tooth and nail to stay even that far up.”

I vaguely listened to them theorizing about it all, but I wasn’t terribly interested. Nothing could deny the *fact*, and that’s all that mattered to me. Usually I have the theory on my side, while the facts are out grazing in somebody else’s pasture. But this time the fact was eating out of my hand, and to heck with how it happened. It just did, that’s all. It is such a glorious holiday for a rational thinker like me to go delightfully mad!

Of course I would have been infatuated with him if he had been ding-toed, lop-eared, hob-nosed, and cross-eyed. But to have him so definitely super, and still to notice I was on the earth. . . that was heaven itself.

Candee said that Mrs. Colby wanted us just to enjoy ourselves informally, so we needn’t be too concerned about what we wore. That meant we had to think of it only every waking moment. If she had said, “Come formal,” we’d each have worn our one and only, and no quibbling possible.

Everyone went over my wardrobe critically. Most of it was pretty bad, they said frankly.

“The whole trouble is, it’s refined,” they said. “I bet your mother bought it at R. S. Burns’ in Boston.”

“They have my size,” I said defensively.

“In about age thirty taste,” Corney said.

“What you’ve got looks either like clothes for a governess, or Mother Hubbards for Babbo, the bouncing twelve-year-old.”

Of course my clothes were not as bad as that; they just weren’t good. But in our world, if things aren’t super, they stink. There’s nothing in between.

“He saw me first in a paint-smear’d gingham skirt and a blouse with buttons missing,” I reminded them.

“This is different,” they said cryptically. “He’ll be looking at you with his mother around. That makes a man see things quite differently.”



At any rate, they finally rigged up something they considered suitable for me, a blouse of Corney's which didn't give me very free arm motion. I could get into it, however, on account of Corney is rather abundantly designed in some areas. They let me wear one of my own skirts with the hem let down rather sketchily by Horty. They trimmed my hair, giving me bangs for the occasion, which nobody was too sure about (especially after it was too late to change our minds). Corney even painted my toenails, which is something I've never quite bothered with. Horty did a job on my eyebrows, with one quizzically lifted, as if my face were perpetually saying, "Oh yeah?"

"Might offset some of your gullibility," she said. "Though maybe that's too much to hope for."

They seemed able to cope with all the external problems I presented, but I was paralyzed with fright about the inner problems. My stomach was upset all day, worrying about everything.

"I just don't know the first thing about getting along with a boy," I said. "You ought to tell me things."

"It'll come to you," they said complacently. "You'll know what to do when the moment comes."

"I don't know what to talk about," I admitted, getting chilly in the spine just thinking of it.

"Well, the safest thing for you is not to talk at all," they said bluntly. "Fact is, when you open your mouth, your parents show."

"I've got to say something."

"Not necessarily. Just look relaxed."

Finally about six o'clock the car came for us. Kimball and a chauffeur, and a big Cadillac job. (There are no shabby cars in Mexico. Either you drive a frisky new number, or you're too poor to own a bicycle. I don't know what they do with slightly used cars, unless they take them out and butcher them, the way they do the bulls after the bullfight.)

When the car arrived, Fate suddenly stepped in, and then I did gain confidence in myself, because I knew Fate was on my side. Just as I was turning from the telephone saying to the clerk, "Please tell him we're on our way downstairs," a wonderful thing happened.

I somehow knocked off my glasses, and blinking blindly to pick them up, I put my foot squarely on them. I never would have had the mental

stamina required to leave my glasses at home and meet the evening at my best. I have been told over and over by catty roommates that I am much better-looking without glasses, though this is necessarily only an unconfirmed rumor to me, since I can't see even myself clearly without them.

"You *must* have another pair," Candee said crossly.

"I did have," I admitted sickly, "but I've mislaid them somewhere."

"Well, think where," Candee said in a flutter.

It happens that I lose my possessions rather more easily than some people do. So my mother equips me with duplicates of everything as if I were twins.

"They were in my raincoat pocket," I said meekly, "but I lost the raincoat yesterday."

"You'll just have to go without them," Candee said.

"It's Fate, obviously," Corney said, voicing my thought. "Just be grateful, darling."

So I went downstairs in a happy daze, hoping I wouldn't rush up and shake hands with the hotel clerk, mistaking him for Kimball.

Horty and Corney looked smooth as cream in simple little peasant clothes they had bought at Bergdorf Goodman's in New York. They smelled like courtesans (I imagine). Candee had on what she herself called "just a gay little print." None of us looked especially relaxed, I thought. Except possibly the chauffeur.

Kimball did most of the talking, but I could see that Horty and Corney were only banked fires, waiting to break out when they got their bearings. (That is a mixed metaphor, permissible, I'm sure, because everything in the scene I am trying to describe was so terrifically mixed up. My palms are damp and cold even now when I think back over it.)

The Colby hacienda was restored by Kimball's grandfather from a beautiful seventeenth-century palace (one never lived in by Carlotta, they said, although they admit they cannot guarantee that). It was about an hour's drive from our hotel on the road to Puebla. The ranch is on a high brow of a hill, looking down over valleys and foothills of the Sierra Madre Mountains. A long, winding drive approached the hacienda. We would see the house in all its serene beauty, then we would lose it for a long swerve, but in a little while we'd come in sight of it again.

I suppose it would be too extravagant to say it resembles Versailles, or Fontainebleau. But at least it had that atmosphere of opulence and ease and large leisure. Great flights of stone steps connected the terraces, and at the top was the house itself, broad and rambling around a patio planted with banana trees and hibiscus and magnolias. Off to the right was a wide bricked courtyard with the stables hidden behind jacaranda trees. All of this, you may be sure, I did not notice much at the time, due partly to near-sightedness, but mostly to excitement.

Mr. Dwight Colby, Kimball's father, seemed to be an important man in one of the big automobile companies. The family has lived in Mexico for a long time. . . forty years or so, probably, although they've all traveled a lot and the old folks have been educated in American universities. Kimball himself, I found from a few quick and I fear uncharming questions, is nineteen, and is going back to Yale this fall for his sophomore year.

The hacienda is a kind of family hobby, just as some of us have big farms that we love. They grow corn commercially, and also have a fine dairy herd, Mr. Colby told me.

But enough of these tedious family facts. Kimball is the important thing.

A group of people, both Mexicans and North Americans, were waiting for us on the top terrace of the house, standing around with tall glasses in their hands, Kimball's mother and his aunt, and several other old but nice people. Slightly away from them, a group of Men. At least four, two being invited for spares, I thought at first. But later it developed that a girl friend of Kimball's, a very competent person named Leslie Grant, was also in the party.

Everyone was very nice to me, due, I suppose, to the fact that I was a kind of connecting link between the two groups. Mostly I gulped and smiled, which sometimes can pass for conversation.

Kimball took me around by the elbow, introducing everyone.

"You look scared, hon," he said.

"I am," I blurted out.

"That's silly," he laughed. "We're just people who like you. Besides, you're prettier than I remembered you."

"I'm not really," I said, thinking as long as we were going to spend a lot of time together, I might as well be honest with him. "It's just that I've broken my glasses."

Corney and Horty were immediately absorbed by the group of men. They each took on two very easily, and I noticed that Leslie Grant seemed to prefer the old folks' society. At least she was spending her time with them.

We got through dinner somehow. I'm sure the food must have been good, though I could taste nothing.

One of the women, just beyond my focal distance down the table, leaned forward and said to me, "Are you related to Elmo Thorndike Prowder?"

All conversation stopped, and all eyes fastened on me like interested bees. "Yes. . . I'm his father," I said in a gulp.

That gave me rather a bad start, but in a few minutes, when I had recovered a bit, I tried again. Daddy always says. . . from his long experience at being a rather bashful man in society. . . that if you can just get yourself floated out on a somewhat extended area of your own voice, your shyness disappears. He says people become snowbound within their own timidity when their own accumulated silence settles in around them. The only thing to do is to put on mittens and shovel your way out to the highway of conversation. Otherwise you're trapped.

So I decided to venture boldly forth.

"Speaking of my father," I shouted to no one in particular, "he has a rather amusing way of describing the difference between Chinese marriages and American marriages."

A clap of silence, loud as thunder, hit the table.

"Oh?" Kimball's mother said encouragingly at last.

"Might be helpful," I blurted out. "Anyway. Well, what Daddy says is that the Chinese custom of marriage brings a cold teakettle to a hot stove."

"Umm. . . very interesting," someone murmured not very convincingly. But I had to go on, anyway, now that I had started.

"Whereas," I cried, unnecessarily loudly, "most American marriages bring a boiling teakettle and set it on a cold stove. . ."

Several of the nicer adults made clucking sounds to show they were musing over the remark. But nobody laughed as I heard a tableful of people laugh at our house when Daddy said it. My own contemporaries completely ignored me, and I sank back on my plate, a conversational suicide.

By the time the meal was over, I discovered that the table was full of vacancies, and then I realized that the music which was coming from the

patio was dance music.

A big moon had come up from behind the stables, and when I called the old folks' attention to that (I seemed now to be the only person at the table under thirty-five), Mr. Colby said, "Kimball says you're a fine horsewoman, Ursula."

"I must have told him myself," I said demurely, "and that evidence doesn't count."

We got up from the table and strolled out to the patio, which now seemed filled with dancing couples. It developed that a number of Kimball's friends from surrounding haciendas had come over for the evening. The next thing I knew we were getting up a riding party to go out and see the country by moonlight. There was quite a lot of discussion about who wanted to go, and what we'd wear for riding clothes. But none of it troubled me, for the thought of a beautiful horse, and Kimball, and a moon all at once, was so exhilarating and wonderful to me that nothing else mattered.

I wasn't even embarrassed when Mrs. Colby had to come to my rescue about finding a pair of trousers ample enough for me. Trousers, unfortunately, fall into my most ample department. But at last she located a rather shapeless pair of dungarees, and Candee suggested that I'd look better if I put on my coat over them.

At the last moment I discovered that Horty and Corney were not going.

"Why waste the moon?" Corney said, to my bewilderment.

Candee explained it in her heavily whimsical way. "Corney thinks the moon was made for dancing under, dear. But you go along, Lambie, and have your ride. Only be careful, won't you?"

I suddenly realized that I was to be the only girl in the riding party. The others were mounted when I came out, my shadow long before me on the brick courtyard, looking rather dapper in spite of the dungarees, because I had belted in my coat as trimly as possible.

The moment was thrilling and beautiful, for the horses were exceptionally fine, nervously pacing and pawing, and eager to be off.

Just before I mounted, I slipped my hand in the pocket of my coat, and there was a change purse I'd thought I'd lost last week, and the extra pair of glasses I thought I'd lost yesterday in my raincoat. Existence is always full of delightful surprises, when one is irresponsible and scatterbrained as Mummy insists I am.

I put on the glasses with gratitude, and immediately all the outlines of things stopped jiggling, and the wobbly gelatine buildings became firm brick and stone.

My horse, a tall roan, looked full of fire. And I myself felt full of fire, equal to his.

“Can you ride him?” someone called out to me.

“I can ride anything. . . tonight.”

“Can you jump?”

“I can if the horse can,” I said.

“We’re off, then.”

A tall rider I identified as Kimball reined his horse in close to me. “Keep close behind me,” he said. “I’ll take the jumps just before you. Keep your eye on me. The first one’s a four-foot jump.”

“Lead on,” I said, with my heart fluttering in my voice. “I’ll follow you anywhere.” I hoped I wasn’t too bold. But then I became even bolder. “I could ride to the moon tonight, I’m so full of happiness.”

The first jump was very high, and not a fence either but a solid wall, which you made in a clean leap or else. My horse was a gentleman and he knew I didn’t know the jumps, so he took it himself, lifting into the air in a swift clean arc that raised my hair from my scalp, and lifted my solar plexus through the roof of my mouth. But what was even more important, it lifted my glasses off of my nose. We made the jump perfectly, and all my blood sang with joy. I stopped my horse clear on the other side, dismounted and ran back to look for the glasses. Even to my bad eyes, they were gleaming in the moonlight. The reason they were gleaming especially, I suppose, was that they were broken into splinters where the horse had stepped squarely on them.

Well, for this one enchanted night, at least, Fate had decreed that I should be as pretty a girl as I can be.

Kimball had turned his horse around and had come back to meet me.

“What’s up?”

“Nothing’s up. My glasses are down,” I said giddily. “I just smashed my second and last pair within four hours. It’s Fate, obviously.”

I was up on my horse again, and we were off across the long sweep of downs. The others were far ahead of us now, and I'm sure neither of us cared.

"I wanted to be out here alone with you," I said.

"Did you really?" He sounded surprised.

"Don't let's ever tell anyone I met you in a pawnshop," I called out after a few minutes.

He came back closer to me and his voice was full of laughter. "I thought you said pawnshop," he said.

"I did. Don't let's ever tell anyone. Let's let it be our little secret."

He rode a wide circle around me, and then he called out jovially. "I don't know what you're talking about."

I began to laugh then myself. "I see. . . you're a gentleman."

"I try to be. But I'm not very smooth about it."

We rode awhile in silence, except that he was singing to his horse. And I. . . I guess I was singing, too, but quietly in my heart.

"Then where *did* we meet?"

"I met you at dinner," he said.

"Okay. . . but how did I ever get out?"

"Out?" he asked in amazement. And then, "Well, that's your problem, let's say. How do you usually get out?"

"I don't. The time we met is the only time I've even been out since we came to Mexico."

"Watch out. . . there's a water jump ahead," he called, and I caught the jump just in time.

We didn't talk very much. We didn't need much talking. He told me about a horse he had had when he was a boy, and I told him about my old Sunny. I had no fear at all of him now; he seemed even nicer and kinder than he had been in the Loan Office.

It was a wonderful ride. And the most perfect evening of my life. Except for one thing. One rather startling thing.

When we came riding back into the courtyard, the music was still filtering out from the patio. Now the moon was high and our shadows lay

directly under us. When the dancers heard our hoofbeats coming back across the bricks, they ran out to meet us, hand in hand, laughing like old friends.

“A fine symbol of international friendship,” I thought, never quite free from the larger meanings, alas.

A tall bright-haired man ran ahead of the girl he was with, and came over to help me dismount. To my horror I discovered it was Kimball Colby.

“Hope you’ve had a fine time, Lambie,” he said.

“Why. . . why, I did. . . only. . .”

“I’d have liked to be with you,” he said. “You know I’m crazy about riding. But I thought I had some obligations to the rest of my guests.”

“Of course,” I said. “And this way, you could be in two places at once.”

“I beg your pardon. . . I didn’t catch what you said.”

“Nothing,” I muttered. “Nothing at all.”

Corney came running up, all curls and dimples and perfume.

“Oh, Lambie. . . you smell so horsy,” she said, making a little face. And before my eyes she slipped her hand back into Kimball’s.

Some guests just naturally mistake a host’s good manners for something else, I thought, hardly able to keep back the tears.

I hurried as fast as I could out of the dungarees, through a quick shower and into my clothes, but I seemed to be all thumbs. When I came charging down the stairs and out to the patio, I found to my horror that Candee was rounding up our party to take us home.

“It’s nearly midnight, and we have quite a long drive back to the city. And there’s painting to be done in the morning,” she said in her horridly cheerful way.

“But we can’t go yet. We simply can’t,” I said, on the verge of weeping.

“Of course you can’t,” Kimball said, suddenly appearing behind me. “I’ve got to have at least one dance with Lambie. After all, we’re old friends, Lambie and I.”

I think I would have died if he hadn’t insisted on that dance. All my old familiar inferiority complex would have settled down on me. It practically wouldn’t have been a real date, if Kimball and I had not danced.



For the first few minutes, everyone else stayed off of the marble floor while we danced. If Kimball had not been such a super dancer, I doubt if I could have made it, due to emotion and to the fact that I'd only danced with girls before (except in dancing school when I was a little kid, which doesn't count). My mind was a turmoil of excitement and joy, and over that, like a loudspeaker, was screaming a warning, "Don't lead, Lambie. . . don't lead. . ." I tried my best not to lead, but when you're as tall as I am, and as strong, it is difficult.

"You're a good dancer," he said nobly.

"I lead. I try not to," I mumbled.

"You'll get over that, honey. You're just a forceful personality, that's all." My heart melted in my breast at his kindness. It seemed to me I had never been in the presence of anyone so understanding.

"I hope you've had a fine time," he said. (I'd like to say, "looking down at me affectionately," or something like that. But the honest fact is that our eyes were practically on a level. If anything, mine were a half-inch above his.)

"I wanted especially to have you enjoy yourself," he said, "because I owe you such a lot."

"Me?"

"Yes, you, Innocent. Because you've brought something so beautiful into my life." He squeezed my hand. And then, though we were out where everyone could see it, he lifted my hand to his lips and kissed it.

The music stopped then. It was a good thing, too, for I think I should have swooned down with delight and happiness.

Surely no girl of sixteen years and three months ever had a more wonderful thing happen to her. Here I had been thinking of what a transformation he had brought about in my life. . . never for a moment suspecting that I might have done as much for him.

I rode home in a dream, far above hearing any of the juvenile giggling confidences Horty and Corney were exchanging, and the prim comments of Candee. I was living now in a private and wonderful world, lighted by one star, the lovely, unforgettable thing Kimball had said to me.

"Look at Lambie. . . she's practically asleep," Candee said. "Such a child. A big rowdy child."

I smiled inwardly without opening my eyes. Let them think whatever they pleased. They could not possibly guess the blazing truth.

## Chapter Eight



I insisted on sleeping in the single bed that night. Horthy and Corney willingly let me, because they had to go over every atom of their evening with a fine-toothed comb. Their silly girlish chatter was the last thing I wanted to hear at such a time in my life. I turned my back to them, and drew the covers close around my ears. I fully intended to stay awake all night, savoring to the full this first great emotional experience that had come to me.

But to my disgust, no sooner had I got myself settled than it was broad daylight, and the others were up bickering as usual about who should have the first shower. The second shower from our prankish Mexican plumbing is stone cold, also there is not a dry spot the size of a dime in the whole bathroom.

My blessed near-sightedness kept me in my own lovely world. Ten feet away everyone's face became a blur, so that I didn't have to bother with it, either to attempt to be pleasant or to snub it so that it wouldn't break in on my privacy. My day was completely subjective.

To my surprise, I found that my painting was much better when I couldn't see what I was doing. Señor Mariano held off one of my creations at arm's length and said, "Now we are getting somewhere. You have not niggled, Señorita. You see the broad masses, and not the irrelevant lines."

I remembered the story about Monet (or was it Manet?) who had painted in happy abandon all his life, only to discover when he was an old man that he had defective eyesight. Someone persuaded him to have glasses fitted. For the sake of his painting, he did. But when he put on the glasses and walked out into his beloved world, he was horrified. Everything was sharp and outlined. . . the lovely simple masses were broken up. So he took off the glasses, jumped happily on them, grinding the lenses to powder, and went on with his work unhampered.

All morning I painted, apparently absorbed in it, but my mind and my heart were carrying on a fine dialogue. I had so many things I wanted to talk about with my new friend, so many things I wanted to ask him about

himself. I had no worry now about whether or not I would know how to talk with him. I could talk with him as easily as I could think by myself.

It didn't seem at all strange to me that I could have fallen so utterly in love with him on such a brief acquaintance. It was as if I had been waiting for him all my life, and had been preparing to find him. The picture was all ready, and had been for years; all that was missing from it was his particular face, and his name for me to call him by.

I had no idea when I should see him again, but of course it would be soon. He would take care of that. I wouldn't even have to bother too much about Candee; I felt sure he could twist her around his little finger.

Before the day was over, I began to realize that Horty and Corney had something on their minds. Every time I came near them, they stopped talking and looked guilty. Once when I came into our room suddenly, I heard Horty say:

"It's the least we could do for her, Corney, after all she's. . . oh, hello, Lambie. . ."

"What're you two talking about?" I said.

"Who? Us? Why, nothing," Corney said. "What *were* we talking about anyway, Horty?"

But I could tell by their dear guilty little faces what it was, and I was touched. Obviously they were planning some kind of little surprise for me, some small gift or some treat to show me how much they appreciated the lovely evening I had provided for them.

Of course both of them were seventeen and I am presumably younger. But now I felt older and wiser than they. I almost felt maternal about them. I expect that was because I felt so rich in what I had now.

But before the next day had ended, my whole world came crashing down around me.

It happened in the john. One of the beastly indignities that Life thrusts upon us is that some of our most monumental moments are marred by something ludicrous, droll, or even obscene. Art edits all this, but Life itself is a drunken bungler. I confess that in writing this next scene, I have been tempted to rearrange it a bit, because of the inappropriateness of the setting. But such was the architecture of our rooms. . . and of our whole life, in fact. . . that the john is the only place where it could have happened. For it was the only place we ever had privacy, and not always there.

Well, I was in the john when suddenly I heard angry voices out in our room. I thought for a second it must be two maids fighting, and then I recognized Horty and Corney having a good old row.

“I’m not going to have any part of it,” Horty was saying.

“All right. Cut off your nose,” Corney said indifferently. “What good would that do Lambie?”

“But I just don’t like it.”

“So you just don’t like it. Too bad.”

Sounds of closet doors being banged, and dresser drawers jerked out and shoved back.

“You know you’ll come in the end, so why not skip all this?” Corney said. “Or do you enjoy the noble act?”

“I’ll hate myself in the morning,” Horty said. “It just won’t be worth it to me.”

“Okay. Call him up. Tell him you’ve got a fungus growth of scruples. He’ll be interested in the novelty, I’m sure.”

“You know how thrilled she is.”

“So she’s thrilled. Well, she might as well wake up young,” Corney said brutally. “It’s time she got out of the bassinet anyway.”

“You haven’t any heart.”

“I’m all heart,” Corney said sweetly. “That’s what Kimball likes about me.”

“You’re all something else,” Horty said, “but don’t let’s have to scrub our mouths out with soap, shall we?”

“Now calm down,” Corney said agreeably. “You know I wouldn’t do anything to hurt a flea.”

“Not much. You’re the mother type. Always the little comforter.”

“I’m not going to stay here and be insulted,” Corney said. “If you want to discuss our date for tonight, okay. But if you just want to vent your envy. . .”

“I’m sorry,” Horty said gruffly, “but I do feel bad about it.”

“I feel bad, too,” Corney said. “But can I help it if the man likes me?”

“Of course not. It’s just a catastrophe nobody could prevent, I suppose.”

They were quiet a moment, and I thought maybe I had better just open the door and say, “Listen, kids . . . what’s all this about? Don’t distress yourselves. I can take it. . .” Only I knew darned well I couldn’t take it.

“Suppose we just passed up the date entirely?” Corney said. “What would that gain for Lambie?”

“Her self-respect, maybe,” Horty said. “But what’s that, pray tell? Sooner she loses that the better, I suppose.”

“Now, don’t get cynical about it,” Corney said. “We’ve got to weigh everything.”

“Okay. Let’s weigh. We’d all stay home together tonight, and Lambie would go on into the sunset, happy in her ignorance,” Horty said. “Maybe that would be worth something.”

“It would be silly,” Corney said, “and I, for one, am not going to do it.”

“And you, for one, *happen* to be the majority,” Horty said. “But the least we can do is not to let her know.”

“She’s got to know. Who’ll she think it is we’re going out with? She might as well face it. The fact is she wouldn’t ever have seen the man again if he hadn’t happened to see me with her that Sunday. He hadn’t looked her up before, had he? Definitely no.”

“Okay, Irresistible,” Horty said glumly. “He saw you. And he would have invited Bo-Bo, the Two-Headed Girl, out to his hacienda in order to get acquainted with you.”

“In a word, yes,” Corney said. “And now, in the natural course of events, he wants to take me to *Ciro’s*. And to make it pleasanter, he gets one of his friends to invite you.”

“Oh, sure. Scenery. That’s all we are, his friend and me. Just so much scenery to toss around you.”

Whatever they had come up to the room for, they had picked up now, and suddenly they were leaving, continuing round and round the discussion as they went.

I opened the door, hardly able to stand. The whole terrible scene hadn’t taken more than five or six minutes, yet it had cut my heart off at the roots. Everything I had thought had been a childish delusion.

In a few terrible sentences they had made me see the truth. Kimball had *not* looked me up until he saw Corney with me last Sunday. . .

Even that last little sentence he had said to me. . . and the way he had kissed my hand right out there on the floor where everyone could see us. . . had an entirely different meaning from what I had supposed. I was so utterly ineligible that he could *afford* to kiss my hand. He thought of me as a child. Or even worse than a child, if anything is worse. He thought of me, in fact, as a girl with no pink magic.

He had not even thought of persuading one of his friends to invite me to Ciro's tonight. Or. . . maybe he had thought, and he just couldn't get anyone to do it. My face was flaming with the fieriest shame I ever had felt in my whole sixteen years of feeling various degrees of shame for my oddness, and too-bigness.

I wanted to die.

I went over to the window and looked down at the street. Surely there have been busier streets on earth than these in Mexico City. New York and Chicago streets are a steady flow of activity, but it never is the teeming noisy hurly-burly of Mexican streets. This is because most Mexican motion is animal, and not mineral as ours is. People in all states and stages of intimate human busyness, horses and donkeys and a constant ebb and flow of dogs, thin and inquisitive and busy. I watched this never-ceasing maelstrom, and I knew that among them there couldn't be one person so crushed as I felt.

The only consolation I had was that I had not fully bared my folly to my friends. They thought I was absurd enough; they did not guess how dementedly happy I really had been. I tried to think calmly, but all that was clear was that I wanted to disappear from living.

I thought of Mummy's merry little face, but there was no comfort in it for me, for she could not possibly understand the chasm of sorrow into which I had fallen. And Daddy, of course, was out of the question, blinded as he always is by statistical facts. As Mummy once said about him, "He cannot see the truth for the facts."

If I had had any money, I would have slipped away somewhere. But I knew, even as I said that to myself, that I could not do that except with such a loss of pride and dignity as I could not bear. No, I should have to stay right here. I should have to carry off the thing high-handedly enough so that no one ever would suspect how I really felt.

As I thought about it, I felt a rôle writing itself for me, and I knew that would be the only comfort for me. I would lose myself in a new part, just as I had long ago tried to lose my bigness in being interested in Art. I wasn't sure yet what the part would be, but it would fool me enough so that I could carry it off until this hurt had healed.

The first test I would have to face was the next seeing of Horthy and Corney. I'd have to think of a way of dealing with that, so they would not guess.

I went out onto the street recklessly, even though Candee has told me a hundred times that I am not to step out alone. Nothing would happen to me; I knew that now. Nothing ever would happen to me. I would just be one of the frustrated passed-up rejects of the earth. Nobody would even give me a pinch when we were caught in the crowd as Corney and Horthy got pinched every time they ventured out. I would catch colds, and turn ankles, and have other people's babies named after me. I'd be given scholarships, and win races, and be smarter than other people my age until everyone hated the sight of me. But I'd never worry my parents sick, nor get special-delivery letters on Sunday morning, or make a boy threaten to commit suicide, or have an illegitimate baby.

So I went out on the street alone, and I scuffed along through the crowd, towering above it, and if strangers saw that I was crying I just didn't give a damn.

The daily rain came pouring down suddenly, hot and wetter than any other rain on earth. It matted down my hair and ran down my face, and I cried all the harder because now even I couldn't tell which was rain and which was tears.

At last I blundered into an oculist's shop which I had noticed on the Avenida Juarez.

"Estades spik English?" I said fiercely.

"Certainly, Señorita," the dapper little tadpole behind the plush table said respectfully.

"Well, fit me to some glasses," I said. "I might as well see where I'm going, as long as I'm not going anywhere anyway."



## Chapter Nine



As long as I had started, I thought I might as well keep going. After I'd had new glasses fitted, I swaggered out into the street again, feeling reckless and desperate, and quite unlike my usual self. With its typical suddenness in starting and stopping, the rain was over, and already hot dry spots were appearing on the pavement. The angry monsters of clouds had gone back to their lairs until tomorrow when they would come forth growling again. A timid apologetic sun was showing its face, and the crowds on the street, unshucked from their raincoats again, were looking up at him as if to say, "Come home. All is forgiven."

But all wasn't forgiven with me, by any means. My hurt had only passed into its next stage of malignance; now I felt sullen and reckless.

I winked at a man in a car; I bought a slice of fresh pineapple right on the street and ate it, which is something that no one except a prospective suicide ought to do. (If he's an educated person and knows better, that is.) I considered going into a bar and asking them to set up a row for me. In other words, I just dared Fate. I guess I wanted to see if she could treat me any worse than she already had.

Finally, about five o'clock, I wound up at Sanborn's, where I said to the waitress, a sad-eyed elderly duenna rather incongruous in the horizontal-striped long skirt and ecclesiastical headdress someone in charge there has evidently decided is appropriate, "What's the fiercest combination of ice cream you people are capable of?"

"How, Señorita?" she said, in a worried little voice. "Mebbe I better should bring menu-card, perhaps?"

"Not necessarily," I said bad-manneredly, lolling back in the armed chair and feeling like Sadie Thompson in the second act of *Rain*, when she Just Doesn't Care. "Ask the boy to toss in one scoop of every kind of ice cream in the house, and then put a shot of chocolate over it. Never mind the cost, muchacha."

While I was waiting for this devil's-brew, humming to myself and looking around blindly at the other characters in this tropical dive, a tall bony girl of no particular age came in. She had on a Guatemalan coat, and

an armful of tourist bait, woven mats, a few native jugs strung together with a rope through their handles, a pair of huaraches. Her hands were knuckle-deep in silver jewelry.

“I see you’ve been to Taxco,” I said, hoping I didn’t sound too cynical.

“Yeah,” she said indifferently. “Last week, chum. Right now I’ve just come in from Toluca. C’n I sit down here?”

“What’s to prevent?” I said indifferently. So she slipped into the seat opposite me, sighed, picked up the menu and said, almost to herself, “If I have to face one more week of this cute food. . .”

“Been traveling long?”

“Two years and eleven weeks,” she said, without looking up from the menu. “Ever since I was Queen for a Day.”

“Well,” I said, interested in spite of myself, “how’d that bring on a trip?”

“I figured if sheer personality could get me a night at the Stork Club, Charm in Six Lessons, four pairs of shoes by I. Miller, a lifetime subscription to Palmolive Toothpaste, re-styling by Love-me brassière, free dental work, and ten cartons of cigarettes, why shouldn’t extended personality get me extended benefits?”

“Good reasoning,” I said at the end of this tired recital. “And did it?”

“I’ll say it did,” she said despondently. “I’ve seen every tourist trap in the Western Hemisphere, I’ve had my picture in ninety-four newspapers, I’ve sent postcards home from eleven hundred and thirty-two post offices, I’ve got nine autograph books full of signatures of people who’ve done something kind for me. . . God, how I hate kindness. . . and now all I gotta do, when I get the railway fare together, is go home and write a book.”

“Gosh. You’re a real adventuress,” I said, my admiration showing in my voice.

“Yeah. A real adventuress,” she said wearily. “And what I’d give to just sit on a porch and not go nowhere.”

“You mean. . . *you’re fed up?*”

“Right up to here,” she said, drawing her finger across the top of her throat. “Queen for a Day, and goon for the rest of my life.”

The duenna brought over a soup bowl with my ice cream in it, and set it down defiantly.

The Queen looked at it and then at me. “You mean you eat that stuff?”

“Feeling the way I feel, I do,” I said, matching my voice to hers.

She looked at me then for the first time. Up to now she had been talking, but now she began talking to me.

“Oh! So you feel that way, too.”

“I’m more than fed up,” I said.

“Anything in partick?”

“Yes,” I said, and then, with a shiver down my spine, “a man.”

She looked at me again, carefully and almost insultingly.

“Your father?”

“I’ll say not,” I laughed shortly. “Although he’s caused me a lot of grief, too.”

“Drink?”

“No, not exactly,” I said, trying to get my hand on something plausible. “Books.”

“Oh. . . a bookie?” She nodded, understandingly, and then said to the waitress, still loitering impatiently for her order, “Bacon and eggs.” It looked for a moment as if the conversation was going to bog down then, but I got hold of it again.

“Men,” I said scornfully. “They’re all alike.”

“Except that some are worse than others.”

“Especially the good ones,” I said.

“What happened to you, chum?” she said. “Anything you could write about, maybe?”

“Afraid not,” I said. “Too much the same old story, I guess. Another woman.”

“Oh?”

“I trusted him,” I said. “I thought. . . after all we had been to each other. . . engaged, and everything . . . but you know.”

“Sure,” she said.

“If it had been a woman of my own class,” I said vaguely, “I’d have known how to deal with it.”

“Oh, I see,” she said. “What was she. . . a native?”

That gave me an idea. “Not a pure-bred native,” I said thoughtfully.

“Oh. . . a half-caste? I guess they’re the worst,” she said expertly. “The interbreeding, I suppose.”

I nodded dismally. “She had once been a society girl. But she. . . well, she had just gone native, I suppose. Just let her instincts pull her lower and lower until. . .”

“Gosh,” the Queen said. “That sounds like something you could write, maybe. Listen”. . . she leaned towards me with confidential helpfulness. . . “I ran into a party a few days ago that told me she’d sold a lot of stuff to *True Story*, easy as anything. A hundred bucks. Soon’s I get the carfare back home, I’m going to write up some of my experiences. Maybe you. . .”

I shook my head slowly. “This is too close to me yet,” I said. “I still can’t see the forest for the trees.”

“You mean it happened. . . *in the woods*?” she asked in a lurid whisper.

“A lot of it did,” I admitted. “You see, we belong to the horse set.”

“Gosh,” she said again. “What’d you say your name was?”

“The name doesn’t matter,” I said, “Underneath we’re all the same.”

“Yeah,” she said, as if a blaze of truth had burst on her. “That’s exactly what I’ve found. Maybe that’s what I oughta name my book I’m going to write. Or maybe just ‘Under the Skin.’ What’d you think?”

“I think it’s swell,” I said politely.

“No. I guess it isn’t so good, either,” she admitted, with the sparkle gone out of her again.

She looked around the big cathedral-like restaurant where all the Americans had sought refuge, and I thought for a moment she was going to burst into tears.

“I’m so gee-dee tired of being a character,” she said. “I’d like to just go home. And sit.”

“I know,” I said sympathetically. “On a porch.”

“On my fanny,” she said. “A girl’s personality gets so dawg-goned tired, when she has to live off it.”

Then she brightened up, for her bacon and eggs had come. Before she took a bite, she reached for the check and looked at it. Then she looked at me. She groped down to where her shoulder-bag was swinging heavily and got out a large printed card. “Say, chum. . . how’d you like to have me autograph one of my poems for you?”

“Sure,” I said, reaching for her check, and putting it under my own. “I’d be honored.”

“I’ve got two printed up,” she said. “You can have your choice. Either ‘Get out of your rut, Bud, and see the world’ or ‘Don’t spend tomorrow the way you spent today.’”

“Give me that one,” I said. “Sort of fits my own case.”

“Yeah,” she said, bending over tiredly to put on the five-peso-fifty-centavo autograph. “Sort of fits everybody’s case, I guess.”

I don’t know why, but I felt better as I walked back across the Alameda to our hotel. Maybe it was because night was coming on, and I wasn’t going to have to sleep in the Y.W.C.A. I knew I was going to run into plenty of trouble when I got back to the hotel. But at least it was going to be trouble with people I knew, not today’s crop of strangers.

Candee would be pretty furious because I had gone out alone. She might even decide she would pack me up and ship me back to my parents for disobedience . . . yes, that might be my salvation! I could hardly keep back tears of homesickness as I thought what that would be like.

“She became entirely unmanageable and unruly,” she would say to my parents, and they would try to find out why, and I wouldn’t tell. I’d just be a mystery. But I’d be at home, anyway, and to heck with whether or not the Garland girls had a lot of men on their tennis courts and I had none.

“I’ve had enough of men,” I’d say. And I’d mean it. I’d mean it right up to here. (In the twilight, as I was striding along, I drew my finger across the top of my throat. Its pressure gave me some comfort, for my throat felt full of tears and tension.)

As I came into the hotel, through the little office which separates the patio from the street, the clerk looked up from his desk and saw me.

“Miss Lemmie, where have you been?”

“Out,” I said loftily.

“You’re going to ketch it, Señorita,” he said kindly. “Maybe you want to sit down a minute an’ think up a good alibi.”

“Thanks,” I said, “I’ve got plenty of alibi.”

I had decided, matter of fact, just to brazen the thing out. The recklessness of utter bankruptcy was upon me. When the worst that could happen has already happened to you, you suddenly find that you’re not afraid of anything more. There is a kind of desperate relief that comes over you. You know nobody can make you feel worse than you already feel, so you just look things in the eye.

That’s the only way I can explain the bravado with which I swaggered in. I didn’t care what anybody said, not even Corney. I think I had touched bedrock in feeling bad and there was no farther down I could go. The next step, for the moment at least, was bound to be up.

But I wasn’t prepared for having the whole gee-dee group assembled to see how I was bearing up. Although I should have known they’d be there, for it was close to dinnertime, and the Anonymities come down to the pasture gates like cows just before feeding time. There they all sat, drumming on the table hungrily, and absently picking up crumbs off the tablecloth.

Candee, her eyes hidden behind the shine of her glasses, froze when she saw me come swinging in.

“Well,” she said in a bristling tone of voice. “And where have you been, Miss Prowder?”

“Out,” I said dangerously.

“So I inferred.”

The others all straightened up in their chairs, licking their lips delightedly, hoping they were going to see me punished. There is nothing that gives the old more consolation than to see the young humiliated and curbed. Partly, they are paid back for their own forgotten punishments and frustratings, and partly they are paid for being past the age when anyone can mete out justice to them. They looked gluttonous and full of righteousness.

“Mrs. Candee has been so worried, dear,” one fussy little plump spinster said. “We tried to tell her you were all right.”

“Of course I’m all right,” I said rudely. “What could happen to me?”

“Plenty of things could happen, dear,” Mrs. Killigant from Kansas said. “I’m afraid you just don’t know.”

“I’d have to be a deaf, dumb, and blind moron not to know,” I said, “the way you people are always hinting at it.”

“That will do,” Candee said. “And don’t change the subject, Ursula. Where have you been?”

“I’ve been out walking and seeing sights,” I said. “I’ve spent thirty dollars for some new glasses, and you will have to telegraph to my father for money to pay for them.”

“Why. . . Ursula. . .” Candee gasped, “what *are* you talking about? Your parents gave you perfectly adequate money.”

“I’ve spent it,” I said defiantly.

“You couldn’t have.”

“I must have,” I said recklessly. “Anyway, I haven’t it now.”

“You’ve been nothing but a chiseler ever since we’ve been here,” Candee said. “You haven’t paid for one thing you could avoid paying for. You’ve all but eaten off of other people’s plates rather than buy yourself a decent meal.”

“I’ve spent my money,” I said insistently, “or else I’ve lost it, or given it away. Anyway, it’s gone.”

The little group sat thunderstruck. The loss of my innocence they contemplated every day, but the loss of my money was a catastrophe that really hit them where they lived.

Then Mrs. Killigant took out her handkerchief and dabbed at her eyes.

“I know what you’ve done with your money, Lambie dear,” she sniffled. “You’ve been giving it to beggars. We’ve all told you not to. . . but I saw you the other day. . .”

For a moment I felt the soporific arms of temptation clinging around me. It would be so easy to confirm this quixotic nonsense by appearing to deny. But in this moment, when I had had as much emotion as I could possibly stand, I just couldn’t be bothered with that sticky, spurious one.

“Don’t be dumb,” I said angrily. “If I gave away pesos all day, I couldn’t have given away three hundred dollars’ worth. No, I spent it. . . and I lost it

. . . and when I didn't happen to have any kleenex around, I used ten-peso notes. So don't let's hear any more about it."

"*Ursula*," Candee said. "That will do. I think I'd better send you to your room."

She got up from her chair and came over to me, and put the back of her hand against my forehead the way your mother does when she suspects maybe you have a fever.

I could see her eyes now. They were sharp-whittled little points of anger. We looked furiously into each other's faces for a second, and then I saw something come into her eyes which I had never seen there before. If she were going to be kind to me. . . I thought with a murderous surge of rebellion in me . . . I'd just not stand it. With everything else I had suffered, I wasn't going to have the humiliation of kindness heaped on me. I jerked away from her hand.

"Let me alone," I said. "I'm sick and tired of being hounded and watched every waking moment."

Candee didn't say anything to that. She went back to her chair and sat down, and I heard a few of the Anonymities clucking and tch-tching in their bridgework.

"Young people. . . nowadays. . . what can you expect? . . . no manners. . . no respect. . ." A pinwheel of their biologically jealous clichés was whirling and throwing off sparks in the heavy black silence.

One of the tame little husbands said, "I think the girl's been drinking." Meaning, of course, that he wished he had been.

"I have, chum," I said. "I've had six scoops of ice cream, pistachio, strawberry, chocolate, vanilla, coffee, and tutti-frutti."

I planted my feet far apart now, and plunged my hands so deep in the pockets of my hideous Mexican coat with the white appliquéd palm trees, Mexican-sleeping-under-sombrero-beside-cactus, and crescent moons rising above waves, that I felt the pockets rip. Then I let them have it.

"I've been chucked under the chin by a taxi driver as I got out of his cab. I've bought a ticket to next Sunday's bullfight. Since I've been here I've mislaid three fountain pens, also most of my panties and all but one bra. I don't know where on earth my rubbers are, also ditto for the two umbrellas my mother packed for me. I used my slip to wipe oil paint on, and I've stuffed it down one of the chimneys on the roof so I won't have to hear a



lecture on the subject. I've got a half-eaten box of candy hidden in my bureau, and when everybody's asleep I get up and gorge.

"I found out how to hock things in this town, and I've hocked my watch and my last fountain pen, my camera, and my binoculars. I tried to toss in Miss Winslow's school pin, but they wouldn't take it.

"I've run through all the money I brought down here. And the only reason I haven't lost more is because I just didn't have any more to lose.

"Sometimes, when I'm making a noise like I'm taking a shower, I'm standing outside the tub, because I just hate water."

Through all this, nobody said one word. I went on hanging myself higher and higher. Once I was started on it, I couldn't seem to stop. I wished I could recall more of my crimes and misdemeanors so I could add them to my confession. But I just didn't seem to have committed any more.

When my breath and my memory had both run down, Candee spoke. "Have you quite finished, Ursula?"

"Quite," I said.

"All right, my dear," she said cheerfully, "then come over here and sit down quietly and wait for your supper."

"You mean. . . you're not going to punish her?" the outraged stronghold of decency gasped in various voices.

"You mean. . . you're not going to punish me?" I myself was almost as shocked as they were.

"Certainly I'm going to punish you," she said in her level voice, neither too vindictive nor too kind. "But not in some stupid way that wouldn't really matter to you."

"In what way, then?" I blurted out, collapsing into the chair beside her.

"I'm going to have to take a privilege away from you which you would enjoy having."

"What privilege?" I said weakly.

"Do you want me to tell you. . . here in public?"

I nodded helplessly. She didn't glance at them. This was apparently just between the two of us.

“All right, then. The others here know nothing about it, I suppose,” she said, “but you know that you and the other girls have been invited to Ciro’s tonight.”

My eyes were on her face, and I have no idea what they told her about my suffering today.

“Well, Ursula, I’m not going to allow you to go to Ciro’s, my dear. The others are going. But I’m not going to let you go. You understand?”

She looked me full in the face. For once we were not child and woman. We were two fellow humans, and one of us was a wonderful, understanding person.

## Chapter Ten



I knew that the worst part of my ordeal would be carrying off the situation with Corney and Horty. My pride and my cowardice begged that I just slip into the easy make-believe with them which Candee had opened up for me. No doubt Corney and Horty would be as relieved as I would be if we could all pretend I had been invited to *Ciro's* tonight, and that Candee *was* keeping me from going.

But that would mean that I would sacrifice whatever scrap of respect they had for me (if any, after last Tuesday's *débâcle*) and that I would certainly lose face with myself. Although my face could hardly be lost any further than it was already. The face I had lost with myself extended clear down to the soles of my feet; no mistake about that.

No. If I saved the surface of the situation by insisting that all of us act out a hypocrisy, I would be no better than an adult. Adults, naturally, do this sort of thing all the time, living out complacent lies for years, while underneath everyone involved knows the truth perfectly well. I think this is the reason they are generally so suspicious of each other, and dislike each other so bitterly.

We children know what fiends we are, so we can deal honestly and cleanly with each other. When we feel like stinkers, we usually act like stinkers, and when we're being decent, it is because we momentarily have got some decency in us. Unless, of course, we have associated with adults too closely since birth.

So I decided that the only thing for me to do, much as it might lacerate my pride, was to be frank with Corney and Horty about what had happened. I figured I was going to have to live with myself for a long time, and I didn't want to live with a smug failure who would spend half her brains trying to make up an appearance that would cover up the facts.

But it was not going to be easy for me to meet them. All through dinner, while they were sitting down at the other end of the table, slyly glancing up at me to try and figure out what my temperature was, I was working on the problem.

For some reason I wasn't very hungry, or else we didn't have a very appetizing dinner that night. At any rate, I found the food hard to swallow. But perhaps it was only that I had so much on my mind. Or it may even have been the six scoops of ice cream.

I kept remembering something Daddy once said to me when I had some childish difficulty. He said, "Lambie, do your big fighting on the inner battlefield."

Well, my inner battlefield was strewn with corpses tonight. And most of them were me.

As soon as dinner was finished, Horty came over brightly and leaned over the back of my chair.

"Where've you been all day, Lambie?"

"Oh, here and there," I said, with a very friendly grin.

"Well, how's about us kids going up to our room a few minutes? Corney's got her pictures back from the camera shop. There's a swell one of you from the rear you can send home to your family."

"Okay," I said, knowing that the whole speech simply boiled down to Horty wanting to say, "Listen, for gosh sake. Let's get this business over, hmm?"

As soon as the three of us were alone, without the simpering eyes of the old upon us, we sat down and stared at each other. Horty, the most direct of all of us, broke the ice with a meat-axe, so to speak.

"No use beating around the bush, I guess," she said. "I can see by looking at you that you've found out."

"Yep. I found out that you two are going to Ciro's tonight, and I'm not in on it," I said, getting the words out into the ventilation as baldly as I could. Once you've said something dreadful like that, it doesn't seem quite as unbearable. Unspeakable is the old Biblical word, and it is quite a word, when you think of it. All day this had been unspeakable to me, but now I had said it, and I felt a fraction relieved.

Corney said, "Listen, Lambie, before we say anything else, I want to tell you I'm darned sorry about all this."

"You haven't anything to be sorry about," I said. "I just was trying to play in the big league when I'm still only a bush leaguer. Or even less than that."

I think that surprised them a little. After a few minutes Horty said, “Gosh, I fully expected you were going to be difficult.”

“I would be, if I thought it would get me anything,” I said, with a kind of weak grin. “But I’d be dumber than I am, if I didn’t know that I just haven’t made the grade, and I’ve nobody to blame but myself.”

“There are plenty of things you *could* blame,” Corney said, with what I think used to be called in literature “a rueful look.”

“I’m not blaming anybody,” I said. “I’m not going to waste my energy blaming things. I’m just going to ask you two guys to help me figure out what’s wrong with me.”

“There’s nothing definitely *wrong* with you,” Corney said, and surely nobody on earth was ever damned with fainter defense. “It’s just. . . well, you try to use your brains in a game where brains are a handicap.”

“I wouldn’t say that,” Horty said. “*You* use brains, Corney, in a kind of feline, animal way.”

“No,” Corney insisted. “Nobody could ever accuse me of using my brains where a man is concerned. Other parts of my anatomy, yes. But not brains.”

“Don’t be smug,” Horty said. “You’re pretty hard to take at any time, but in your hour of triumph I, for one, find my stomach turned when I look at you.”

For a moment they glared at each other sweetly, and I could see that, even though they definitely had what I would willingly have given my eye teeth for, they weren’t particularly happy about all this.

In some unaccountable shift, Horty had come over to my side. She and Corney really were in this together, since they were both people with obvious appeal, and I was a rejected outsider. But for some reason, Horty had left her team and had come over with me. It was the first time in my life such a thing had ever happened to me. I felt a wild impulse to burst into tears, for next to being popular with boys, being liked by the right kind of girls is wonderful success. And I have never been liked much by anyone, except my parents, who don’t count because they have no choice in the matter.

Now Horty’s dark eyes were snapping with rage, and she was saying, “I’m frankly fed up with you, Corney Baker. And when I’m fed up with you I have to include a large section of the masculine race, which wouldn’t see

through you and would think you were super. That makes me fed up, period.”

I tried to come to the rescue, as best I could. After all, just because I was such a failure was no reason Horty and Corney should be mad at each other.

“Let’s don’t get despondent,” I said. “We’re only discussing what’s wrong with me. Not what’s the matter with the universe.”

Horty said nobly, “Well, if it comes down to that, I don’t see as much wrong with you as I do with some other people.”

“Okay,” Corney said. “So now everyone has insulted everyone else, and we’ve cleared the atmosphere.”

“But you still haven’t answered my question,” I said. “I couldn’t feel any lower than I already feel, so I might as well try to get something constructive out of this.”

“You’re a glutton for abuse,” Corney said.

“No. But now that I *am* caught with my pride down, I might as well get a frank opinion. You needn’t be afraid of hurting my feelings, because I just haven’t got any left.”

“What is it you want to know?” Corney asked, after a long moment of looking at me to see if I really meant it.

“Well, you saw me muff my big evening in about as big a way as an evening could be muffed. How’d I manage that? Let’s begin at the beginning.”

“Well, to begin with, it wasn’t *your* evening,” Corney said baldly. “The evening came to us with your name as the address. But it was really sent to *me* by Kimball Colby. It didn’t belong to you at all.”

I took that squarely on the chin. “No, I guess it didn’t,” I said, with a gulp. “I only thought it did.”

“Let’s put it poetically,” Corney went on. “You were just the plug in the electric socket. Someone noticed you when he wanted to connect a beautiful lamp. But as soon as the light was on, he hadn’t time to notice anything but the lampshade.”

“How beautifully said,” Horty said sarcastically. “You ought to be a poet instead of. . . what you are.”

Corney just ignored her. “That was not your fault, Lambie. It just happened a bit unfortunately for you. You see, you accidentally stepped out of the orbit of your own life into what is normal in my life. It was a bit overwhelming to you.”

“Also a philosopher, I see,” Horty said, and made a disreputable and unladylike noise.

“But. . . but. . .” I said, and couldn’t exactly frame what I was trying to say. So Corney went on.

“But, judged just from your own viewpoint. . . within the range of your own experience and ability . . . you had a perfectly swell evening. You like horses? Well, you had a date with a horse.”

Horty got up from the bed, and was about to pound her friend over the head. But, hardly even noticing her, I took her by the wrist, and went on with what Corney was saying, for I felt she had hit the nail on the head. The nail in the coffin of my hopes even though it was.

“But I don’t want to spend my life with horses.”

“You don’t?”

“No, I don’t. And what I’m asking you is how to get myself over the line from horses to men. I’ve got to get out of my disgusting, sterile existence. I want the kind of living you know all about.”

Corney looked thoughtful, and even Horty listened with bated suspense for the answer to that one.

“Well,” Corney said at last, “that can’t be done in a minute. If it can be done at all. You’ve got to go way back and change things.”

“Okay. Let’s go way back,” I said doggedly.

“Well, there’s something terribly wrong with your heredity.”

“Sure,” Horty said. “Let’s get her unborn.”

I said, “Be nice if we could, feeling the way I’ve felt all day.” Then I mustered up a big grin to give the impression that I didn’t really mean that. But honestly I did mean it.

“And even if we could do something about her heredity,” Corney said, “we’d still find that her environment is all wrong.”

“There must be some people from the intellectually privileged classes who find life and love,” I suggested.

Horty said heavily, “Only that three-fifths of a child statistics allow to each Vassar girl. The others are doomed to chastity, mayhem, and hangnails.”

“If we’re going to deteriorate into facetiousness,” Corney said, with dignity, “we might as well skip the whole thing.”

“Don’t skip it, please,” I said. “It’s terribly important to me. I’ve got to live this life, you know, and it’s time I faced it squarely.”

We all sat in the pit of discouragement a few minutes, and it seemed to me that if there was ever anyone whose troubles and difficulties were bigger than herself (big as I am), I was that somebody. I was, as I have always suspected, a huge cosmic mistake. A kind of eugenic hiccough. No wonder Nature at the last moment, and as a furtive apology for what she had nightmarishly dreamed up, slapped a smattering of talent into me.

I guess we were all following the same line of reasoning, for Corney said, very kindly now that she had been so devastatingly frank.

“Lambie dear, I think the best thing for you is to forget all about men. Why don’t you just be a great Genius of some sort?”

The injustice of that made me boil. Life, in its sullen underhanded way, had said that to me in the beginning, and everyone who ever considered me would repeat the barren advice. It just was not fair.

“I will *not* be a great genius,” I said. “I’m sick and tired of Art. I’ve had it crammed down my throat all my life, whenever anybody didn’t know what else to do with me. But the worm has turned, and *I am not going to be a genius.*”

“Well, you don’t have to yell so the adults can hear you,” Horty warned.

“Okay. But I’m not going to be a genius,” I said in a grim whisper.

“You’re not, huh?” Corney gave up the idea reluctantly.

“*No*, I’m not. And either you two can help me throw off the shackles and learn to be normal, or I’ll just go out on the street and learn it the hard way.”

That really stopped them, for they saw that I meant it.

“What d’you want us to do?” Horty said, with the first touch of respect in her voice I’ve ever heard from her.

“I want you to take me in hand,” I said, “and none of that vague stuff about it all coming to me, and me knowing how to behave when the



occasion arises. The occasion arose and I didn't know. So now you've got to tell me, in plain words."

"Yes, I know what you mean," Horty said thoughtfully. "For instance, I would have done better lots of times myself if somebody had told me stuff. If somebody had said, 'Hortense, you lug, when you get excited, you shout way up in your head like a fishwife. It's not your type.'"

"Shouting is nobody's type," Corney said conclusively, "except maybe when just girls are talking things over quietly by themselves."

"Well, you know what I mean," Horty said meekly.

"I don't know whether or not people *can* teach each other," Corney said. "You have to be born knowing."

"Don't give us that stuff," Horty said inelegantly. "Most people weren't born knowing anything. If *you* happened to have been born knowing how to crawl up men's neckties on any and all occasions, that's just the drop you have on the rest of us. I had to *learn* everything I know."

Corney was thinking deeply; you could see that. At last she said, "All right, Ursula, I'll take you on, if you'll agree to do anything I suggest. But at the first sign of sniveling or alibi-ing, I drop the case."

"No alibis," I said staunchly. "You'll find I've got a skin like a walrus. You can insult me as frankly as you please, if you'll just try to help me."

"I don't guarantee to make anything of you," Corney said brutally. "After all, you're a terribly big order. But at least we can make a start on you."

Horty said to her, just in passing, "Lord, you make me sick." But Corney disregarded her completely, and I was glad she did.

"First of all, we've got to do something about your figure."

"Whatever I *can* do," I said eagerly. "I've got some kind of girdle. But if I brought it with me, I've lost it somewhere."

"Girdle's only skin-deep," Corney said in a matter-of-fact voice. "We've got to get to the bottom."

"That's where I'm the biggest," I admitted meekly. "And these full skirts don't help me any."

But Corney brushed this aside impatiently. "No more desserts," she said. "No more bread or potatoes."

Horty said nastily, "I suppose you'll accommodate by eating the desserts for her."

"I could certainly carry them better than you can, my dear," Corney said impartially. "Your skin isn't everything you might wish, is it?"

Horty was speechless with rage, and it didn't help that what Corney was saying was perfectly true. Meanwhile, quite unconcerned about her, Corney went on prescribing for me.

"And you've got to sleep on curlers. Your hair looks like a haystack."

"But I can't sleep," I said. "I'd just lie awake."

"Okay. Just lie awake, then," Corney said brutally. "May even adle your brains a bit, which would certainly be a help."

Horty was more comforting. "You'll get so you can sleep on 'em, honey. Just make-believe you're recovering from a brain operation, and that you're going to wake up lovely and half-witted."

Corney drew down her mouth with disapproval of this light spirit. "The rest of us learn, Ursula, and you can. Or maybe it wouldn't be worth it to you?"

"It'd be worth it," I said hastily. "It'd be worth anything it cost, Corney."

"Well, I'll watch you critically for a couple of days, and then I'll get you a practice date."

"A practice date?"

"Yes. I'll get Kimball to dig up some unimportant little drip, and we'll see how you do with him."

"Gosh," I said, my skin crawling at the thought. "You mean, I'd have a date in a goldfish bowl. . . and you'd do a kind of survey on me?"

"Something like that," Corney said. "That is, if you're really interested in learning. Otherwise. . ."

Then her eye happened to fall on the clock, and she jumped up and began ripping off her clothes.

"Seven-seventeen," she shrieked, "and Kimball will be here at nine. We've got to dash. I'll have the first shower, Horty, shall I?"

"Oh, sure," Horty said. "You'll do me a favor and use up all the nasty old hot water."

She was in the bathroom already, and in a second the trickle of water that runs off of the slanting floor, was beginning to curl down across the bedroom. She daintily dropped Horty's bath towel on it, to soak it up.

"Ciro's! Ciro's! Ciro's!" she sang, running up the scale delightedly. "How I love the place!"

I got up and put on my coat. At least I didn't have to stick around the room with my tongue hanging out, watching them dress for a date which was none of my business.

"I'll be seeing you," I said.

"Where you going?" Horty said, trying not to sound sorry for me.

"Out with schoolteachers. Gosh, how I'd love to see Ciro's! You know what's there?"

"No, what?"

"Diego Rivera murals. . . the famous one where the women all have sunflowers for heads."

Horty looked at me in amazement. "Imagine knowing there's Art at Ciro's!"

Then she shook her head in despair. "Art. . . it'll be the ruin of you yet, Lambie Prowder."

"I hope so," I said dejectedly. "I hope something'll be the ruin of me."

## Chapter Eleven



As it worked out, Corney and Horty didn't see the Diego Rivera murals. Or, for that matter, anything else about *Ciro's*.

Naturally, being a healthy wholesome sleeper, I didn't hear them come in. But in the morning I woke to the lemony scent of crushed gardenias, and to the sweet chaos of their best clothes in a scramble all over the bedroom floor, ceiling, and walls. Corney's gold sandal was dangling from an electric wall bracket, where she had evidently kicked it when she came in; Horty's gold mesh purse was hanging on a doorknob, and her strapless black bra, looking like a Mardi-gras mask for a giant, was festooned across the mirror. Corney's six-yards-around skirt was gnashing its ruffles in a tantrum on the floor, and Horty's best shoes were valiantly propping open the window which won't stay up unless propped. The scene was definitely the morning after.

Leading the revoltingly maidenly life I lead, I woke up about eight, and there they were looking definitely laid out. Corney had that sulky, mad expression on her face which no one has ever caught on her when she is awake and putting her best disposition forward. Horty, as usual, was asleep with her fists clenched, and her chin thrust out pugnaciously.

They had managed to put up their hair in curlers (probably not wanting to face me on account of the way they hound me if I try to forget them). Confirmed girls with appeal that they are, this morning, all unconscious and helpless, they looked about as appetizing as two eggs fried for breakfast and then mislaid until afternoon.

"We'll let them sleep, poor darlings," Candee said to me.

I wanted to say, "What's poor about them?" But bitterness is a confession to which I will not stoop.

When they finally did wake up, along about the shank of the morning (as Daddy so quaintly says), they were very evasive about their evening. More to show that I was a good sport than from any honest curiosity, I asked them brightly what kind of time they had.

"Oh, swell," they said in a listless chorus.

“Well, that’s unanimous, anyway,” I said beamingly. “And how was *Ciro’s*?”

“Oh, fine, I suppose,” Corney said brightly.

“You mean you didn’t like it?” I hope I didn’t sound too gratified.

“She means we weren’t there,” Horty said.

“The boys thought we ought to see more typically Mexican night life,” Corney said.

“Though to me *Ciro’s* is plenty typical,” Horty said.

But Corney was defensive about the boys. “Well, I think they had a good point. Kimball says we can go to *Ciro’s* any time. And all we would see is more Americans. As it was. . .”

“As it was we dredged the depths of atmosphere,” Horty said.

“I wouldn’t say that,” Corney said loyally.

“Well, maybe you’re accustomed to lower depths than I am,” Horty said, with a colossal yawn.

“We’ll go to *Ciro’s* next time,” Corney said firmly. “Now that Holt understands I really want to go.”

“Holt?” I cried, in honest amazement. “Who on earth is he?”

“He *was* my date,” Horty said grimly, “but now that he understands what Corney wants. . .”

“Don’t be petty, dear,” Corney said crossly. “You know how things happen.”

“I ought to know, being a victim of your friendship,” Horty said.

Funny thing about hope. No matter how many times you’ve weeded it out of yourself by sheer brute realism, the darned stuff springs up again. The moment that Corney mentioned *Ciro’s* and next time, a rank undergrowth of hope sprang up in me. Maybe *I*. . . I turned away in disgust from myself, and was only grateful that I haven’t a cellophane front so that people can’t see what goes on inside me.

The days went along, very much alike except that something different happened every day. But what happened was only outside; inside me was the desert of discouragement. I know the suffering of the young is supposed to

be a very humorous subject, rated somewhere between income-tax jokes and mother-in-law cracks. But there is nothing funny about it, actually.

Whatever it is we suffer with, we mortals, is a sensitive instrument when we are young. Afterwards, by the time people are thirty or so, the edge is dull and nicked. It has been my observation that most of what these old people appear to feel is largely imitative, conventional gesture.

Once at school I happened to be in a room where a middle-aged teacher was, who had just had a telegram bringing bad news. All the time she was weeping and snuffling into her handkerchief, she was trying to dislodge a piece of nut from her bridgework with her tongue. A young person couldn't possibly grieve like that. When we feel bad, we just ache all over, and there's nothing else to us but the big stretch and pull of pain.

So, let us say, I felt bad; and let it go at that. I felt bad on all subjects, and there wasn't even the customary consolation of a nice cozy little dessert to look forward to.

My life at this time was a grim forbidding of everything I usually enjoy. By remote control, Mummy was saying in every letter, "Lambie dear, don't forget about the lettuce and fruit. *Don't eat it.*" And at my elbow at every meal was the smug watchful eye of Corney Baker, who would say to the muchacho about to slap down a puny little plate of flan, or some other goo, at my place, "Just put that dessert over here, boy. Miss Prowder doesn't eat dessert."

Miss Prowder didn't eat, period.

I didn't even have the humiliating comfort of my surreptitious box of chocolates. Occasionally, not out of lust but out of honest hunger, I would permit myself a couple of hundred calories worth of candy. But Horty smelled it on my breath one day and that ended that secret vice.

"What is that filthy stuff you've been eating?" she accused me in front of Corney. There was nothing to do but admit it. So then they burrowed through my bureau drawer and captured the box.

"Chocolate," Corney said, looking at me as if I were an addict to some criminal habit. "Don't you know you haven't any business with this!"

"I know," I said meekly. "I just got a little faint."

"Faint, indeed," she said scathingly. She shook the box menacingly in my face, and its few remaining pieces rattled like a Salvation Army

tambourine. “If you want to make anything out of your life at all, you’ve got to take the pledge. Otherwise you’ll just go down and down.”

“Or up and up. On the scales, that is,” Horty said, chipping in her evangelistic quip.

“Candy,” Corney clucked disgustedly. “Do you know what candy it is?”

I shook my head dumbly. “It’s horrid brown stuff eaten only by children, men, and old women over forty.”

Naturally, whenever I was with other people, I tried to disguise the way I felt about life in general. I tried to bubble and squeak with enthusiasm, but I’m afraid they were pretty hollow sounds I made. But noise and bounciness insures you of the only privacy you can have if you’re just one little island of feeling in a sea of adults.

“Look at Lambie, just sitting there staring into space. A penny for your thoughts, dear,” someone would chirp if I lapsed for a moment. “Yes, a penny for your thoughts,” the rest of them would chant. Then they would all scrutinize me through their spectacles, and I would squirm with discomfort which was itch added to agony.

The protective coloration of the young is general brainlessness. So we soon learn to make silly sounds in order to pursue our thoughts in private. I expect if there were any way of Gallup-polling this situation, you would find that the most melancholy young people are the cheeriest-sounding.

With everything else I had to feel badly about, Art really left me in the lurch. Señor Mariano got very explicit about not liking what I was doing.

“Bleeze ask me not to look at it,” he said. “Excooze me out, Señorita. My stomach is wick.” I felt like saying, “Brother, you don’t know what a wick stomach feels like. I expect you’re fortified with nine tortillas, a side of bif, some pollo with rice and one of those dishes of sweet whitewash you guys prize so highly for dessert.”

But of course the silent retort is the weakling’s revenge. The fact remained that he didn’t like my work. He thought maybe I should be working in a field, or taking in floors to scrub. But Art and I shouldn’t continue to annoy each other any more. That, boiled down, was what he said in a combination of bad English and worse tact.

It really cut the ground out from under my feet. If there wasn’t love, and there wasn’t Art, what on earth was there? Maybe I could become a humanitarian. Except that I don’t care much for humans.

On Saturday my glasses were ready, and with trembling hands I put them on my nose and looked around like a man from Mars, thus ending my brief unhappy career as a pretty girl. It was complete abdication.

I hoped the visible world had improved while I had been absent from it. Everything jumped back into focus, and sort of leaped at my throat. Trees across the street, which had been enveloped in a kind of legendary mist like the trees in Metropolitan Opera scenery, hurled themselves at me; the pavement, which had seemed a pleasant blur, heaved up so that for an instant I cringed away from the paving blocks. Even my own chest, which had been pleasantly remote, surged up to meet my revised vision.

“Well,” I said to all the clarification around me, “welcome back, world.”

Now that I had my glasses, I wasn’t so brave about tomorrow’s bullfight. I had attained a momentary notoriety around our bailiwick by my avidness for the fight. But now I wasn’t so sure I could take it. Knowing something terrible is happening just beyond the rim of your vision is like reading in the paper about a typhoon in China. But seeing it clearly is a fish of another feather.

But I didn’t see how I could possibly get out of going now, for, led by my invincible example, the rest of our group had got tickets. Candee had exchanged my single seat, which after all was only the bravado of despair, for one in a long row with the rest of them. Like everything else difficult that attacks me, there was no escaping now.

Corney, you could see, was hoping that Kimball would telephone and ask them for some kind of Sunday afternoon date. But by Sunday morning he still had not called, and they were both haggard.

“Would you still go, if he called now?” Horty said, and when Corney lifted a pale pitiful face to her, she added kindly, “Just a hypothetical question.”

“I certainly would not,” Corney said proudly. But when the muchacho from the office came to our breakfast table to say, “Telephone for Miss Baker, please. Will you take. . .” she trampled over him and ran like a panther to the phone booth.

But it wasn’t Kimball. Or even a reasonable facsimile. It was some woman who had got her name from one of the shops she haunts in her spare time, who wanted to make her some custom-made gloves, “ver’ inexpensive, Señorita.”



“I thought it would be something like that,” she said dejectedly when she came back to the table. “Who’d be calling little me?”

“Who indeed?” Horty said cruelly.

“It might be Kimball Colby, if he didn’t have such a suspicious nature,” Corney said.

“What’s he suspicious about, my pet?”

“He insists that I made a date with that nice Holt boy who was supposed to be with you,” Corney said, wide-eyed and indignant.

“Supposed is hardly the word,” Horty said cheerfully. “And you did make a date with him, didn’t you?”

“Of course,” Corney said, with dignity. “But it shows a very unpleasant and suspicious nature in Kimball to think so.”

“Well, whatever kind of nature he has, he’s not calling you on the phone, it seems,” Horty said, with a slight touch of malice.

So we all went to the bullfight, and Corney said she, for one, was just in the mood. I suppose everyone has read descriptions of bullfights ever since they were old enough to read. Certainly everyone who can write takes a whirl at describing them. (Here is where I distinguish myself as a writer, because, for a very good reason, I shall not describe the fight.)

But no matter how many accounts you have read of the bullring, the crowd, the glamour, the bloodlust, you are completely unprepared for it when it hits you.

First place, it is all so much more huge than you are expecting. If your ideas of crowds are based on the Yankee Stadium, you’ll have to stretch your skull a bit. For this is huger. Or maybe it is only that Mexicans, being the exuberant and bursting-at-the-seams kind of people they are, make everything *seem* bigger.

Partly, of course, it is the noise. Mexicans measure their enjoyment apparently by the noise it produces. At any rate, everyone is shouting and gesticulating; everyone is dressed in bright colors, everyone is in two places at once, so that the whole scene teems with primitive life, motion, and for me, nausea.

We think we are accustomed to amplified music; we were practically born with our cradles wired for “musik.” But when Mexicans amplify music, it is something else again. They blow up the notes so that Mars, or at

least the moon, can share them. Their music scorches the air and shrivels the eardrums. Their music is so loud it can be seen as well as heard, for the very air seems to be pulsating in horrible waves, which cringe and swell, cringe and swell like a great ugly wound.

And also, when Mexicans enjoy themselves, they eat. Not restrainedly out of small paper bags. Not just peanuts and pop. When they eat, they run the gamut. Boys stagger over your knees with great baskets of dripping pastry on their heads, bubbling and simmering in the hot sun. They also eat meat, and poisonous green ices on sticks. They likewise eat some kind of stuff that looks like bloated bathmats, on which they sprinkle horseradish and a liberal carnage of catsup. They top this off with round after round of very drippy pineapple, roasted ears of corn, and pink cotton candy in wads as big as your head.

Mexicans come very early to the bullfight, and for an hour or so, they eat, greet, and make love, working themselves up, I suppose, to the proper pitch where only slaughter on an eight-bull scale can satisfy their emotions.

They also have altercations about their seats. These disagreements are carried on with the same etiquettical tradition that glorifies the bullfight itself. Nobody gets angry, or raises his voice (for the simple reason that his voice is already raised as high as it will go). But very agreeably and persistently, they all show their tickets and wave their arms and bow and apologize and insist and contradict, and finally all change seats and feel better.

Mexicans usually bring their mothers and fathers with them to the bullfight. Also their young children, who certainly have a right to be given this good start in life. They may be poverty-stricken all week, but on Sunday they invite all their friends to make up a big party and go to the bullfight. The women, if possible, wear blouses embroidered lavishly with red and green sequins which glitter and growl in the sunlight and add, in their miniature way, to the general confusion. Dust, heat, perspiration, and perfume swirl in clouds. Everything that can move, vibrates; everything that can utter a sound, yells; everything that can give off an aroma, broadcasts itself. The bullfight is a carnival of the senses. All the five senses indulge in a paroxysm of reaction, and must go home prostrated and stunned for another week.

We kept valiantly pretending we were having a fine time throughout all the preliminaries.

“Now we’re really seeing Mexico,” the Anonymities kept saying gluttonously to each other. “Won’t this be something to tell when we go home!”

At last, when nothing more could possibly be added to the scene, the loudspeakers gave one scarlet, screaming blare of fanfare, and the bullpen door opened. I’d always heard that the pageantry of the bullfight is magnificent, so I was prepared for something which would be a combination of Ringling Brothers and Billy Rose.

Instead, out came walking one horse dressed in a 1910 bathing suit made of burlap. Over his head, as a terrifying omen of what was to come, he was wearing blinders. At a respectful distance, he was followed by another horse, similarly clad and blinded. Four of these dribbled out, more like a funeral than a festival. Then there was a thunder of applause, and the first matador came out, quivering with white spangles. He was a small roosterish little man, walking boastfully on the balls of his feet. He stepped proudly to the center of the bullring, turned and bowed in all directions while the crowd pounded applause and tore its throats apart with yells and cheers. Four blazingly beautiful matadors duly appeared, spangled in red, blue, green and black. They milked the willing audience for the last wave of frenzy.

Then, four abreast, came marching eight men clad in scarlet and gold, looking like generals except that they had some strange implements across their shoulders.

“I like these the best. . . who are they?” I shouted.

To my chagrin, I found they were the clean-up men. This magnificent pageant went back where it had come from and the crowd surged on its bottoms with anticipation. In another instant out strolled the bull, a lethargic-looking fellow with a fine brave handlebar of horns. He staggered about aimlessly for a few minutes, and then the matador in the scarlet sequins appeared, slyly approaching him from the right flank. His cape undulating skillfully, for one moment he was all a matador can be in grace and poise and beauty. But to say that the bullfight is worth seeing because of the skill and grace of the matadors is just stupid; there is more grace in one fisherman casting his fly, or in one ballet dancer leaping into an entre-chat. And much less murder.

We sat frozen in our seats, fearing what we knew was inevitable, but unable to look away. The bull made a few lumbering passes at the matador, who leaped out of his way, agile as a salmon. When things got really difficult for the man, he sprang behind a wooden barricade where the bull

could not follow. When this happened, the crowd booed mildly. Meanwhile the bull, stupidly baffled by the wooden wall suddenly appearing between him and the man, sauntered off, hoping the whole thing was over.

Then the picadors on their enshrouded and blinded horses came out. All this had taken less than two minutes. But suddenly, it became unbearable. For the picador thrust his horse up beside the bewildered bull, and stuck a long gleaming knife in his neck, between the shoulder blades.

The knife, for some reason I cannot analyze, was the most obscene object I have ever looked at, waving and shining in the sun with its point deeply embedded in the bull. There was such shame about the scene as I cannot attempt to describe. I only know that I burst into tears, and that Corney, too, was sobbing, as angrily and helplessly as a child.

We both had our hands up over our eyes now, and both of us were crying. Not quietly at all, but with loud protests.

“I’ve got to get out of here,” I said.

“So’ve I,” Corney said. “I can’t stand it.”

We looked along the faces of our party. Some of them were frankly sick-looking; some were fascinated and cruel; one or two were hilarious and brutal, their lips open, their teeth clenched. Horrible as was the scene in the bullring, the faces in the grandstands were much more unbearable.

I got up suddenly and began trampling over knees, regardless. I thought Corney would be behind me. But she wasn’t. She was sitting there, tearing her handkerchief to shreds and shrieking.

“Come on, Corney,” I called back to her.

“I can’t,” she said, in a horrible dream-voice. “I’ve got to see it, Lambie. . . I’ve got to see every bit of it.”

And she did.

## Chapter Twelve



As Horty explains her, Corney is a kind of chain smoker as far as boys are concerned. As soon as she has consumed one boy, she looks around for new worlds to conquer.

She never has a blind date herself; that would be beneath her standing as Super Popular. Instead, Horty took the blind dates one by one, and before the evening was over (men never being quite as good as they look at first glance), Corney had shifted her interest from the boy who was with her to the one who was with Horty.

“Seeing another girl with a man always seems to make him so much more attractive,” Corney said ingenuously.

Before the four parted on their first date, Corney always managed to line up a new date with this untried character. She didn’t consider it stealing, naturally, for she always insisted that Horty’s ex would provide somebody very interesting for Horty on the next party. Besides, Candee refused to let Corney go out with a boy alone.

Candee was a bit bewildered about the whole thing, anyway. “I don’t know how I got into letting you two run around Mexico City the way you do. Are you sure your mothers would approve?”

“Natch,” they said in a breath.

Once they had got their privilege in their fingertips, it became a long-held right which they had no intention of relinquishing under any conditions. Candee knew that without a doubt, and she was smart enough never to bring up a test case.

But, as I was saying, Corney just couldn’t bear to see a boy around with whom she had no date pending.

“What is it you’re looking for, anyway?” Horty asked her.

“I’m looking for the One Perfect One.”

“And you can’t tell until you’ve tried him out. You have to sample all of them before you’re eighteen?”

“You wouldn’t understand,” Corney said, with that particularly sincere look she can bring up into her gray eyes. “The trouble with me. . . I’m an idealist.”

Horty didn’t try to answer that. Instead she said, “Well, at least I’m good for something in the picture. I bring in the new blood.”

“Your unpleasant way of saying things won’t get you anywhere,” Corney said gently.

You might have thought that while they were lining up new blind dates for Horty, they would have thought of fixing up one for me. But in spite of the fact that I was still sleeping in my curlers, and still existing practically without food, and still running Corney’s errands and taking her insults like a lackey, nobody thought I had reached a stage of presentability yet.

“You wait until I’m sure you’re ready, pet,” Corney said kindly when I stumbingly suggested maybe they might do something about making a sixsome instead of a foursome.

“I’m dangerously ready.”

“The spirit may be ready, dear, but the flesh. . . well, frankly the flesh has a long way to go.”

“Maybe you could just get me a kind of spiritual date,” I suggested. “I’d settle for just anything.”

She shook her head firmly. “A failure would do you too much harm, darling.”

“Who would it do me harm with?” I asked callously. “I’m already persona non grata with myself.”

They gulped at my repulsive legal terminology, and I could see them checking it down as one more black mark against me. And they were perfectly right; I was a long way from concealing my father’s brains under my mother’s charm.

“The very words you use,” Corney said. “You haven’t grasped the first inkling, dear. You’re so utterly unsexuctive.”

“About words?”

“Naturally. Everything is sex. Words have gender, like everything else. You’ve studied French; you ought to know that. You’ll lead a neuter life, as long as you use neuter words.”

“Such as what?”

“Such as plenty that you use,” Corney said evasively. “Words are either silk, tweed, calico, chiffon . . . they either smell like a stable or a kitchen or a garden. With all your brains, you just don’t know the difference. You use big strapping masculine words.”

“I hardly ever say ‘sweat,’ ” I defended myself meekly.

“Well, you’ll just have to be more careful,” she said judicially. “I’m not going to risk a failure. If news got around among the boys here that you were impossible, we might all suffer. After all, there’s not an unlimited supply down here.”

So I subsided. In fact, there wasn’t anything else I could do. We had passed the halfway mark of my Mexican month, and it looked as if the summer was going to be only a confirmation of my lifetime of failure. Just more of the same.

I was pretty discouraged. The psychologists try to hearten us up by saying that when we frankly face what’s wrong with us, we’re a long way toward remedying it. But I’ve been facing what’s wrong with me ever since kindergarten, when the little Adams boy had a tantrum because I tried to kiss him on his birthday. And still I’ve not made much headway in improving me.

People of the last generation had inferiority complexes about their inferiority complexes. They seldom faced them, much less admitted them to others. But I face mine all the time, and I’m pretty sick of the sight of it.

Mummy has always been rather blithe about the whole matter of how hopeless I am.

“Don’t you worry, Lambie dear,” Mummy says. “One thing, you’ll never have small and narrowminded men in your life. It will take a big wonderful man to appreciate you. The weaklings will run to cover, and only the supermen will take a second look at you.”

But so far I had never met any supermen. And I couldn’t believe Mummy was right. She was very likely only trying to keep up her courage when she thought about having me on their hands for the rest of their lives.

I managed, of course, to live some kind of life during these days when Corney and Horty were fully launched in their whirl. But it was a hollow mockery, and I hated everything about myself.

Now that Candee had received some more money from home for me, I had no privacy at all about my financial affairs. Every day she doled out to me what she thought I ought to have, and this kept me restricted and mortified. Though, of course, I had become fairly accustomed to being restricted and mortified all my life. But now nothing outside could add to my gloom within. I expect I'll always look back on those days as the most unhappy of my life.

Most of all I hated the long twilights when the room would be full of girls with Appeal getting ready to go somewhere wonderful. I'd try to get myself terribly occupied somewhere else, but where else *is* there, when you ought normally to be running in and out of a bathroom, putting on smudge-proof lipstick, and perfume on your knees? No matter what else I tried to interest myself in, so that I would not be underfoot in our bedroom while they were getting ready for their date, I'd come lonesomely back and sit on the bed and watch them, and wish I was dead.

The old folks, too, were irresistibly attracted to their evenings. They would come to the door on one pretext or another, and they'd say, "Oh. . . you girls getting dressed to go some place? Where'll it be tonight?"

They would look hungrily at Corney's prettiness and at Horty's youngness, and I would think gloomily that it would be almost easier to be old and hopeless than what I was. Just hopeless.

The whole group really degenerated during these days. Platonic pursuits had seemed all right a week or so ago, and quite a lark, to judge from the squeals of the old girls. But now the evenings were pallid and tame, and everybody gradually decided to be just too tired to bother with them.

The next morning after every date, I would ask, "How were the murals?"

"What murals?" Corney would ask quarrelsomely.

"You know, the women with the sunflowers for heads. They're at Ciro's, you know."

"You think you're very funny, don't you?" Corney would say angrily.

Horty, naturally, didn't care quite as much as Corney did. "You know what we *could* do?" Horty said. "We could get ourselves a job as cigarette girls, and *see* the place, anyway."

"Don't be vulgar. Ciro's is just a little too rich for most boys' blood."

"I think that's an unsexuctive sentence, darling," I said, but sweetly.



“I don’t think about Ciro’s any more. It’s a matter of indifference to me,” Corney said, ignoring me.

But it wasn’t a matter of indifference, by any means. Every new boy was scrutinized for his Ciro-rating.

“What d’you think?” Corney would ask Horty, and Horty would say, “Not a chance. He says, ‘Let’s leave it for the tourists. I’ll show you some real Mexican night life!’ ”

“It’s the one cloud on my trip,” Corney admitted disconsolately. “I just can’t face going home and having to admit never going to Ciro’s.”

“As if you would admit it, pet,” Horty said. “I can just hear you now, being casual but impressive.”

Every occasion was a mirror for Corney. She always saw herself reflected beautifully in whatever was going on. She was even capable of admiring herself through the eyes of the old folks, if nothing better was at hand. She was sometimes very generous and patient with them, so long as they asked only the privilege of admiring and envying her. During the daytimes when she couldn’t avoid their company, she would often put on quite a touching little act for them, clapping her dainty hands in girlish delight about some innocent pleasure.

For instance, when we climbed, puffing and panting, to the top of the Teotihuacan Pyramid, Corney stood there poised in the wind like the Winged Victory, and uttered one of her typically ecstatic outbursts.

“Oh, how magnificent. . . all my quaint little nooks and crannies of my mind feel stilled and satisfied by such a view!”

Horty hadn’t much patience with stuff like that. Horty said to me, “Listen to her! She’s the perfect Mrs. Maladroit type. I don’t know what words she means, but she certainly doesn’t mean those she’s burbling.”

After that, as a bond between us, Horty and I sometimes called her Mrs. Maladroit. Corney wasn’t sure what kind of a crack it was, not being the literary type herself. (As a matter of fact, I was quite surprised that Horty knew that much Shakespeare.)

Quite maliciously, we collected Corney’s little Maladroitisms. Once we had to attend a lecture on modern furniture at the University. To our amazement, the professor turned out to be young and very handsome. So Corney was spellbound with the subject. Naturally she put up her dainty hand and asked a question.

“Señor Professor,” she said demurely, “I wish you’d please tell me something. Which do you consider the most artistic. . . modern or contemporary?”

Up to now Corney’s dates had all come about by what Horty called a direct line of descent, by divine right of grabbing.

But now she got a date in a most unexpected way. An almost unbelievable and indirect way. She had it, in fact, brought to her on a silver platter and offered by another girl. Leslie Grant, whom we had all forgotten we had met on our famous evening at the Colby hacienda.

Leslie telephoned to her one evening just before dinner at our hotel.

“Miss Baker? First I must apologize for not getting in touch with you lovely people earlier.”

“Oh, that’s perfectly all right,” Corney said, completely mystified because, quite naturally, she had assumed that Leslie Grant didn’t like us. Miss Grant skillfully ran through a few of the amenities, hoping we were enjoying Mexico, our Art, and one thing and another, and then she got down to the real business of the call.

“What I’m hoping right now,” she said, “is that you’ll be free to come with my brother Wally and me to the Ballet tomorrow night. I know it’s very short notice, but we hope. . .”

At the word “brother,” of course, everything went into focus for Corney, and she recognized an old pattern perfectly familiar to her. Now it wasn’t important whether or not Leslie Grant had liked her or not; Leslie had had to swallow her own tastes, because her brother wanted a date with Corney.

“Let me see,” she said, trying to give the impression that she was thinking (an effort she occasionally manages).

“Of course we’d love to invite your two friends also,” Miss Grant was saying, “but there are only subscription tickets available, and so they’ll have to pardon us this time.”

“Oh, that’s perfectly all right,” Corney was saying generously. “They’re both busy, anyway, tomorrow evening.”

“And you? Are you busy, too?”

“No. As it happens, I’m not,” she said winsomely. “I was planning just to stay home and read some books on Art.”

Well, at any rate, the date was arranged. In anticipation it became the high peak of the whole Mexican experience up to now. Corney just couldn't remember which of the several boys at the Colbys' was Wally Grant. We tried our best to help her; or rather Horty tried, because that evening was a complete blackout to me. The evening happened to me, but I just didn't happen to it.

"I think he's the tall moody one who danced only with that girl who used to be Kimball's girl friend until the North American invasion took over. Temporarily, that is," Horty said.

"I just didn't notice him," Corney said regretfully. "I was wasting my time with that Kimball Colby."

"Well, he noticed you, pet."

Corney was beside herself with pleasure. "It's simply wonderful," she said. "Here I was getting into a rut! I was fooling around with these tiresome *boys* . . . and there all the time was a *man*."

"We hope," Horty amended. "Of course, all we know about him for sure is that he has his sister call you up."

Corney was shocked at such ignorance. "That's etiquette, my dear. That's because he knows what he's doing. He's not rushing at me like a puppy, the way some of these little drips down here do. He knows what's proper."

"So now we're proper," Horty muttered. "The things we are!"

For the Ballet Corney went all-out on dressing. The formal we had all been so worried that none of us would ever have a chance to wear came out and was pressed again by the hotel maid.

Corney's was a ravishingly demure formal, black and white cotton, very simple. Depending completely, as Corney pointed out, on what is inside it, for its effect.

She spent the afternoon getting ready, putting on new toenails and fingernails, washing and setting her hair, besides the more or less routine scrape-over which she does every day with her magnifying mirror. And in addition, she lay utterly relaxed for an hour with some kind of herbal pads on her eyes to make them more lustrous. We tiptoed around respectfully.

For once, there were two of us rejects left high and dry to get through an evening. Horty, on account of it being rather a novelty for her, took it very hard.

“Gosh. . . suppose this kind of thing got to be a habit!” she said. “Suppose it got to be some kind of psychological pattern with me. . . one of those things that kind of settle on people for the rest of their lives!”

We went out with the old folks for a walk, but all either of us could think about was Corney. Had they called for her yet? Was Wally Grant all she expected? Had he already fallen in love with her?

Occasionally, I even thought of the Ballet, which I love.

At last we came back to the hotel, thinking it must be nearly midnight. But it was only a little after ten.

They had barely left; the turmoil in our bedroom had scarcely settled down into a still life by Angna Enters. At the last minute Corney had decided not to wear her own formal, and it was lying in a swoon half on the bed, half on the floor. The hanger which usually held Horty’s was dangling from the chandelier, and Horty’s evening shoes had been tried on and found too big, and now were huddled in the middle of the dressing table, slightly ruined with face powder.

“Well,” Horty cried delightedly, “at least my formal went on a real date. Mom’ll be glad to know I wasn’t a complete bust.”

“And my evening bag!” I cried, in awe. “She took *my* evening bag. *Gosh!*”

I expect all my life I’ll be denied the companionableness of lending and borrowing other girls’ clothes, except hose, hair-ornaments, scarfs, and such accessories which don’t have to fit. It was quite exhilarating to know I had something Corney wanted.

We hung around the room awhile, washing underwear and our hair, and one thing and another. We knew it would be hours before Corney would come in, so at last we went to bed. Candee, in her room on the other side of the bathroom, was snoring in her well-bred way, so we gloomily settled down to telling off-color jokes. That’s one department in which I excel; I have a really choice collection, picked up from Daddy’s classics, and adapted to the modern tempo.

Quite a few of them I don’t know the point of myself. But I can see, by the admiration I get from people I tell them to, that they are darned good.

All of a sudden, although it was still before midnight, we heard a key opening the door from the patio gallery.

“Who the heck can *that* be?” Horty said, sitting up in bed. “Can’t be Corney, can it?”

But it was. She came rustling in with Horty’s formal fairly bristling with emotion.

“I’ve never been so humiliated in my life,” she said, in a hissing whisper.

Horty didn’t understand what she said, so she had to repeat it, and this time a kind of sobbing gulp swallowed up the last of the sentence.

I started to correct her about “humiliated,” but then I decided not to bother. After all, it is a word Corney will not have to use much in her life, I suppose.

“What happened?”

“That man. . . that absolutely repulsive man. . .” she said, and slumped down on the bed.

“What’d he do. . . my Heavens, *what did he do?*” Horty gasped, obviously expecting the worst.

“He’s not a gentleman. . . he’s rude and *brutal* . . .” She was crying now.

Horty, in her above-the-knees nightshirt, had jumped out of bed and was over beside her. “Corney Baker, you tell me instantly.”

“I can’t. . . I’m too ashamed. . .”

Corney was crying unprettily now, not like the madonna type at all, but more like a tomboy with a scraped knee.

“Maybe I’d better wake up Candee,” Horty said. You could see how extreme the situation was. Anything short of surgery, naturally we would handle by ourselves.

“He said. . . he said. . . he called me silly,” Corney blubbered.

“Well, you are silly, aren’t you?” I said, meaning it as a compliment.

“Of course she’s not silly,” Horty said, turning on me for some reason. Probably relief that his crime was only mental outrage.

“He said I was silly,” Corney repeated, in a dazed and indignant whisper. “I was only trying to entertain him.”

“But you’re supposed to be silly,” I said, endeavoring in vain to make my point plain. “That’s why you have so much Appeal, isn’t it?” My

bewilderment was absolutely honest. Here for weeks I had been trying to reduce my brains to an attractive minimum, and now suddenly I found that there was such a thing as being too silly.

“He brought me home early,” Corney said. “I was telling him something very cute in a boring part of the Ballet, and suddenly he just got up and dragged me out of my seat, and hurried me up the aisle.”

“He’s a maniac,” Horty said. “We ought to report him to the police. Whose idea was it, anyway, that he take you to the Ballet? Nobody forced him, did they?”

“That’s why I was so humiliated,” Corney said, and covered her face with her hands. “He said I was an impostor. He said he didn’t mean to invite me at all. I’ve never been so humiliated in my life.”

“Stop using that ridiculous *Maladroitness*,” Horty said commandingly. “What d’you mean he never intended to invite you?”

Here Corney plumbed the depths of her degradation. “He said. . . he said he expected me to be. . . somebody else.”

“What did he mean?” Horty cried, in danger of waking up Candee and the whole hotel.

“He invited somebody else. . . and got me,” Corney said in shrill italics. “I’ve never been so. . . so insulted.” She burst into wild tears now, and rolled over on the bed with her face buried in the bed-clothes, and no regard whatsoever for Horty’s formal. Horty, in her blue chiffon nightshirt with the lace ruffle just above the knees, was trying her best to console and quiet her. I, as usual out of my depths, was standing clumsily by, trying to make sense out of it all.

“But how could such a preposterous thing happen?” Horty was saying, patting her shoulder rhythmically. “He must be out of his mind.”

“He is,” Corney gulped. “He definitely is.”

“You sit up, pet, and try to tell Horty calmly.”

She gulped and gurgled a few minutes, and then she did sit up, and both of them glared at me as if I were an intruder.

“Now, darling. What happened?”

“He. . . well, I thought he looked a little weird when I came downstairs. That sister of his was with some very nice man, of course. . . they must be at least twenty-one, and very smooth. . . but that Wally . . . he just stared at me.

He just looked like he had a stomach-ache all over. And he didn't talk. He just sat there in the car, sort of slumped down with his chin on his chest. His sister said, 'Now, Wally dear, let's make the best of the evening, shall we?'—I thought, 'What kind of a crack is that?' But I just smiled and made-believe I hadn't heard it."

She sort of ran out of breath here, and Horty, goggly-eyed with curiosity, began patting her on the back again.

"So then. . . like I told you. . . he suddenly got up in the Ballet, and dragged me out. . . we were definitely conspicuous. . . but I thought, 'Oh, thank Heavens, he's fed up with all this jumping and leaping about, too. . . .' But when we got out into the lobby, he was glaring at me worse than ever. I tried to pass it off. I said, 'Honey, don't you feel well? Or something?'"

"So what'd he say?"

"He said, 'Matter of fact, I feel awful. I'm here with the wrong girl.'"

"He said that? Right out?"

"He certainly did. I was. . ."

"I know. You were humiliated," Horty said hastily.

"Yes. Then he told me. Straight out. He said, 'I got you mixed up with somebody else. I thought you were that other girl.'"

"What other girl?"

Corney took a big breath, and her face was so convulsed with indignation that it looked as if she weren't going to be able to get out the words.

"*Lambie*," she said. "He expected me to be *Lambie*."

"But. . . but. . . how could anybody think such a ghastly thing about you?" Horty cried sympathetically.

They both turned on me then, looking at me with utter loathing.

They asked me accusingly, "What did you *do*, Lambie Prowder?"

"Who? Me?" I could barely get my voice up from the pit of my astonishment.

"What did you *do*, anyway," Corney said, "that made a man like that brood over you for a couple of weeks? I've just never heard of anything so outrageous."

“Gosh,” I said. “He’s got me mixed up with somebody else.” I’m sure I looked absolutely terrified, for phalanxes of duck bumps were crawling up and down my spine, and I was shivering as if with ague (a mid-Victorian ailment, to be found in Charlotte Brontë).

“And he wants to see you, too,” Corney said in blazing capital letters. “*Right now!*”

“Oh, my gosh.” I scrambled under the covers, as if I expected him to come leaping over the iron balcony railing of our room.

“He’s downstairs in the patio waiting for you,” Corney said. “And you go right down there and tell him what we think of him.”

“I can’t go down,” I said, when I recovered enough to speak. “It. . . it wouldn’t be respectable. Besides, what would Candee say. . . and, anyway. . . I wouldn’t know what to say to him.”

Horty was dragging the covers off of me, and raking through the few remaining clothes in my closet, practically at the same time.

“What’ll you wear, for gosh sake?” she was mumbling. “Not that it makes much difference. When he sees you, he’ll know he’s made *two* big mistakes. That ought to fix him up perfect.”

In a daze I slid my feet into my evening slippers which happened to be lying under my bed.

“You haven’t got a single thing to wear,” Horty reported from the closet. “You washed practically everything tonight. Unless you want to wear something wet. . .”

“I’ll just put on my bathrobe. I’ll just appear at the top of the steps, and let him see for himself,” I said, seeing a kind of Ophelia vision of myself. He would take one look, and then he’d bolt out of the place, and we could all go back to bed.

“Not that bathrobe,” Corney said, lifting up one corner of her tears to peer out at me. “It’s practically a man’s bathrobe.” Even in the midst of her suffering, she didn’t completely lose sight of her sacred pink magic. “There’s no use of being *criminally* unseductive. Even for that kind of a man.”

“It covers her up, anyway,” Horty said. “No use him seeing those polka-dot peejays she’s got on.”



Horty wrestled me into my bathrobe, and gave the cord a tight tug around my waist; she all but shoved me out the door, then jammed the bolt shut behind me. I stood in the cold moonlight, shivering.

I would have tried to creep back inside, except the door was locked, and I knew I'd just wake up the Anonymities all around the gallery if I began rapping and begging the girls to take me in. There was no choice for me but to tiptoe downstairs. I thought wildly that perhaps I could slip past the patio without that terrifying man seeing me, and ask the clerk in the front office to let me telephone up to our room.

But I had taken only about four long strides when I saw him sitting absurdly in the dark at a little table under one of the sun umbrellas. At the same moment he saw me, and he got up and came toward me. His shadow ran before him like a friendly puppy, and leaped upon me. I stood frozen with embarrassment, conscious of my ugly bathrobe, and my evening slippers, and even of my green polka-dot pee jays which, of course, he couldn't actually see.

"I thought I'd never get hold of you," he said, and he laughed and put out his hand just as if I were another boy, and a good old friend. I shook hands with him timidly.

I saw then who he was. One reason I recognized him immediately was that the only other time I had seen him had been in the dark also. A little more than a week ago, although it seemed like a lifetime ago, when I had been young and full of hope.

"Lambie. . . you haven't forgotten me," he said, and he tossed his arm around my shoulder, still as if I were another boy.

"Of course not," I stammered. "You're the boy who saw me having a date with a horse."

"We had such a wonderful ride on the Colbys' horses," he said. "Come over here and sit down a minute. Do you mind? I thought if I went home tonight without really seeing you, I just might never."

"I know," I said, not meaning anything in particular, and probably staring at him feeble-mindedly.

"I got your name mixed up," he said. "We had such a good time that night. . . I wanted to see you again." I saw then that he was rushing along trying to cover up his own discomfort, and that gave me confidence.

"We did have a lot of fun that night," I said. "But afterwards. . ."

“Afterwards I kept thinking of things I’d like to show you around here.”

He leaned over to me and peered into my face. Not having my glasses on, this gave me a chance to see his face clearly for the first time. It was a nice face, with a homely crooked nose, and a wide kind mouth, and I guessed there were probably freckles sprinkled over it.

“Do you like baseball?” he asked, as if his life depended on it.

“I’m keen about it,” I said, and instantly I remembered that I was trying to use the more feminine expression (I adore it). But it felt too late to make the correction.

“And I’ve got some swell places I know to take movies. . . do you happen to be interested in photography?” he asked.

“Not too much,” I said honestly. “You see, I’m trying to learn to paint.” In a blur I realized that I had violated another of Corney’s basic instructions. “Be interested in everything he is interested in,” Corney had said. “At first, anyway.”

But here I was, just stupidly being myself.

“Well. . . why couldn’t we go out somewhere and take my movie camera. . . and you could take your paints. . . or anything you happened to want to do?” He grinned at me, and I thought, in a whirl of understanding, “Why, he’s trying to think of something to please *me*. . . he must like me a little.”

I wanted to put my head down on the table, and weep.

“Gosh, I had the darnedest time tonight,” he said. “I got your name mixed up. . . so I asked my sister if she’d help me get acquainted with you. . . just at first, you know. . . and we got hold of the wrong girl.”

“I know,” I said again. But this time I said it with sympathy, for I could see how hard he’d taken the evening.

“I don’t know how Leslie came to make such a bad mistake,” he said, “after I had described you to her, too.”

“What did you tell her?” The question had slipped out before I could stop it. I knew in a minute it was the wrong thing to ask him. We would just both be embarrassed.

“Why, I had told her you were the most attractive girl I’d ever seen. Beautiful, you know.”

I burst out laughing at that. “No wonder you drew Corney.”

“But you are,” he said earnestly. “You’re big and generous-looking, as if Nature weren’t trying to skimp when she put you together. You look like Nature enjoyed making you. You’re beautiful, just the way I remembered you.”

I put my hand up to my head, not quite sure I hadn’t suddenly gone out of my mind. My hand met a lot of hard little lumps. Good Heavens. . . my curlers! Right out there in public, where anybody could see them!

And Wally Grant was looking at them. But he didn’t seem to be seeing them.

## Chapter Thirteen



A world of wisdom came to me during the next few days. Little half-facts I had suspected all my life suddenly became clear to me. I think I must have sung in my sleep. I felt at last as if I understood all the really important things in the world. People, mostly. As if I were related to everybody, and never again could feel like an alien and a stranger.

But most of all, I didn't seem to feel any astonishment that I had a friend at last. That's what I called him in my mind. Not "my date," nor "my boy". . . not anything out of the old worry-department that I both feared and adored. The sex angle of the deal had sort of escaped me; I can't quite explain it. I simply had a friend that understood me, and that I understood. It was practically platonic.

Understanding is a wonderful thing. It's like swimming with no clothes on, just a natural, lovely feeling with nothing getting in your way to cling or hold you back. I guess you could practically say that when there's real understanding between two people, they can dare to go around with their souls undressed.

For understanding, people must have deep things in common, like horses. Or even Art. Wally and I had both of these. And even more. It was uncanny. It was Fate, obviously. He hated parsnips just the way I do.

Up to now, everything wonderful that had ever happened to me had been in my imagination. But this was reality. This didn't need one bit of fixing up from me. It was perfect just the way it was, and my feeble make-believe couldn't have improved it.

The very next day after we had sat and talked in my pee jays and hair curlers, he came over and asked Candee if he could have lunch with us. Everybody seemed to think it was a most unconventional thing to do.

"What's funny about it?" he said. "I'm hungry around noon, and what's the use of me eating alone somewhere, if I could be here with Lambie?" That seemed like such impeccable reasoning to me that I cannot understand even now why people laughed and looked meaningfully at each other, the way old people sometimes do.

“That shows you what a goon he is,” Horty said. “Coming *here* to lunch!” Because of her great protective loyalty to Corney, Horty continued to consider him a loathsome specimen of the masculine race. Corney behaved as if he were just ten gallons of thin air. He was just as nice to her as he could be. His only crime was that he wasn’t embarrassed.

“Awfully sorry about last night,” he said to her. “Making you waste a good evening on somebody that wasn’t interested in you.”

Corney looked serenely past him, as if they were two other guys.

After lunch, Wally and I got a streetcar, and went way out to the village of Obregon, where the Indians were having a religious fiesta. I didn’t even notice that we were not riding in an automobile, until he said (having to shout, of course, because of the general street clatter and racket which grinds on night and day), “Hope you don’t mind my not owning a car.”

“Why should you own one?” I said. “Maybe you haven’t done anything yet to earn a car.”

He looked at me in utter admiration. “You’re the first person who’s ever understood that,” he said, in positive awe. “I’m saving up money to get one. A car’s too big a gift to accept from anybody. My father had to earn his own, so I think. . .”

“You don’t have to explain,” I said. “It seems absolutely right to me.”

We looked at each other and grinned happily. I don’t honestly know whether or not I had ever thought of such a thing before, but now it felt very sound to me. And we seemed like clean and admirable people.

“My Dad lends me his when I ask him,” Wally said. “So don’t think we’ve always got to thumb rides when we go places.”

“I shouldn’t mind,” I said, and really meant it.

There was the matter of my name, also. Late that same afternoon when we were on another streetcar on our way home, he asked me about it.

“You devoted to that name of yours?”

“Good gosh, no.”

“Fine. Lambie’s too little, and Ursula’s too big,” he said crisply.

“What would you like to call me?”

“Well, Melinda was my grandmother’s name. I was sort of saving it for my first child. But if you like it. . .”

“I like it very much.”

“Okay, then. It’s yours.”

“I’ll take good care of it,” I said. “I’ll give it back to you in good condition, for your first child.”

“In a way, you *are* my first child,” he said. We sat side by side a few minutes in silence while we both thought his words over. Then I decided that the best thing was to be sure what he really did mean. The coy boy-and-girl way would be just to assume and to guess; and later, with one’s girl friend, to giggle and speculate, and make-believe you thought it was very odd. But we were more than just boy-and-girl; we were practically twins. So I asked him right then.

“In what way, Wally?”

“You know,” he said, in a matter-of-fact voice. “I don’t have to tell you. In a way, you’re my first child.”

“Bring me up properly,” I said, after a moment.

“I hope to, Melinda. You bring me up properly, too.”

“I will,” I said. “We both will.”

It was a nice promise to be making. It didn’t feel handled and dog-eared, the way some promises do. It was fresh and new, as if we had just unwrapped it for ourselves.

We had fun that day. And all the other days. Wally wasn’t too much of a talker, and he seemed to like to listen to me. I liked to listen to myself when I was with him, for I found that I was saying all kinds of things I had never known before. Conversation was a kind of little flashlight, with which you explored caves you had never been in before. You never could guess, when you started, what you would find. Sometimes Wally would be holding the flashlight, so to speak, while I would venture ahead in its ray. Then in a few minutes, I would hold the light and he would explore our new country which we had discovered between us.

Horty and Corney used to say to me, “What on earth do you two find to talk about so much?”

“Oh, nothing partick.”

“Horses, I suppose,” Corney said scornfully.

“We mention ’em.”

“It must be just thrilling.”

“Yep.”

I knew they were kidding me, but it didn't matter. You can afford to be laughed at when you know what you have.

They went on with their dizzy merry-go-round of dates, always going some place and never getting anywhere. I was conscious of it all around me; I could hear them squabbling and tittering in the double bed. I could hear their telephone conversations, all made up of sighs and bubbles and exclamation points. But none of it seemed very real to me.

Once they even invited me out with them, and I heard myself saying, in horror, “Good Heavens, no. But thanks a million for thinking of it.”

They stared at me in amazement; Corney thought I just hadn't heard the invitation.

“Listen, Lambie, we're inviting you out on a date. We're willing to show you around.”

“Thanks,” I said. “I've been around.”

Horty gave a great appreciative guffaw, but Corney looked positively outraged.

“What's the matter with you, Lambie Prowder?” she said icily.

“Nothing. Just exactly nothing. I'm fine.”

Corney narrowed her eyes dangerously. “Are you going *steady* with that guy?”

The word really hit me right between the eyes. If only, when we are in the midst of a pit of discouragement, we could hear a kind of movie trailer of what will be ahead of us! Imagine how I would have felt once. . . only a few days ago actually. . . if I could have imagined anyone asking me if I were going *steady*! (I get all goose-pimplly at the drama of it.) I stretched out the moment as long as possible, like the last noisy teaspoon of ice-cream soda in the bottom of a straw.

“Steady?” I asked, just to hear the beautiful condition discussed a bit. “I don't even know for sure what the word means.”

“It means you're not going out with anybody else. It means you've given up all other dates for just one boy.”

“How could she give up all other dates when she didn’t have any other dates?” Horty asked logically. But for once I had no dealings with logic.

“Sure, I’m going steady,” I said deliriously. “Ever since I’ve been old enough to know what I’m doing, I’ve gone steady with Wally Grant.”

A chill ran up and down my spine. It was as if I were twenty. . . and thirty. . . and maybe even an old lady of forty. . . and all of them were saying it straight through my life.

Wally and I never seemed to need much entertainment from anyone else.

“Just the three of us is enough,” he said once.

“The three? Who’s the other one?”

That embarrassed him for a moment. “Well, you know. You. . . that’s one. And me, makes two. And then there is always the third. . . the way we are together, sort of.”

“Like in paint. Every color is itself. And it is also what it is in relation to other colors.”

“Sure. You get the idea.”

“When you put two colors beside each other, if you do it with any skill, there’s the effect of three.”

“Don’t keep hammering away at it,” he said disgustedly. “We both ketch.”

Horty and Corney were very suspicious of me these days. They always wanted to know where I’d been, and what we had done.

“Don’t tell me you went to see *Indians* again!”

“Cert. They danced for us.”

Or else, “But you saw the pyramids *once*, Lambie.”

“They’ve been here for three thousand years. Twice isn’t too often to look at them in all that time,” I’d say good-naturedly.

But I didn’t bother one way or the other about what they thought of me and Wally. I had outgrown their opinion of me quite painlessly, and it was intoxicating freedom.

I felt as if I were someone all new. When I wasn’t with Wally, I loved being by myself. Sometimes I’d look at myself in a mirror, and I’d say, “Hello there, Melinda.” She would smile back at me, and I’d think, quite



impersonally, “Why, you’re almost pretty, you rascal you.” We’d practically nudge each other in the ribs, because we both understood why Melinda was almost pretty.

Sometimes I’d say to her, “How am I going to keep you alive after we leave Wally down here?” I could see her, like a big six-foot puppet, all unstrung and collapsed, as soon as his presence was denied us. I made up my mind that I just wouldn’t think of that moment until I had to. I’d let Melinda live as long as she could.

But I knew that after it was over, I would have two lonelinesses. Wally would be gone, and Melinda might be dead.

I had a sober certainty that I would never be completely young again. I felt incurably grown up. But it was a great comfort to me. Youth, in most ways, is a grossly overadvertised commodity. It is supposed to be the best part of life; but actually it is a jungle and a swamp and a desert. Everything is too terribly important to be borne; that is why we have to appear irresponsible and downright silly. We just couldn’t bear caring so much about everything, if we didn’t. But somehow I felt I had now escaped most of that tense stretched-out emergency called Being Young.

I had a feeling that maybe I had zoomed in a jet-propelled leap right through my own adolescence, and had somehow come out safely on the other end. I knew that never again would I be bothered by the anguish of feeling that other people didn’t like me.

Wally liked me. He had gone into the subject of me quite deeply, and he found it okay. It wasn’t fixed up or edited for him; it wasn’t translated cleverly into something acceptable. It was just itself, and he thought it was good.

Any part about me he didn’t understand was probably okay, too, he said. He said it was something like the guarantee the old craftsmen put on their work, meaning that the same quality of materials were used throughout, even in the parts you couldn’t see. They had a stamp they put on such workmanship. It said “sincere” and the word meant “without wax.”

“That’s what’s the matter with most girls. . . three quarters wax,” he said, with a grin. “Maybe that’s why so many people just fall apart when things get hot. The wax in ’em just melts and they go to pieces.”

I was painting in a park that day, and he was lying on his back beside me, with his eyes hidden by his hand.

“I want a woman who’ll stick together, so I won’t have to be afraid of getting her too near the fire of something big,” he said. Then he rolled over on his stomach and looked at me. “What d’you think?”

“That’s just what I think, Wally,” I said, still painting. Then I looked up from the picture, and winked at him, and he gave me a soft punch to the jaw.

“You’ll never go wrong, my girl, agreeing with me,” he said. And we both laughed.

We talked about everything in our life, I guess, at one time or another. The past, the giddy good present, and even the future. We even talked about Fate, a deep subject which I had seldom discussed with anyone.

“It was funny how we came to know each other,” I said. “It was really just a lot of coincidences short-circuiting and blowing out fuses.”

“Yes, in a way it was,” he said. “Estrellita. . . and then you having to go to the Loan Office. . . and Kimball inviting Leslie and me over to meet some other Americans. . . it all did seem like a chain of coincidences. . .”

“It was really very funny.”

Then he looked at me with one eyebrow cocked up like a questioning Airedale. “Nothing funny about it,” he said gruffly.

“Do you believe in *Fate*, Wally?”

“Hell, no,” he said, in horror. “What I believe in is God.”

That shocked me, naturally. I don’t remember hearing anyone ever admit such an old-fashioned belief. But I made up my mind then and there that, when I have more time I’ll investigate the subject myself. Of course, we *have* horses and things in common, but it would be nice to have that subject also.

Wally’s parents were just moderately well off, he said. “Just enough so they don’t have to keep bumping into money every time they move. . . either the too-muchness or the too-littleness.”

Next fall he was starting at the University of Chicago, and he thought maybe eventually he would like to study journalism. The civilized way of fighting, he said.

“You like the idea?” he asked me, and I nodded.

“Okay, then,” he said, just as if we were Mamma and Poppa sitting on each side of the breakfast table talking things over.

He said once he hoped I wasn't going to make him learn to dance.

"I will, of course, if you insist," he said, not too cheerfully. "But mostly, for your own sake, I don't advise it."

"We'd step on each *other's* feet," I said consolingly. "But maybe you should learn, just enough to get around decently. We don't want anybody to think we're queer."

"We are queer, Melinda," he said. "Might save us time if we got that understood early. That would leave us free to do only what we enjoy. Don't you think?"

"No," I said very seriously, seining up the words from the deep sea of my own old grief. "You have to prove to yourself you *could* be like other people before you can be comfortably like yourself."

"Did you prove it to yourself?"

"I was working at it," I admitted. "But you saved me."

"Well, get that silly tear out of your eye," he said.

But once in a while we did do the things other people enjoy, just to show ourselves we could.

Like Wally's party for everybody on our last night in Mexico. When he told me about it, he said, in a nice offhand way, "I'm going to invite my mother and dad."

"Suppose they don't think I'm. . . suitable."

He just gave me a look for that one.

"If you think Mrs. Candee would enjoy it, I'd like to have her come. Dad's business partner is down here now, and maybe they would get along okay."

"My goodness," I said, staggered by such unexpected social engineering. "You mean Candee would have a *date*?"

Then he really did go overboard. "Which do you think Horty and Corney would rather do. . . have me invite two boys they pick out for themselves, or bring in two friends of mine for them?"

"You mean. . . you're going to ask Horty and Corney to the party?" I gasped.

"Natch," he said. "They're your friends, aren't they?"

“Well, sure,” I admitted, a bit dazed.

But he went on, flying higher and higher into the stratosphere of elegance.

“Unless you have somewhere you’d rather go, I thought of making it Ciro’s.”

That, of course, knocked the last breath out of me.

“But Wally. . .” I said, with my customary all-thumbs showing, “that’ll be just awfully expensive.”

“Sure it will,” he said. “It’ll kick the teeth out of the money I’ve been saving to get a car. But who wants a car?”

“You do.”

He shrugged nonchalantly. “Not necessarily. I’m indiff about it. You’ll be gone, Melinda. So what would I need a car for then?”

See what I mean about Wally?

## Chapter Fourteen



Our last days in Mexico are a blur, a wonderful dreamy blur, which I shall quietly sort out next winter when I'm back at Miss Winslow's, marooned alone with Latin, geometry, and girl-children. It will give me enough to think about for the rest of my life, I guess.

But before I lose myself again in trying to tell about Wally, I had better mention Art, which after all was the inadvertent reason for everything happening as it did to me. Art. . . a molehill among mountains to me now.

The last few days I painted madly, partly because I found it was the best way for me to have some privacy for my thinking. And also because I felt I ought to use up the expensive tubes of paint, and fill up the lovely canvases which Mummy had bought for me, so that my parents wouldn't think I had wasted my summer. I hardly noticed what I was painting; the brushes seemed to live a little life of their own.

I managed to elude Señor Mariano while I was engaged in this abandoned paint-slinging, by stacking my work in our john as fast as each canvas was covered. Whenever he came over to my corner of the patio to give me a lesson, he found me niggling away at a sketch on a piece of too-small drawing paper. Invariably he would take a look at the sloppy, rapid sketch I had drawn, then he would sit down as if someone had kicked him in the stomach.

"How can you do anything so bad?" he would ask me in all seriousness. "I look at you and I wonder, Miss Prowder."

"Don't wonder," I said gently. "Don't distress yourself, Señor. I've decided not to be an artist, anyway."

"Decided!" He fairly hissed the word at me. "It is not something you decide whether you will or you won't. You haf also decide not to be a Chinaman, I suppose? Or maybe not to be a crocodile? Well, I think you haf more chance of being one of those. Or bot' at once, perhaps."

He could not forgive me. He kept coming back and looking furiously at me.

“And I expected to tell peoples I teached the daughter of Elmo Thorndike Prowder!” he said angrily. “I write Elmo Thorndike Prowder a note. I disgratulate him about his daughter.”

“He knows all about me,” I said meekly. “He’s already disgratulated himself about me, Señor. He just loves me, anyway.”

“Well, I don’ love you, anyway,” he said, bristling in every mustache, eyebrow, and gray pompadour. “You ruin my summer.”

I went on with the canvas-filling, whenever he wasn’t around. I knew it would cause less discussion if I brought home unintelligibly bad canvases than if I came home with blank ones.

“Well, the child tried, anyway,” Daddy would say.

Then an amazing thing happened. Suddenly Art came up and ate right out of my hand.

I had a full hour before Señor Mariano was supposed to arrive for our daily bout. I was dreaming over my lovely thoughts, and putting on paints in swirls and bursts of color. If anything, I was trying to paint the way happiness feels, like a fountain in the heart.

Suddenly a man’s voice spoke behind me. A whisper, full of amazement.

“And I scold you! I beat-brow you,” he said.

I hung my head guiltily. “I’m. . . I’m only enjoying the colors. . . I’ve stopped trying to draw. . . I’m just enjoying things. . .” I confessed.

Suddenly he seized my grimy hand and kissed it respectfully. “Forgif me, Señorita. I mis-measure your size. I make you suffer. No?”

I blushed and wriggled, not sure whether or not he was just trying to punish me by making me more ridiculous. But he went on, gazing at the canvas with rapt delight.

“Now you paint. No more the little paper-doll hills and the trees that have lumbago. Now you paint what is within inside.” He walked around and around the canvas, looking at it with his head twisted first one way and then the other. Finally he bent over and looked at it from upside down. I just couldn’t believe all this was praise.

“Now you paint uncontaminated by reality,” he said, and got out his handkerchief and mopped his eyes with emotion. The older people (who seem very nice to me now that I have got a bit better acquainted with them), seeing the pantomime, came and stood in a ring gazing at the canvas, and

murmuring bewilderedly. They had always known, they said. I couldn't be such an odd child for nothing. . .

"Now I write to Elmo Thorndike Prowder," he said. "I apologize because I make up my min' to write him a complaining letter."

"But you don't need to apologize," I reminded him. "You haven't sent the letter."

"True," he said thoughtfully. "But I apologize, anyway. Now I congratulate him. His daughter is not what I thought."

His daughter, so it seemed, was not what anyone thought. Least of all herself. She had been for sixteen years and three months only a blind cocoon huddled at the center of an ungainly bulk of child, waiting to be born out of herself.

She had been, though unrecognized and unaddressed, Melinda called by other names. She had been disguised so well she could not even recognize herself. Perhaps it is an old story; perhaps it is only the old familiar theme of Sleeping Beauty waiting for the Prince. Perhaps all the beautiful things which happen are the Sleeping-Beauty story, over and over. Maybe all ugliness is only the husk of beauty waiting to be wakened by someone who can see beyond husks. . .

But enough of philosophy (as I have to say so frequently). On with Ciro's.

It was everything it was supposed to be. Especially the murals, although I think Diego Rivera has made the sunflower heads on the women a bit realistic. They don't express the within inside, as Señor Mariano might say.

Horty and Corney, never able to pass up a chance at something new, had decided that they would prefer to leave the selection of their partners for the evening to Wally.

So he had brought with him two nice tall boys, whose names I didn't catch, but who seemed perfectly satisfactory to everybody. (I think that must be some kind of record. . . disposing of two supposedly attractive boys in a single sentence!)

The big news of the evening, for everyone but us, was Candee's date, a kind of elderly Van Johnson in a white dinner jacket. Corney frankly would have liked to get her mitts on him. But she didn't have a chance, with Candee's glasses left at home, and her revealed personality a hotbed of charm, vivacity, and decorum. You wouldn't have recognized the woman.

As soon as we were in the Champagne Room, it turned out that Candee could rhumba. In fact, that she had given rhumba lessons last summer during her vacation from school. You don't often encounter surprises in the old, who are really pretty routine, but Candee on our last night in Mexico City was certainly one in a lifetime.

She rhumbaed with hip-swaying and eye-rolling, but for some reason she wasn't ridiculous. She was wearing very super white orchids, sent in advance by Mr. Crater, the business partner of Wally's father. She had on a white dress dripping with long fringe, which seemed to keep her in subtle motion. I suppose the dress had been part of the rhumba personality last summer, and it certainly was a masterpiece.

Even Wally's Dad, a nice gentle exporter type of man, seemed to feel his old blood stirring at the sight of Candee. The two Old Boys had quite a lot of heavy fun, pretending to be rivals for every dance. It really touched Wally and me to see them all trying so hard to enjoy themselves.

But of course we didn't pay too much attention to them. Or to anything else. It was our last night, and under everything else, that was all we could think of. We both tried to be very lighthearted about it, but neither of us fooled the other.

Wally, it turned out, danced quite adequately. He dutifully pushed all the women, including his mother, once around the floor. And, thrilling discrimination, he danced twice with me. Then we just sat quietly at our table and enjoyed being alone.

"But we can't talk properly here," he said. "All this darned music. Takes your mind off what you're saying."

"It's supposed to."

"How's about us going for a quick walk outside? Or would it hurt your green shoes?"

"I'd like them to be hurt. I probably won't be wearing them again for years," I said, unsexually.

"We ought to keep them in the archives. You had them on the night we talked in the patio of your hotel."

"Did you notice that?"

"Certainly, my girl. I notice everything about you."



We went out on Paris Street, where all the trees were standing knee-deep in their own shadows, and the pavements were flooded with silver. It seems incredible that I could have lived and died and then been really born again, all within the lifetime of this one moon. It only shows how false is time. . .

We turned away from the big modern mountain of the Reforma, and went wandering down a little side street until we found a high iron gate that was unlocked. We pushed it open, and inside was a tangled garden with fourteen plaster or porcelain cats, several Buddhas, and a sad Kwan Yin, among the wild sweet growth.

We walked respectfully around the garden, untangling a few of the little figures from the embracing vines, and then we sat on the bottom step of some stairs leading up to a gallery high above.

Now that we had come so far for a quiet place to talk, we didn't have much to say. Our shoulders were only about three inches apart, and Wally looked a little pale.

"I expect you're what people usually call good-looking," I said.

"I doubt it."

"Don't girls usually think so?"

"I've no idea."

That seemed to cover that subject.

Then he reached out and took a handful of my hair and held it curiously.

"I've often wanted to find out if it were warm hair or cool."

"Which is it?"

"It's warm. And it clings to my fingers."

"It probably loves your fingers," I said.

"Melinda, Melinda."

"Is that a sentence?"

"It's a whole book of sentences. In all the languages I know."

"We've never kissed each other, Wally," I reminded him. "People our age are supposed to think very highly of kissing."

"Do *you* think highly of it?"

"I've no idea."

“Do you want to try it?”

“I don’t know. Do you?” I asked.

“Maybe we ought to,” he said, still not moving.

“I think we should. Mostly so it won’t torment us later when we think about it.”

“What would you think. . . later?”

“I’d think, ‘I guess he didn’t want to kiss me, really.’ ”

“Or you could think, ‘He wanted to kiss me too much. So he thought better of it.’ ”

“Yes, I could think that,” I said. “But still I’d wish you had.”

“All right.” He leaned toward me now, and his hand slipped down from my hair, and held my chin. We looked at each other and smiled, and in a rush I thought, “Such a smile is better than kissing ever could be.”

But then we did kiss. It was a slow, deliberate kiss, a bit tentative at first, the way you put your foot into cold water, and then draw back.

“There’s nothing to be afraid of, Melinda,” he said. So then I kissed him with all my heart.

“It was a warm kiss, like your hair,” he said in a few minutes, when we were looking at each other again. “I thought probably it might be like that.”

I said, “It was good. But I wouldn’t want to make a habit of it.”

“We’ll make a habit of it, all right,” he said. “But that will be later, Melinda.”

“Later,” I agreed contentedly, and it struck me that there just couldn’t be a better word between two people like us.

“Wally, does that mean I’m not a virgin any more?”

“Because of the kisses?” I nodded. For some reason then he laughed, and took my face between his hands and kissed me quickly on the end of my nose.

“You’re a virgin all right, Melinda,” he said.

I don’t remember much else we said. But it was all perfect. Not exciting and mixed-up, but very dear, the way such a thing ought to be.

“I suppose we’ll have to go back,” he said after a while. “I’m supposed to be the host, you know.”

So we said a quick good-bye to Kwan Yin, and Wally picked a spray of scarlet bougainvillea, and twined it around her head like a rather rakish halo.

“Be good to people,” he told her.

Just before we closed the iron gate, we discovered a squat little stone faun, so we plucked a white azalea flower and tucked it in his umbilicus.

“Watch yourself, Bud,” Wally said to him, “and don’t go getting people into mischief.”

Then we walked back up Paris Street. Only now we were arm in arm, the way I’ve often envied other people walking. And our hands were lightly clasped.

“So now we’ve kissed,” Wally said, with great delight.

“Did you like it?”

“I think very highly of it, Melinda.”

That was really the end of the evening for us. Though of course the amenities had to be patiently borne through. But we could afford to be patient, for we were brimming with happiness, and that makes people gracious and good to everything they see.

We got home about two. Candee explained that we had to come home early, because we still had some packing to do in the morning.

“I have my packing, too, to do in the morning,” Mr. Crater said boldly.

“But you’re not leaving tomorrow, George,” Mrs. Grant cried, in surprise.

“Yep. And by a curious coincidence, I’m going on the same plane with Mrs. Candee. Which plane *is* that, anyway?”

You can imagine Candee’s fluster at that. But he really meant it, and probably everything else that was implied in the entirely unmiddle-aged impulsiveness.

Corney and Horty were beside themselves with delight at the idea of having such a romance right in our midst.

“Why. . . think of the freedom it will give us on the plane,” they said, as soon as we were in our bedroom again.

“Now we’ll surely have a chance to meet Somebody.”

“But you did meet somebody,” I said. “Seems to me you’ve met dozens of boys.”

“Oh, I suppose so,” they said impatiently. “But Somebody New. . .”

I hurried and got myself into bed, where I could do my quiet thinking. Here I was, a girl without Appeal. . . and yet. . . . And there they were, two Popular Girls. . . and still they were restlessly looking for something new. I tried to figure it out.

The lights were out in the room now, and Corney was in bed, but Horty was still chucking things in her suitcases. (Me, I had little packing to do, because I had lost most of my possessions, I’m glad to say.)

Then I heard a loud rasping whisper, concession to the idea that I was probably asleep.

“Horty. . . I found out the secret of the mystery.”

“You mean. . . why Wally likes Lambie?”

“Exactly.”

“Well, for gosh sake *why*?”

“His dad says he’s a woman hater.”

“Well, that explains it,” they said confidently.

I didn’t mind. I lay there holding a handful of my warm hair, and smiling to myself. I knew what I knew.

This was none of their pink magic. This was something decided upon when the firmament first wound its watch. This was Fate, obviously.

Or it might even be what Wally believes in.

THE END

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

Inconsistency in accents has been corrected or standardised.

When nested quoting was encountered, nested double quotes were changed to single quotes.

[The end of *Pink Magic* by Margaret Lee Runbeck]