

**BEVERLY GRAY
SOPHOMORE
CLAIR BLANK**

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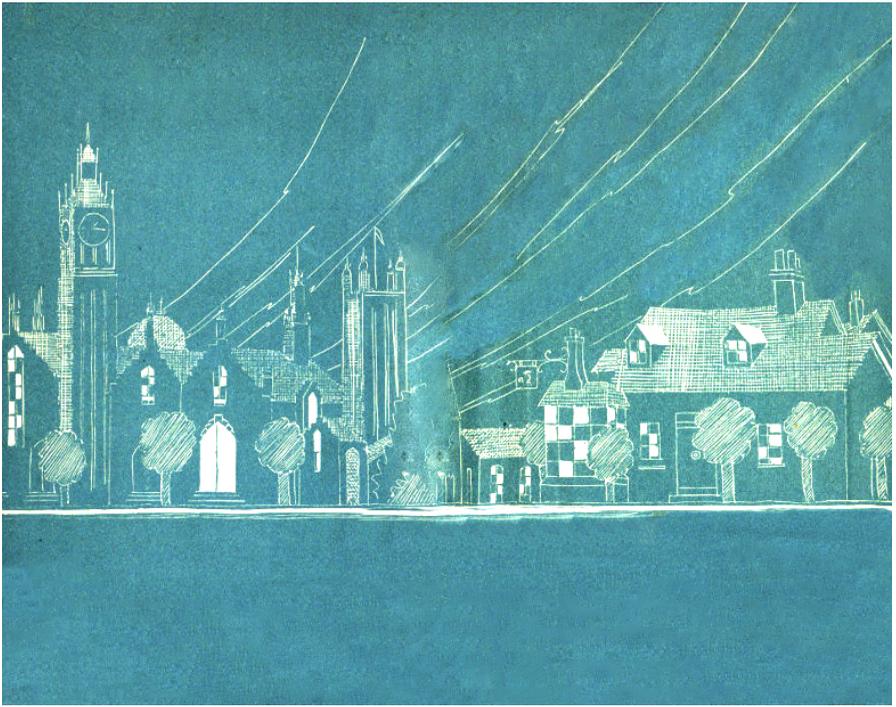
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*The two girls ran all the way from
Chadwick Hall.*
(Frontispiece) (BEVERLY GRAY,
SOPHOMORE)

The Beverly Gray College Mystery Series

BEVERLY GRAY
SOPHOMORE

By CLAIR BLANK



GROSSET & DUNLAP

Publishers

NEW YORK

*The Beverly Gray College
Mystery Series*

BEVERLY GRAY, FRESHMAN

BEVERLY GRAY, SOPHOMORE

BEVERLY GRAY, JUNIOR

BEVERLY GRAY, SENIOR

BEVERLY GRAY'S CAREER

BEVERLY GRAY ON A WORLD
CRUISE

BEVERLY GRAY IN THE ORIENT

BEVERLY GRAY ON A TREASURE
HUNT

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CHAPTER I

Alpha Deltas

“GREETINGS, old pals, old kids, old socks, old things!”

The vivacious young lady who entered her friends’ room so boisterously was Lenora Whitehill, commonly known as the campus cut-up. No one could think of more mischief than that which came out of Lenora’s bobbed head.

“Greetings, yourself!” answered one of the girls, Shirley Parker, who lounged lazily against the window sill. The setting sun sent little shafts of sunlight dancing in the room and brought forth the reddish tints in her hair.

At the imminent risk of falling on her nose, a slim, laughing young lady was hanging out of the window at a perilous angle, gayly waving to someone on the campus below.

“Beverly Gray! Do you want to fall on your head?” the newcomer demanded.

The brown head was withdrawn from the window, and the girl stood up laughing.

“Hello, Lenora,” Beverly answered. “Gerry Foster has just arrived.”

“Don’t you like our new quarters?” Shirley Parker, the red-headed girl, asked, bouncing up and down on her bed. “I think they are just grand!”

“Some class,” Lenora murmured in approval, glancing about the room.

The walls were painted a cream color, and pictures and gayly colored school pennants hung thereon. Twin beds were placed close together, one on each side of the window. Two desks, also side by side, stood against the opposite wall. A bright-patterned rug covered the floor, and two chairs were placed at inviting intervals. Cushions were strewn about in profusion.

“Some class,” Lenora repeated. “Chadwick Hall the Second certainly does itself proud.”

Those who have read *Beverly Gray, Freshman*, are acquainted with Beverly’s exciting adventures of her first year at Vernon College, and with her heroic action during the drastic fire that destroyed the first Chadwick Hall. They have also met Beverly’s roommate, Shirley Parker. Shirley’s first year at Vernon started badly, and she was back now with the firm resolution to get the most out of her sophomore year. The mischievous Lenora Whitehill and her roommate, Rosalie Arnold, are familiar figures, as are Lois Mason and Anne White, Beverly’s friend from home.

The door opened and in burst Rosalie, followed hilariously by Anne and Lois.

“What-ho, comrades of Vernon!” Rosalie called gaily. “What do you think of our new mansion?”

“We think it’s the berries,” Lenora answered promptly if slangily.

“I’m awf’ly glad to be back,” Anne sighed, seating herself beside Beverly on the window sill.

“What?” Lenora shouted. “Glad to be back at school? Inhuman girl!”

“I am glad to be back,” Anne said again defiantly. “I’ll bet you are, too.”

“Well——” Lenora conceded.

“Of course, we have to study hard,” Lois said, “but we have a lot of fun.”

“Will you ever forget the freshman play last year?” Shirley laughed.

“When Lois had to play Romeo, even though she had a black eye,” Lenora giggled.

“And the trick we played on the sophomores and juniors at their dance,” Anne reminded them.

“We ought to incorporate,” Lois declared.

“There is an idea!” Shirley took up the suggestion. “Why don’t we form a sorority—or something?”

“Fine!” Beverly applauded. “Let’s.”

“I nominate Beverly Gray for president,” Lenora sang out.

“I second the motion,” Anne said promptly. “All those in favor say ‘aye’!”

A loud chorus of “ayes” greeted her.

“Beverly Gray, president of the Whatsis Sorority,” Lenora said, leading Beverly to her desk and installing her therein.

“The meeting will please come to order!” the new president said, rapping on the desk. “I think the first thing to be decided is the name for our new organization. Has anyone any suggestions?”

“Sunshine Club.”

“Mischief Makers.”

“Vernon Girls.”

“Rainbow Girls.”

The suggestions poured forth from all present until the president rapped for silence again.

“All the names are good,” Beverly said, “but—let’s have something more dignified.”

“As befitting sophomores,” Lenora interrupted.

“I know we are all full of mischief,” Beverly said, smiling, “and I know we are always cheerful——”

“Oh, yeah?” criticized the irrepressible Lenora.

“But I also think,” Beverly continued, ignoring the interruption, “that once in a while we should be serious. We want our sorority to last years from now, so we should have a more suitable name for a sorority.”

“A Greek name,” Lois contributed.

“Yes,” Beverly acknowledged, “a Greek name would be nice.”

“How about Alpha Epsilon?”

“Or Delta Omega?”

“Alpha Delta,” Anne contributed.

“We’ll vote on it,” Rosalie suggested.

Shirley distributed paper and pencils, and each girl wrote down her choice of name. Then the slips were collected, and Lenora and Anne sorted out the votes to determine the winner.

“From now on,” Lenora said impressively, “this group of young ladies will be known as the Alpha Delta Sorority.”

“Now about the other officers of this august body,” Beverly began.

“Madam Chairman, may I have the floor?” Shirley asked.

Beverly nodded, and Shirley stood up.

“I don’t think we need any other officers right now,” she said.

“Nor I,” Lenora murmured out of turn. “Wait until we start having business.”

“We need a secretary,” Anne pointed out.

“I think Shirley was talking,” Beverly reminded the others.

“I was going to suggest that we have but two meetings a term,” Shirley said. “One meeting on the first day we are back, and one on the last day before vacation. If, for some reason, any of us want a meeting, we can call a special one.”

“That is where the secretary comes in,” Anne said again.

“All in favor of the course Shirley suggested say ‘aye,’” Beverly directed.

A chorus of “ayes” greeted her.

“And now to elect a secretary,” Beverly said. “Shall we vote on it?”

Once more the slips of paper were distributed and collected.

“Lois is now the secretary of the Alpha Delta Sorority,” Lenora announced.

“Madam President, I have a suggestion to make,” Lenora said, and by the humorous glint in her eyes Beverly knew it would be a mischievous one. “I think,” Lenora continued, “that we should try to find something interesting to do this term.”

“Such as——”

“Anything that would be fun,” Lenora answered. “I have no particular suggestion in mind.”

“Therefore,” Beverly said, “the aim of this sorority is——”

“Anything that is fun,” Lois supplied, “or entertaining.”

“Where are we going to find it?” Anne wanted to know.

“There is the Sophomore Dance on Hallowe’en,” Rosalie said. “Perhaps we could think up something spectacular for that.”

“We’ll try,” Shirley promised.

The loud peals of a bell rang through the building, and the meeting was abruptly brought to a close as the girls hurried to the dining room for their dinner. After dinner the girls gathered in the main living room of Chadwick Hall and sang songs to the accompaniment of the piano.

Studies would not begin until the morrow, and the girls crowded all the chatter and laughter they could into their first night together. The term promised difficult school work, but it also promised fun and mystery, the latter in which Beverly and her friends were to figure largely.

CHAPTER II

An Assignment

“I MADE it!” Beverly announced, bursting in upon Anne, Lenora, and Shirley, who were laboring over a difficult literature lesson.

“You made what?” Lenora demanded.

“I made the staff of the *Comet*!” Beverly repeated ecstatically. The *Comet* was the college newspaper, and Beverly had desired nothing so much as to be on the staff. “You are now gazing on a reporter of our estimable college newspaper.”

“Congratulations!” Shirley said smilingly. “What is your first assignment?”

“You know the old Horler Mansion at the end of College Avenue?” Beverly asked.

“Yes,” the three acknowledged.

“Well, lately several people in Vernon have said they saw strange lights and figures moving about in the old house. I’m to go and see if there are any—ghosts.”

“Ooooo!” Anne shivered. “I wouldn’t like that.”

“If you see any, give them my regards,” Lenora said gayly.

“Be sure and be back in time for dinner,” Shirley called as with a flourish of her notebook and pencil Beverly departed on her assignment.

During her first term at Vernon Beverly discovered that she had a desire and a talent to write. Since then she had been bending every effort to secure a position on the college paper. Her position as a reporter on the *Comet* was the first step in the literary career she planned for herself. After college she had dreams of being a reporter on a large newspaper; perhaps eventually she

might be a foreign correspondent, reporting stories from Europe, Asia, the South Seas—who knew?

College had been in session now a week, and this was the first thing that had happened to break the regular routine of studies. Beverly stepped along the Avenue briskly. She was glad to have something to divert her thoughts from classrooms for a little while. The assignment too, savored of mystery. That intrigued her as nothing else would have done. Alison Cox, editor of the *Comet*, had not wanted to give her this job of reporting on the supposedly haunted house, but Beverly had coaxed and wheedled until in sheer self-defense Alison had given in.

The Horler Mansion sat far back from the road. It was surrounded by a dense growth of underbrush and trees. The house was gray and weather stained from the winds and rains that beat upon it. More than one shutter was hanging by a single rusty hinge. The roof was peaked and gabled, and two broken brick chimneys towered like stumps against the blue sky. The porch was rotting into decay, and the windows were like bleak eyes staring into nothingness.

Andrew Horler had built the mansion for his bride in 1870. When his son was married, he too brought his bride there to live. In those days it was painted a dazzling white, and laughter and gay voices echoed within its walls. When the son died, he had no heir to succeed him, so the place was put up for auction.

The mansion passed into the hands of an old man and was painted a depressing gray. The new owner was a figure of mystery to all the surrounding country. People were very seldom allowed to catch a glimpse of him, for he lived the secluded life of a hermit. Wild tales spread about the country that the old man was rich and was living this secluded life because he had a large treasure concealed somewhere in the house. He was supposed to have a large chest of gold and precious loot that had been taken off a pirate ship. Nothing was heard to substantiate these tales, but they persisted, nevertheless. Then, one dark and stormy night, a marauder broke in. Through the shadows he glided up to the old man's bedroom, where, the tales had it, the old man kept his chest of gold.

In the morning an inquisitive neighbor found the front door swinging open and a strange stillness upon the place. Curiously, the man entered and went through the empty rooms until he came to a bedroom, where he found the body of the old man. He was dead, with a knife sticking right through his heart. The neighbor fled in terror to the authorities. The police came and

viewed the situation, but no clues were found as to the identity of the murderer, nor had the house been ransacked to prove that the marauder had searched for the treasure.

From that time to this, legend had it that the place was haunted. The old man was supposed to come back to guard his treasure, although no one had actually seen him. For years nothing had been heard from the old house until recently. Now people began whispering about lights and figures seen at night moving about in the rooms. One man had seen strange men carrying in boxes, yet when he and a policeman went to investigate, no boxes could be found. Too, voices, high and singsongy, were heard coming from the shadows. It was a mystery that had the town of Vernon all a-twitter.

Beverly approached the mansion from the road. She cut through brambles and bushes that threatened dire damage to her silk stockings, and stood for a moment before the house. It was silent and deserted. A slight wind stirred amid the tall grass and set the leaves on the trees to whispering. She jotted down a few notes in her little notebook and climbed the broken steps to the rotting porch. She tiptoed to the windows. It wasn't necessary to tiptoe, but she felt a strong aversion to making any noise. She smilingly told herself that a loud noise might awaken the ghosts.

She cleared a place on the rain-spattered glass of the window and looked in. A room, large, empty, and exceedingly dusty, met her gaze. In one corner stood a huge fireplace and before it a rickety wooden box. That was all. At one end were huge wooden doors, closed.

Well, she could get no material for a story from that room. She would have to go in and investigate farther. She approached the door and turned the knob. It swung open at her lightest touch. Damp, musty air rushed out and met her. Tremulously she set foot in the dark hall. In order to have some light while she conducted her tour of the building, she left the door standing ajar. Cautiously she advanced step by step.

To her right were the huge doors leading into the front room that she had seen when she looked in the window. No need to go in there, for she already knew everything that was to be found. To her left was another set of high wooden doors. She approached them and pushed on one. It swung inward on squeaky hinges. She put her head into the opening and looked around.

The room was heavily shuttered, but light seeped in from one window, where the shutter was dislodged. This room, too, was empty of furniture, but large shelves lined the walls. Evidently it had once been used as a library. Dust, thick and undisturbed, lay over everything.

Beverly retreated and closed the door again. Once more she stood in the hall. It was uncannily black in here. She looked toward the front door. It was shut! Had the wind blown it shut or had some more human agency been at work?

CHAPTER III

Head Ghost

SHE remembered, then, that the wind had scarcely been strong enough this afternoon to blow such a heavy door shut—without a sound. If it had banged shut, she would have heard it. She felt out with her hand and touched the wall. With her back to it she stood still, straining her ears for a sound that would tell her she was not alone in this black hallway.

A sudden scurrying movement sent her heart leaping into her throat. Something small and fuzzy touched her foot. A mouse! She laughed with relief as her nerves relaxed. Naturally an old deserted house such as this would have mice. That was nothing to frighten her. Why did she insist on imagining things? Still, a mouse could not have shut the door. Why did that thought persist in troubling her?

She turned and made her way, slowly and as silently as she could, into the dining room. The furnishings still stood in this room as they must have stood when the queer old man had lived in the house. The three-piece dining-room suite, heavy oak and old-fashioned, was showing the ravages of age. Even the cloth on the table was rotting slowly into threads. There were plates on the table, some covered with dust and some that were not. The latter interested Beverly. Evidently three people had dined, in style, at the old-fashioned table—and lately! Glasses still partly filled with water, a half loaf of bread, not at all old and mouldy, and an ash tray filled with partly smoked cigarettes gave evidence of what must have been not a very pretentious meal.

Into the little notebook went more notes as Beverly took in every detail of the room. Who could have been living in the house? Was it the explanation to all those queer lights and figures that had been seen? Anyway the “ghosts” were humans, needing a substantial meal just as any other person. A trace of cigarette smoke still lingered in the air. Beverly sniffed it

in a puzzled manner. How long had the “ghosts” been gone, if they were gone? Not very long, of that she was sure. She turned from her survey of the dining table and stopped terrified in her tracks.

There, standing in the doorway through which she had entered, was a man. A man not at all prepossessing in appearance. He wore no hat, and his hair was straggling and unkempt. His shirt was dirty and his trousers creaseless. From his crooked mouth dangled a cigarette. A long, evil-looking scar ran from the point of his chin to the tip of his left ear.

“Well,” he drawled, “whada you want?”

“I—um—that is—I’m from the college, and I was sent out to get a story on this old house for our newspaper,” Beverly said with a winning smile.

“Yeah?” he sneered, ignoring her friendliness. “Well, you can get out. This old house isn’t nice to visitors.”

“I shan’t go until I get my story,” Beverly said confidently. “I would only have to come back again.”

“You better get out,” he said menacingly. “Aren’t you afraid of the ghosts?”

“Ghosts?” Beverly said innocently, as if she had never heard the word before. “Are you one of them?”

He laughed as if at a great joke. “Yeah. Yeah, sure. I’m the head ghost.”

“How many more are there?” Beverly asked.

“I don’t know right offhand,” he said with a cruel smile. “Come on, you’re getting out now.”

The man grasped her arm and propelled her roughly to the front door. He swung it open and pushed her out onto the porch.

“And don’t come back!” he said glaring at her.

With great nonchalance Beverly straightened the beret that he had pushed awry and smiled. “You’re not very cordial to your guests, are you?”

“Not to the guests who don’t knock,” he retorted. “Get going!”

For a minute Beverly stood undecided. She had to get a story. If she went back and told Alison and the rest she had been put off the premises the girls wouldn’t believe her. No one was known to be living in the house. She would be the laughing stock of the college. She looked again at the villainous person standing squarely in the doorway. Not much chance of

getting past him. Then an idea occurred to her, and she almost smiled gleefully.

“You shouldn’t leave the front door unlocked,” she shot back at him. “I warn you, I’ll be back.”

“I’m goin’ to stay right here and see that you don’t get in again,” he said, establishing himself in a comfortable position on the doorstep.

That was just what she had been angling for. If he would stay there at the front of the house, perhaps she could get in through the kitchen. She smiled jauntily and stepped down off the porch. She proceeded on her way toward the road, her notebook tucked cozily under her arm. Several yards from the house the bushes and trees hid her from the man’s view. It was then she doubled back. She kept in the shadows of the trees and out of range of the man’s vision.

Creeping along, she came to the back of the house. She stood for several minutes looking over the building. She didn’t want to walk into any more ghosts. When she had first seen that man standing so calmly staring at her there in the dining room her heart had skipped a couple of beats. She had supposed she was alone in the place, and then to come face to face with such a rough-looking character—it was hair-raising.

Satisfied that no one was stirring in the rear of the building she crept up to the kitchen door. It was locked! Luck was against her. She took stock of her position. There was a small window, just large enough for her to squeeze through, high up near the roof of the kitchen. It no doubt opened inward over the kitchen sink. Now, if she could find something to stand on—— She spied a heavy rain barrel. Just the thing! Some kind and considerate soul had already turned it upside down. If she could roll it over under the window and somehow manage to get the window open—— With a mighty effort and considerable damage to her white sports dress, she managed to shove the barrel into position. With a leap she was up on top of it and at work on the window. The lock was old and rusty, and it didn’t take much of an effort on her part to break it.

This was fun, breaking into a haunted house. Most people were content never to go near such a place, but Beverly, now that one ghost, the head ghost, had proved to be so human, could find no fear. The window swung inward, as she had thought it would do. It was a tight squeeze to get her lithe body through the narrow opening, but she managed it. She had been right in her guess. The sink was directly under the window. In another second she stood in the middle of the kitchen gazing in surprise at the stock of

provisions that met her gaze. Under the sink and in the old-fashioned kitchen cabinet were cans upon cans of foodstuffs. The ghosts were indeed well supplied. Milk bottles, some empty, some not empty, were lined along the floor; wax papers and newspapers were strewn about, as were dirty dishes. Evidently, dish washing was not one of the ghosts' accomplishments.

Beverly tiptoed to the swinging door that communicated with the dining room. She put her ear to the panel and listened. Not a sound. The head ghost must still be sitting on the front-door step. Inch by inch she opened the door and slipped through. There was nothing left to explore on the first floor, so she started for the stairs that led to the floor overhead. To reach them she must needs go into the hall, and that might mean discovery by the head ghost. On tiptoe and holding her breath lest he suddenly decide to come into the house, Beverly reached and went up the stairs. Now and then they squeaked protestingly beneath her weight, but evidently the head ghost didn't hear the squeaks and groans, for he did not investigate.

She reached the second floor and viewed the closed doors that confronted her. Four doors behind which lay—what? Which one should she choose first? She might as well start at one end of the hall and continue on until she had entered each room. She chose the door at the front end of the hall. It opened into a large, empty room that at one time had been the master bedroom. There was nothing there to excite her interest, so she continued on to the second.

In the second room she found a bed, dirty and disreputable. It had recently been slept in, too, for a blanket and an old tattered comforter were piled unceremoniously in a heap. Was this the boudoir of the head ghost? It would seem so. Aside from more newspapers scattered over the floor, there was nothing to interest her, so she left that room.

The third room she entered was dark. Heavy shutters kept out any light. She could make out nothing in the indistinct darkness, so she did not linger there. The fourth room was small, little more than a closet. In one corner were steps leading up to the attic. Without hesitation she crossed to them and started to mount. A trapdoor opened in the ceiling, and through this she crawled into another small room. All the light there was in here came through a skylight in the ceiling. In one corner and scattered about were piled boxes. Beverly investigated one of these. It contained pink packets filled with a finely ground powder. Some also contained small round pills. Beverly little realized, then, the significance of her discovery.

Dinner at Chadwick Hall was promptly at six o'clock, and anyone late was the object of a series of black looks from Mrs. Dennis and the other teachers. Beverly looked at her watch and frowned. It was five-thirty. She had just a half hour in which to return to Chadwick Hall and make herself presentable. If she dared to appear at the dinner table with her dress in the condition it was she would be disgraced.

Tearing herself away from her discovery and mentally promising to come back on the morrow, Beverly descended to the second floor again, closing the trapdoor after her. Heavy footsteps were ascending the stairs. In the little closet-like room Beverly held her breath and listened. The head ghost must have gotten tired of his sentinel duty at the front door. He was coming up to the second floor. Was he coming to the little room in which she stood? The footsteps paused at the head of the stairs and then went down the hall. No! She breathed easier. He was going to his makeshift bedroom. She would have to wait until he went down the stairs again before she dared to make a noise.

Slow minutes passed while Beverly listened to the sounds the head ghost made. If only he would go downstairs so she could also descend. She would most surely be late for dinner! He was staying an awf'ly long time. She opened the door and peeped cautiously out into the hall. His door stood ajar. If he happened to look out as she was creeping toward the stairs, he would be sure to see her. She had to take that chance. She couldn't stand here all night.

Step by step, moving cautiously so as not to step on a squeaky board, Beverly tiptoed to the stairs. So far so good! But the steps were old, and she remembered how they had squeaked when she mounted them. One, two—oh, she almost stumbled that time! three, four—darn that step! five, six—There were fifteen steps in all, and Beverly breathed a sigh of relief when she reached the bottom. She would leave by the front door. She tiptoed down the hall and tried it. It was locked! The head ghost was taking no chances on any more surprise visitors. She would have to leave the way she entered—via the sink and the rain barrel.

CHAPTER IV

Found—One Mystery

“WHAT do you mean, Beverly Gray, by this crazy statement?” Alison Cox, the editor of the *Comet*, demanded as she read the story Beverly had submitted about the old haunted house.

“Which one is that?” Beverly asked laughingly as she seated herself on the edge of Alison’s desk.

“‘The chief sustenance of the ghosts seems to be baked beans and coffee,’” Alison quoted. “There is no sense to it.”

“Well, there were piles of bean and coffee cans in the kitchen,” Beverly maintained.

“Probably covered with dust,” Alison said.

“They were not!” Beverly said indignantly. “They were all fresh. I tell you, Alison, there is something mysterious about that house. I told you about the man I saw there. Certainly he was no ghost.” She giggled. “Although he said he was,” she added.

“Only a tramp,” Alison said, refusing to be roused to any excitement.

“For a tramp he had a lot of provisions,” Beverly commented. “I’m sure there is a good story for the paper to be had there.”

“Well, if you can find something to write about in that old dusty place, you may,” Alison sighed. “I still think you are wasting your time.”

“I don’t think so,” Beverly maintained. “If he was only a tramp, why did he try to keep me out of the place?”

“Probably because he likes peace and quiet,” was Alison’s response.

“More likely because he had something to hide,” Beverly said shrewdly.

“He didn’t want you to see the baked beans,” Alison smiled.

“Silly!” Beverly scoffed. “Just the same, I mean to find out what is going on in that house. I have a feeling that it is something exciting.”

“Don’t let the ghosts catch you,” Alison laughed.

“Wait and see if I don’t write a ‘scoop’ for the newspaper on the doings in that house,” Beverly replied confidently.

“Go ahead,” Alison said. “I give you a free hand to report on anything interesting that you may see in the mansion.”

“O. K.,” Beverly said, jumping to her feet, “and I’m going to get some assistants.”

That afternoon, the day after she had visited the old house, she called a special meeting of the Alpha Delta Sorority. The girls assembled in Beverly’s and Shirley’s room immediately after classes, all agog with excitement.

“What’s up?” Lenora demanded.

“Yes, why the special session?” Lois wanted to know.

“At the last meeting I believe we made our aim to discover something interesting to do this term,” Beverly began.

“Yes, and we have all failed,” Lenora said. “There is not a thing that would excite a mouse!”

“I don’t know about that,” Beverly said smiling. “I had quite an interesting time yesterday.”

“You mean you have found something for us to do?” Lenora pounced on her eagerly. “Beverly Gray, if you have found something to break up the monotony, I shall be your friend for life.”

“I’ve found a friend,” Beverly said with satisfaction. “You all know the Horler Mansion?”

“Where you had to go for your first assignment on the *Comet*,” Shirley contributed.

“The place is dead,” Lenora said in disappointment. “I hope you don’t expect us to get excited over that musty place. There hasn’t been anything doing there since Vernon College started in the nineteenth century.”

“That’s what you think,” Beverly answered, whereat all the girls looked up with interest.

“What do you mean?” Anne asked.

“Yes, tell us about it,” Rosalie seconded.

Beverly told them about her explorations. With lurid details she described the man she had met and her forced entrance to the house through the kitchen window. The girls held their breath when she described how she had waited in the little dusty room for the man to discover her hiding place.

“What would have happened if he had discovered you, Beverly?” Lois wondered aloud.

“He would probably have thrown me out on my ear,” Beverly said promptly.

“Maybe he would have kept you there,” Rosalie said, wide-eyed.

“Be your age,” Lenora said slangily. “Why should he keep her there? She didn’t do anything.”

“But she could tell the authorities about his being there,” Anne reminded the other girl.

“She could do that anyway,” Lois cut in. “It must have been exciting.”

“It was,” Beverly assured them. “When I came back and told Alison Cox, she refused to believe there was anything mysterious about the place. She has assigned me to dig up something interesting, if I can.”

“Goody, can we help?” Lenora asked excitedly. “A nice juicy mystery is just what I’ve been looking for.”

“That’s why I called this special meeting,” Beverly said. “I thought we could take turns watching and exploring the place until we find out what the strange lights and figures are that the village people have been talking about.”

“We had better plan a campaign,” Lois said. “Most of the strange lights are seen at night, aren’t they?”

“Yes.”

“Tonight Lois and I will go out,” Lenora said. “We’ll see what we can see. Tomorrow night——”

“Beverly and I will go,” Shirley spoke up.

“And the next night, Anne and I,” Rosalie suggested. “In that way we ought to discover something.”

“I can hardly wait.” Lenora danced about the room. “I was so afraid nothing would turn up to save us all from boredom, and here is a nice mystery thrown at us.”

“We might get more than we bargain for,” Beverly said hesitantly.

“We can handle anything,” Lenora said modestly.

“Sure,” Lois seconded. “Why be afraid of a few ghosts?”

“I don’t mind human ghosts,” Rosalie began.

Lenora fixed her roommate with a stern eye. “Who ever heard of a human ghost? They are all supernatural.”

“Beverly’s head ghost wasn’t,” Rosalie reminded her.

“He wasn’t a ghost, either,” Lenora shot back.

“Well, girls,” Beverly stood up. “Tonight you had better take flashlights and—go prepare to meet your fate,” she added mischievously.

“Oooooo, doesn’t she sound cheerful?” Rosalie wailed.

CHAPTER V

Dancing Skeletons

“LENORA WHITEHILL, will you stop sloshing about in those galoshes?” Beverly demanded. “Look at the rug!”

“Well, I can’t walk on the ceiling,” Lenora shot back.

“You can take them off,” Beverly said. “Now,” as Lenora took off the offending galoshes and resumed her pacing, “what is all this about?”

“Lois and I went to the Horler Mansion last night,” Lenora began.

“Shirley and I go tonight,” Beverly added.

“And—” Lenora stopped in the middle of the room and stared at Beverly—“we saw a skeleton dance!”

“You saw a what?” Beverly demanded in amazement.

“We saw a skeleton dance,” Lenora repeated, her face troubled. “I don’t mind admitting that I was scared out of ten years’ growth.”

“Be sensible,” Beverly said, leaning back in her chair and smiling at her troubled friend. “Skeletons don’t dance.”

“These did,” Lenora maintained. “There were about ten of them, and they performed the most astonishing antics that I ever saw.”

“Did Lois see them too?” Beverly asked.

“Yes,” Lenora smiled, “so I wasn’t the only victim of the hallucination.”

“Start at the beginning of the story and tell me about it,” Beverly advised.

“Well, Lois and I waited until the lights-out bell had rung at ten o’clock, and then we stole out of the Hall. We walked out College Avenue to where

you cut across the field that leads to the Horler Mansion. The moon was hidden behind the clouds, and it was so dark that we couldn't see our hands before our faces. You can be sure we kept close together," Lenora added with a smile. "When we came within sight of the house we saw lights moving about in the front room on the first floor. There was no noise, nor was there anyone to be seen. We crept up to the porch. No one saw us—at least, no one said anything to us, so we went and looked in the windows." Lenora paused and stared out the window, where the rain was teeming down on the green campus.

"Go on," Beverly said breathlessly.

"I'll never forget that sight as long as I live," Lenora said eloquently. "I know Lois won't, either. In the middle of the room were two lanterns, and about them were gathered ten skeletons. As we watched they began to dance, if you could call it a dance," she added half laughingly. "They swayed and jumped and skipped, and all the time their bones were shining in the light from the lanterns."

"It sounds incredible!" Beverly gasped.

"That is what we saw," Lenora said, sitting down and staring at Beverly helplessly. "Needless to say, we got away from there as fast as we could. We came back to the Hall, and I even dreamt about skeletons," she finished.

"Did you tell the other girls about it?" Beverly asked.

"Of course I did," Lenora chattered. "I was so scared I couldn't keep it to myself."

"Do you think we had better give up trying to solve the mystery of the mansion?" Beverly asked.

"No!" Lenora exploded. "I might have been scared last night, but in a day or so I'll be quite ready to go out there again."

"Fine!" Beverly applauded. "You have me all a-quiver. I can hardly wait to see what will face Shirley and me tonight."

"I wouldn't stay very long, whatever it is," Lenora said eloquently.

"Did you see the man I told you about?" Beverly asked.

"After we saw the skeletons we didn't look for anything else," Lenora said promptly. "We came away from that house as fast as our legs would carry us!"

“I don’t blame you,” Beverly said. “I hope it stops raining before tonight,” she added.

The rain stopped before Shirley and Beverly were ready to leave on their adventure, but the sky was clouded over, and the moon was not to be seen. When the lights-out bell rang, Beverly and Shirley, each armed with a flashlight, crept down the stairs and out of the Hall. They walked rapidly along College Avenue until they came to the place where they must cut across the field to come to the mansion.

“I’m getting sh-shivery,” Shirley whispered. “D-do you suppose we’ll see the skeletons?”

Beverly laughed nervously. “I don’t know,” she whispered back. “We’ll have to wait and see.”

They entered the growth of bushes and trees and crept noiselessly toward the house. It was pitch dark here in the fields, and they stumbled more than once over tangled roots and vines. The leaves whispered eerily in the night, and once an owl hooted close to them, scaring them so that they almost turned and ran back the way they had come.

The house loomed up before them like a black cloud in the night. They paused, ready for flight, and surveyed it. A flicker of light danced momentarily before the front windows.

“The g-ghosts are there,” Shirley whispered tensely.

“It l-looks like it,” Beverly agreed through chattering teeth.

“Sh-shall we go up and look in the window?” Shirley asked again.

Beverly nodded, and together, like two shadows, the girls stole up the broken steps onto the porch and stood before the windows.

Their startled vision beheld a room filled with the most ghastly figures they had ever seen or ever hoped to see. In the center of the room, about three feet apart, stood two lanterns lighted and smoking badly. About them were gathered skeletons, ten of them. Some were tall, and some not so tall, but each one’s bones gleamed in the flickering light. As the girls watched, the skulls seemed to grin more broadly, and the bones began to sway from side to side. The skeletons seemed to grow in stature and then to shrink into themselves. From somewhere in the room came a low moan that gradually grew into a piercing shriek. The skeletons began to move about the room, taking queer jerky steps and at the same time making chill-provoking groans and murmurs.

“L-let’s get out of here,” Shirley whispered in terror, gripping Beverly’s arm in fright.

However, they stayed for several more minutes watching the dreadful spectacle. They stayed until a skeleton raised a bony arm and pointed to the window where they were. As the skull seemed to leer at them and come ever closer the two girls turned and fled. They ran as fast as they could through the trees, across the field to the road, where they were forced to halt to get their breath. They regarded one another with wide, terror-stricken glances.

“N-now I believe Lenora,” Beverly said between gasps.

“Did you ever see anything so horrible in your whole life?” Shirley murmured awe-stricken.

Beverly shook her head. She never had. The sight of those white, gleaming bones doing their fantastic dance had literally stood her hair on end.

“Do you think they might have followed us?” Shirley demanded, glancing apprehensively over her shoulder.

“It’s not likely,” Beverly answered. She was frowning at herself. She and Shirley had behaved just like two silly children. They had run away in panic, when, if they had stayed, they might have solved the mystery of the house. A memory of the skeleton that had been coming toward them came to her, and she knew she couldn’t have stayed—not even to solve a hundred mysteries. Almost against her will she turned to Shirley.

“Let’s go back,” she suggested.

“G-go back?” Shirley repeated as if she had not heard aright.

“Yes, to see if they are still there.”

“Oh, no! You won’t get me within a hundred yards of that place again tonight!” Shirley declared fervently. “I’ve had enough excitement for one night. Wait until it is daylight and I’ll go back with you.”

“Oh, come on,” Beverly urged. “We won’t go up to the house, just to the edge of the trees from where we can see the lights.”

“No!” Shirley declared positively.

“Then I’m going alone,” Beverly declared.

“Oh, Beverly, I wish you wouldn’t,” Shirley wailed. “I don’t want to see you go alone and yet I’m—scared to go with you.”

“Either wait here for me or come along,” Beverly insisted.

“I’ll come,” Shirley said at last reluctantly. “But, remember, not up to the house.”

The two crept back the way they had come. The moon had come out from behind a cloud, and its rays, though not very strong, threw some light along their way. They were afraid to use their flashlights for fear they would be seen from the house, so stumbled along in the light from the moon. They came to the edge of the trees and halted. They gripped each other’s arms in tense silence. Walking from the house were two skeletons. The moon shone on them for a moment, and then hid behind the cloud, but even in the darkness their bones gleamed white.

A heavy laugh that sounded strangely familiar to Beverly smote the air, and the skeletons turned to face one another. Voices came from somewhere in their vicinity, and the girls exchanged startled glances. Were these the voices of the skeletons?

“We sure scared those kids,” the first voice declared between uproarious booms of laughter.

“I’ll bet they’re running yet,” the second agreed.

More startled glances were exchanged between Beverly and Shirley. Were the skeletons actually discussing them? What was the explanation of these strange voices that seemed to come out of the very air? The skeletons turned and went into the house again.

“L-let’s go back to the Hall,” Shirley whispered frantically.

All the way back to Chadwick Hall Beverly’s mind was busily trying to find some logical explanation of the skeleton dance. Sound reasoning told her there were no skeletons that could dance and talk just like humans. What then was the interpretation of what they had seen?

CHAPTER VI

Larry

THE next afternoon found Beverly again walking along College Avenue out to the old Horler Mansion. She and Lenora and Shirley and Lois had talked over the skeleton dance in a vain attempt to find answers to their mystified questions, but no explanation would come. This afternoon, if she could gain entrance to the house, she would investigate that front room where they had seen the ghosts and see if she could learn something from it.

She went through the trees and across the field to the house. It looked perfectly harmless in the light of day. It looked, too, she thought, much larger from the outside than it was when she was in it. Not a soul was stirring that she could see. She decided not to try the front door today, the head ghost might still be lurking near it to see that she did not enter again. Instead she would resort to the rain barrel and the window.

Beverly walked around to the back of the house. The barrel was just where she had left it. She climbed up on it and opened the window. In another minute she was inside the house. The kitchen was more dirty than she had remembered it from her last visit. She crossed to the swinging door and peeped into the dining room. Like the kitchen, it was deserted. She was through it in a minute and stepping into the dark hall. Boldly she flashed her electric lamp about her. The hall, too, was deserted, and there was no sound of anyone stirring on the floor overhead. She seemed to be alone in the house.

She walked to the large wooden door that led into the front room where the skeleton dance had been held. It took a mighty push to swing the door inward far enough for her to squeeze into the room. She held her breath, half expecting to see the skeletons rise up from the floor and jeer at her. But the room was empty save for the two lanterns that had been lit last night and now stood in a deserted corner. Beverly walked around examining the walls

and floor boards for a trapdoor or a sliding panel. She had read stories about old houses that had mysterious hidden rooms and staircases. Perhaps this house had a hidden room into which the skeletons retreated in the daytime to dance forth and make merry at night. But she could find nothing to substantiate this theory. The walls, when she rapped experimentally on them, seemed to be sound enough. She tested the bricks on the fireplace by pushing and tapping them, but nothing happened. No hidden panel slid back to expose a yawning cavity that she might explore.

She stood undecided in the middle of the floor. There certainly was nothing here. She decided to have another look at the mysterious boxes she had discovered in that little attic room the other day. She left the front room and closed the door behind her. Silently, except for the squeaks from the steps, she made her way to the second floor and thence through the trapdoor to the attic room. Lo and behold, all the boxes were gone! Where the piled boxes of mysterious packages of powder had been was now only empty space. This was rather like a game of hide and seek. One time you saw them and the next time you didn't. Who could have removed them? The head ghost? It seemed most likely that the head ghost had taken the boxes with him when he left the house. Where had he gone and would he return? There was nothing to keep her in the little room any longer, so Beverly turned and made her way down to the first floor again. Her search today had yielded nothing. She might as well go back to Chadwick Hall. She would wait a few days and then come back; something might happen in the meantime. Tonight was Anne's and Rosalie's turn to come and see the skeleton dance. Would they see it?

She went through the dining room to the kitchen and climbed up on the sink. Halfway out the window she discovered that someone had removed the rain barrel! How would she get out? She would have to drop from the window to the ground. At the same instant she made her discovery a slight noise behind her made her pause and turn.

It was not the head ghost this time, but another, younger man who stood there. He wore leather boots, breeches, and a leather coat. He carried an aviator's helmet and goggles in his hand. Beverly caught a glimpse of laughing blue eyes set in a tanned face beneath a mop of rich chestnut hair before she jumped from the sink back to the floor. The man stood grinning at her.

"I wondered who was using this means of entrance to the mansion," he said in a low, pleasant voice.

“Now you know,” she answered.

“Yes, now I know and—I’m curious. Who are you?” he asked.

“I’m a reporter from the college paper. I was sent out to get a story on this old house. You see me in the midst of gathering my material,” she answered saucily.

“Did you get much material?” he asked seating himself on the edge of the kitchen table and swinging one leg out before him.

“A fine story,” Beverly replied. “Did you ever see a skeleton dance?” she asked suddenly.

He looked at her in surprise. “No. Why?”

“You should have been here last night. They put on a fine show.”

“Were you here?” he asked keenly watching her.

She nodded.

“What did you want in this old place at night?” he demanded.

“I wasn’t in the house,” she answered airily. “Besides, what business is it of yours? I suppose you are one of them?”

“Them?”

“The ghosts. I met the head ghost the other day.”

“I’m Larry,” he laughed. “That is, my friends call me Larry.”

“Mr. Ghost,” she said severely, “if you have no objection, I’m leaving.”

“I don’t mind,” he said imperturbably. “How are you going? It is rather undignified going out the window when it is such a tight squeeze. Come along and I’ll show you out the front door in style.”

She followed him into the dark hall and waited while he fitted a key into the lock of the front door. He swung it open and bowed before her ceremoniously.

“Good-bye, Mr. Ghost,” she said as she stepped out into the sunlight.

“Larry, to you,” he called laughingly after her.

Who was he? Beverly wondered. He must be one of those who were using the place, else how would he possess a key to the front door? It was queer that she had not heard him enter while she was in there. He was young and rather good-looking, too. So nice to be engaged in any practice beyond

the law. She had decided that the men who were seen in the house must be kidnapers or smugglers or something equally dishonest. Larry, he had said his name was. It was a nice name, she decided as she turned into the drive that led to Chadwick Hall.

The pillars of the Hall glistened white in the sunlight. It was a magnificent structure, this new Chadwick Hall, and Beverly felt a thrill of pride in it. The old Chadwick Hall had been nice, but the new one was much more imposing and wonderful looking.

Girls were grouped on the steps chatting together, and many of them called gayly to Beverly as she entered. In the living room more girls were grouped about the piano as Lenora played for them. She responded cheerily to their greetings but did not linger with them. On the desk in her room she found several letters awaiting her.

One letter was from Jim Stanton, a boy Beverly knew back in Renville, and who was in his senior year at Yale. Jim proposed something that made Beverly sigh with delight. He proposed that she and Anne obtain permission to come to Yale to see the annual football game on Thanksgiving Day. If only they might! Beverly made a mental note to speak to Anne about it this very day, and together they would go and see Miss Wilder, the Dean.

She had not finished her other letters when the dinner bell rang and she descended to the dining room.

That night Anne and Rosalie departed tremulously to visit the old mansion, but the skeletons did not dance this time. The house was dark and deserted. The girls waited nearly an hour on the porch for something to happen, but their expectations went unfulfilled. The skeletons were gone, and peace reigned.

CHAPTER VII

The Sophomore Dance

IT was the end of October, and the leaves were turning red and gold on the trees. The night frost nipped the grass and turned it brown. The air was crisp and cold with the warning of winter.

Beverly drew in great gulps of the cool air as she walked along. The white clouds went sailing along overhead in the blue sky like ships upon the blue ocean. The very air seemed filled with a magic strong undercurrent. She thought musingly of a line of verse written by Bliss Carman—"There is something in October sets the gypsy blood astir." How true it was. Her heart leapt rapturously as at a gay song as she swung along. She felt as if she could keep on going—going—until she stood on the rim of the world. Autumn days always made her want to wander to far, unexplored places. They awoke dreams in her, dreams of what she hoped to be some day, dreams of places she hoped to visit and sights she longed to see.

The sophomore masquerade dance was to take place tomorrow night. Beverly was on the committee that had undertaken to decorate the gymnasium for the occasion, and so she had come out to get leaves to place artistically about the gym. Seating herself on a fallen log, Beverly proceeded promptly to forget all about her mission. With a pointed stick she drew aimless hieroglyphics on the ground before her.

Beverly was a born dreamer, and now she gave herself up entirely to her bright daydreams. She wanted to be a writer after college, but so far she hadn't made much headway in that direction. True, she was a reporter on the staff of the *Comet*, but what did that amount to? Of course, it entailed writing on her part, and it had provided her with some adventures in the old Horler Mansion, but aside from that it didn't prepare her in any way for the days to come. She sighed, and at the same time a laughing voice spoke behind her.

“Shirker!” it said teasingly.

Beverly looked around hastily. It was the young man, Larry, whom she had met that day in the kitchen of the old mansion. He was dressed as he had been then, in his aviator’s clothes. Beverly had told the other girls about him, and the girls were all anxious to meet this new handsome “ghost.”

“Hello, Mr. Ghost,” she said gayly.

“My name’s Larry,” he said coming forward and seating himself beside her on the log. “What’s yours?” he demanded.

“Beverly,” she answered before she thought.

“What are you doing out here in the woods? Communing with nature?” he continued lightly. “‘There is something in the autumn that is native to my blood——’” he quoted.

“Oh, you are accomplished, aren’t you?” she teased. “You quote poetry, you haunt houses——”

“I say, you don’t really think I was one of those dancing skeletons, do you?” he demanded. “By the way, I saw the skeleton dance last night.”

“Are they back?” she asked excitedly.

“Had they been away?” he countered.

“We haven’t discovered anything that would lead us to believe they were still there,” she answered, “so we supposed they were gone.”

“No, they aren’t gone,” he said with a frown. “Do you know what they are doing in that place, anyway?”

“No,” Beverly confessed. “But why all the questions? You sound like a policeman in a mystery play.”

He laughed. “Sorry. Where are you going?” he asked as she rose.

“I’ve got to gather some leaves to decorate the gymnasium for the dance tomorrow night,” she informed him.

“Let me help. I’m the best leaf-gatherer there is,” he declared confidently.

“If you have a pocket knife you might cut some branches for me,” she suggested.

“Like Robin Hood, I’ll do my good deeds,” he sighed.

“Are you an aviator?” Beverly asked as he cut the branches and piled them into her arms.

“Of a sort.—Is that enough?” he asked.

“Plenty,” she declared. “Aren’t they lovely?” she asked looking down at the crimson, yellow, and purplish tints in the leaves. “I have to go back now.”

“I’ll be here again tomorrow,” he called after her.

“I shan’t,” she shouted back, laughing.

Beverly took the leaves to the gymnasium, where Lenora and Shirley were busily engaged in hanging paper streamers. She tossed off her coat and set about to help.

“I met him again,” she said unconcernedly, though she knew it would create a sensation.

“Who?” Shirley asked, with her mouth full of tacks with which to tack the orange and black paper along the wall.

“The aviator,” Beverly answered innocently, busy arranging leaves in a corner.

The stepladder upon which Lenora was standing wobbled dangerously as she turned to Beverly.

“Where?” she demanded.

“In the woods,” Beverly replied.

“Is he as nice as he is handsome?” Lenora asked.

“Hmmm. Do you think the leaves would look nice there or shall I move them?” Beverly asked.

“Beverly Gray! You are the most unsatisfying person I ever met!” Lenora declared. “Come on, give us the lurid details of this meeting.”

“There was nothing to it,” Beverly assured them. “He just popped up when I was gathering leaves and helped me. Oh, yes, he said the skeletons were dancing again last night in the Old Horler Mansion.”

“They were!” Shirley echoed.

“I’m going out there again some day soon,” Beverly declared.

Anne and Lois and Rosalie and more joyous sophomores burst in then, and the three had no time for more confidences.

The night of the sophomore dance was a clear, crisp night that infected all the girls with surging spirits. They had worked long and hard, and the gymnasium showed the effect of their efforts. Mellow colored lights lent an air of festiveness to the gay decorations. On one end of the floor was a raised dais on which was the orchestra, made up of girls of the college. Leaves and corn husks with yellow pumpkins stood in the corners and grinned at the dancers as they whirled past.

The girls had wasted hours of thought over their costumes. Finally Beverly decided to go to the dance as Peter Pan, and Shirley was to go as Columbine. The two had kept their costumes secret from the other girls in the Alpha Delta Sorority, and the others had retaliated by also keeping their identity secret. But it was not long after their entrance to the dance before they were aware of each other.

The orchestra played sweet, mellow tunes and fast, lively ones. The girls danced and danced and danced some more. The dance was a big success, socially and financially. Over glasses of punch Shirley and Beverly exchanged whispered words about the other dancers.

“Who is Robin Hood?” Shirley asked, nodding toward the door where the well known figure, clad in his forest green, stood glancing about the dance floor.

“I don’t know,” Beverly answered. “This is the first time I saw him.”

“He just entered,” Shirley continued. “Do you think it might be Lois?”

“I thought we agreed that Lois was Betsy Ross?” Beverly said.

“That’s right,” Shirley agreed. “Robin Hood is coming toward you,” she warned. “I’ll dance with Anne. Try and find out who it is.”

Robin Hood bowed low before Beverly, as Peter Pan, and together they joined the other dancers on the floor. Robin Hood was a wonderful leader, and he danced as none of the other girls did. It must be a girl, for there were no boys here, but who could it be?

“The gymnasium looks nice, doesn’t it?” Beverly asked.

Robin Hood nodded but did not speak. Her ruse to make him speak so that she might guess his identity did not work. They continued dancing in silence. Robin Hood directed their course toward the door. A moment later they stood in the moonlight. Robin Hood put his hand up to his mask and removed it.

“You!” Beverly gasped. It was Larry, the aviator.

“Yes, me,” he said laughing. “You look startled.”

“I am,” she declared. “Young men aren’t supposed to come to the dance.”

“Why not? They are nice dances,” he assured her. “Besides, I came to see you.”

“But you shouldn’t have,” she wailed. “If Miss Wilder thought that I had invited you I might be expelled!”

“Oh, I say,” he said remorsefully, “I didn’t think it would get you into trouble.”

“Well, it might,” she said. “You must go at once!”

“No,” he said firmly.

“Please,” she urged. “A teacher might come out and see you, and then we would both be in trouble.”

“I’ll put my mask on again,” he said suiting the action to the letter. “Now, if anyone sees us, they will think I am a girl,” he laughed.

“It won’t take long to discover that you are not,” she declared. “All you have to do is speak.”

She turned and would have gone back into the building, but he caught her hand and held her back. He led her to a stone bench beneath an overhanging willow tree.

“Please sit down for a few minutes,” he begged. “Then I’ll go.”

“Promise?”

“Uh-huh.”

“What do you want? Why did you come to see me?” Beverly asked.

“I—I want to know what you know about the doings in the Horler Mansion,” he said, meeting her eyes squarely.

“If you are one of them, surely you know everything that I might tell you,” she answered. She was on her guard against him. Why, every time that she saw him, did he ask questions about the Horler Mansion? Why was he so vitally interested in the goings-on in that queer old place? Did he imagine that she was in some way connected with those men that were seen in the house?

“I told you once that I wasn’t one of them,” he said.

“Then why are you so interested in them?” she demanded.

He looked away from her across the campus where the trees stood out in dark shadows in the moonlight. “I can’t tell you that,” he answered slowly. “But won’t you trust me?”

“I know nothing about them,” she assured him. “There is nothing there but dust—and mice,” she added. She would tell him nothing until she knew who he was.

“You’ve seen nothing but the skeletons?” he asked.

“Nothing,” she said innocently. “What should I have seen?”

He stood up smiling. “I can’t say what you should have seen,” he replied. “But if you saw nothing——”

“I saw nothing,” she repeated.

“Then that is that!” he said determinedly. “Pretend I never said anything. Let’s go back and dance again.”

“You promised to go so we wouldn’t get into any trouble,” she reminded him.

“Just one dance,” he coaxed with his dazzling smile.

“All right,” she capitulated. “But then you really must go before one of the teachers discovers you.”

They reentered the gymnasium. The orchestra was playing a waltz, and they glided out on the floor. He was a wonderful dancer, and Beverly felt as if she were dancing on air. He whirled her about the floor with scarcely any effort. She was half disappointed when the dance ended and he took his leave.

“Who was it?” Shirley and Lenora pounced on her.

“Guess,” she smiled.

“I can’t,” Shirley answered.

“I’ve exhausted every possibility,” Lenora said also.

“It was—the aviator!”

The girls gurgled with delight. A young man appearing at a sophomore dance was something to be talked about.

“What did he come for?” Lenora asked.

“To ask questions about the Horler Mansion,” Beverly answered.

“Do you suppose he is one of them?” Shirley asked.

“I don’t know,” Beverly sighed, “but I’m going to try to find out.”

She firmly resolved to go out to the old mansion on the following day and see if, as he had said, the head ghost had returned. She might find more material for a story for the *Comet*. Alison was getting impatient and insisted that Beverly was merely wasting her time. Unless Beverly could show her some results from the time she spent out there, Allison might assign her to something else. That would mean that she would have no more time to poke about the old mansion. She didn’t want that to happen. The mystery of the place intrigued her—and also the young man who was connected in some way with the mysterious goings-on.

CHAPTER VIII

A Prisoner

ACCORDING to her resolution, Beverly set off for the deserted house after classes the next afternoon. Dark clouds sailed low in the sky, and a promise of rain was in the air. The wind was increasing, and the trees swayed gently. As Beverly completed the last few steps to the house, rain drizzled down on her, and she ran for the shelter of the porch. A haunted house wasn't the best place to be during a storm, but at least it would keep the rain off her. Since she could not resort to the rain barrel and the kitchen window without getting wet, she might as well try the front door.

She turned the knob, and to her surprise it swung wide at her lightest touch. A moment later she stood with her back against it, straining her eyes into the dark hall. Why hadn't she thought to bring a flashlight! Even if she had one, she would scarcely dare to use it. She listened but could hear nothing but the wind as it whistled about the chimneys. She started down the hall and paused opposite the doors that led into the room that had once been used as a library. She had peeped into that room, but she had not explored it minutely.

She opened the door and went in. My, it was dark in here! The shutters were closed. The shutter that had once hung dislodged had been repaired and fastened securely over the window. As her eyes became accustomed to the darkness Beverly advanced farther into the room. Shelves that had once held countless books stared back at her, empty and dust covered. From her position in the middle of the room Beverly scanned her surroundings for a hint of a sliding panel. She still clung to the idea of a hidden room or staircase that might explain the mysterious lights and figures. One of those bookshelves might very easily conceal a hidden spring. But which one? It would take all afternoon to try each one. She turned away from them. There was nothing else in the room.

A sudden scratching attracted her attention. She glanced about quickly. There was nothing that would account for that persistent sound. It seemed to come from somewhere in the vicinity of the window. As she turned in that direction one of the shutters swung back. A face appeared—and such a face! Beverly pressed the back of her hand across her mouth to keep from screaming aloud. Small, slanting, bead-like eyes peered in at her. The thin cruel lips parted in a toothless grimace. The black hair was straggled and matted over the yellow face.

A Chinaman! Beverly closed her eyes and opened them again experimentally. He was gone! The horrible face had disappeared. Had she really seen it or had she dreamed it? She couldn't dream such a terrible thing. It would haunt her for many days to come.

She tore her gaze away from the window and left the room. Standing once more in the dark hall, shivers assailed her. The front door had not been locked. The Chinaman might have entered the house just as she had. Perhaps he was even now standing close to her! The thought set her heart leaping. She strained her eyes to see in the darkness, and her ears to hear some slight movement that would tell her of his presence. Nothing but the wind and the soft patter of the rain came to her.

She crept toward the stairs and began to ascend them. She was going up to that little attic room to see if any of those mysterious boxes had been returned. She reached the head of the stairs and paused, ready for flight at the slightest indication of another's presence. It was strange, but she felt as if she were being followed. She turned around quickly, but nothing happened. Sternly reproving herself for having too much imagination, she went on. She paused on the threshold of the little room where the steps that led to the trapdoor and the attic were and cast an anxious glance over her shoulder. Had her hearing been at fault, or had it really been a step that she heard there in the gloomy hall behind her? Nothing or no one was in sight. Her nerves were getting jumpy, that was all.

She entered the little closet-like room and took the precaution to shut the door behind her. In the darkness she stumbled over the first step leading up to the trapdoor. The sound was like an explosion that echoed loudly in the old house. Someone would surely hear that! She held her breath and listened for several minutes. Nothing happened. The place must be deserted, or someone would have come running to find out what the rumpus was all about. She continued up the short flight of steps and put her shoulder against the trapdoor. Slowly it opened, and she crawled through the space into the little attic room.

The darkness in here was worse than in the other rooms! No windows, and only that little patch of skylight up in the ceiling to let in air. It was frightfully stuffy. She had to stand several minutes before her eyes became accustomed to the darkness. Even then she could not see in the corners where the boxes had been piled the first time she chanced in here, but had to feel out with her hands. She was bent over to determine whether it was a box or merely a portion of the baseboard when a noise behind her startled her.

She turned quickly, but not quickly enough. The trapdoor was being slowly closed by someone in the room below. The sound of a bolt sliding into place came to her. She put her fingers in the notch that was used to draw the door up from this side and tugged with all her might. It was no use. The bolt that had been shot home held firmly. A high, cackling laugh floated up to her, and she shivered. She looked about desperately for a means to escape. There was none. She was a prisoner!

CHAPTER IX

Escape

SHE was a prisoner here in this dark, cold place. Locked in without a light or warmth. It was damp and, oh, so chilly! Tiny feet scampered across the floor, and she knew it was rats scurrying to their holes. Who had shut the door on her? Had the Chinaman entered the house? Or had the head ghost returned? How long did they propose to keep her in here?

She sat down in the middle of the floor and wrapped her arms about her knees. She might as well be comfortable to contemplate her fate. It was still raining, she could tell by the pitter-patter on the roof. The wind must have increased, because she could hear the shutters groan as it blew against them. Heavy steps sounded in the house and voices of many men drifted up to her. What was going on? She pressed her ear to the floor and listened. Two men were in the room below her. They were coming up the steps to the attic!

As the bolt slid back and the trapdoor rose slowly she sat up. A man's head and shoulders were sticking through the floor. It was the head ghost!

"Hello," she smiled bravely, blinking into the light of the lantern that he lifted up above his head.

"Oh, it's you again, is it?" he grinned. "How did you get in this time?"

"The door was open," she answered. "I walked in."

"Well, you won't walk out as quick," he retorted with a knowing smirk. "We'll let you stay up here and keep the rats company for a while. Maybe it will teach you not to butt into other people's business. You can write a story of it for your paper," he added, laughing.

Beverly was glad when his cruel face disappeared and the door was shut again. It was better to be left alone in the darkness than to face him. She

knew she wouldn't have been able to keep up her show of bravado much longer.

For a while she could hear men's voices and the tramp of many feet, and then the sounds began gradually to die away. After a while silence reigned. Had they gone away and left her locked in this room? She shuddered as more rats scampered along the floor. What a horrible place! She would never come here again—at least, not alone. She wondered if Larry had been one of the men she had heard in the room below. Did he know she was shut in this terrible room?

It would be dinner time at Chadwick Hall. Would the girls miss her and start to search for her? The thought was comforting. All the Alpha Delta Sorority knew she had come to the old mansion. Or would they think she had returned and was having dinner at one of the other campus houses? She sometimes did have dinner at Courtney Hall with Alison Cox. Would they think that that was what she was doing tonight? They need only telephone Alison to make sure, but would they do that?

A peculiar tapping noise aroused her from her thoughts. What was that? It seemed to come from overhead. Only the wind blowing something against the roof, she decided. Probably just the branch of a tree. When it persisted, she looked up at the skylight. In the darkness she could see nothing. The tapping persisted. It sounded almost like someone hammering at the lock on the skylight. Was it the Chinaman? She offered a fervent prayer that it would not be. The glass was lifted, and the bright beam of a flashlight was thrown into the room.

"Pssst! Beverly!" It was Larry's voice.

"Here," she called back in a guarded whisper, thankfully.

"All right?" he asked.

"Fine, although it is cold and damp in here."

"It's a whole lot damper out here," he declared.

"Even so," she said half laughing, "I'd rather be out there."

"I'll have you out in a jiffy," he promised. "Is there anybody in there? Can you hear anyone in the room below?"

Beverly put her ear to the floor and listened.

"No," she replied as she stood up again.

"Good!" he said with satisfaction. "Is there anything you can stand on?"

“No,” Beverly called back after a hasty search of the room. “The place is empty.”

“It’s a good thing the ceiling isn’t very high,” he said as he stuck his head and shoulders through the opening. “Reach up and see if you can grasp my hands.”

Inch by inch he let himself down farther until he could grasp her hands securely in his. Then, by slow, difficult work, he began to pull her up by degrees. It was a long and tedious job, for there was no way in which she could help him. All she could do was to hang quietly while he pulled her up. The muscles in the arms of both were hurting, and perspiration was standing out on Larry’s forehead when at last Beverly was halfway through the narrow space.

It did not take her long to scramble out on the roof once she could gain a foothold. For a moment they sat there side by side, breathing heavily. His had been the greater strain, but he did not propose to rest long. He got to his knees and closed the skylight again.

“This is a fine way to leave a house—through the roof,” she giggled.

“Young ladies who have such a strong curiosity must expect to do funny things,” he replied. “Why do you insist on coming to this house, anyway? Don’t you know it’s dangerous?”

“Especially if you fall off the roof,” she reminded him as his foot slipped.

It was still raining fast and heavily. The wind shrieked and whistled about the chimneys. If Beverly or Larry had stood upright, it would have blown them off the roof.

“Where do we go from here?” Beverly shouted above the wind.

He placed her hand on his belt and motioned her to keep a tight grip on it. Inch by inch they began to creep from the rear of the roof to the front. The shingles with which the roof was covered were slippery beneath their feet. Time and again they slipped as a shingle was dislodged. The night was black around them, and Beverly wondered how Larry knew just where to step. A misstep would mean a fall over the edge and a crash to the ground. She clung to his belt with one hand and tried to hold to the roof with the other. It was a good thing she had worn her sport shoes today. High heels would have been an encumbrance in her present predicament.

They halted to catch their breath in the secluded corner of a chimney. A particularly hard gust of wind dislodged several bricks, and they came hurtling down on the girl's and boy's heads. Larry grimaced ruefully as he rubbed a bruised spot where one had hit him. Both were soaked to the skin from the rain, and Beverly sneezed several times.

“Catching cold?” he shouted.

She shook her head. “I hope not.”

They went on again slowly, slipping, sliding, recovering themselves, only to slip again. When finally they reached the edge of the roof Larry turned to her.

“I'll go first,” he shouted. “When I yell, lower yourself over the edge. I'll catch you.”

Beverly could find no breath with which to reply, so she merely nodded. She watched Larry climb over the edge of the roof. How he managed to hang on was a mystery to her. Any minute she expected to see him hurtling to the ground. She lay flat on the roof and peered over. He was disappearing into one of the windows that opened into the front bedroom on the second floor. He must be as agile as a monkey to have completed such a descent. He stuck his head out of the window and waved to her. She knew he was shouting, although the wind swept the words away from her.

It was her turn to lower herself over the roof. She summoned all her courage and swung one foot over. The other followed and she lowered herself down. For one awful second she hung suspended between the clouds and the wet earth. The wind whipped about her, and the rain beat down on her. Then strong arms grasped her, and she let go her hold on the roof. She was lowered and swung inward until Larry placed her upright once more beside him. She leaned weakly against the wall.

“Feeling faint?” he asked anxiously.

“I'll be all right—when I get my breath,” she answered gaspingly. “I never swallowed so much wind in my life.”

He waited quietly by her side until she had regained her self-control. Then he grasped her arm and led her toward the door.

“We better get out of here before the skeletons come back,” he whispered.

“We can't leave too soon to suit me,” she answered.

They crept silently through the hall and down the steps. At the bottom Beverly was attacked with an uncontrollable desire to sneeze. Not once, but three times! They listened and watched for someone to confront them, but no one did, and they made their way out of the house.

CHAPTER X

Lenora Is Missing

As a result of her wetting Beverly suffered a heavy cold. The next two days she spent in bed, surrounded by warm blankets and hot-water bottles. The girls offered various methods of curing colds, and each proved more distasteful than the last.

“That’s what you get for climbing over roofs in a rainstorm,” Lenora teased.

Beverly, sitting up in bed upon propped pillows, grimaced at her. “I should have stayed in the attic and eaten mice.”

Lenora laughed. “It is a good thing the Hero came to your rescue,” she declared.

“We were about to start after you ourselves,” Shirley joined in, “when we saw you coming down College Avenue.”

“That was one time when we could truthfully say you were all wet,” Lenora giggled.

“Go away!” Beverly retorted, tossing an unoffending pillow at her friend.

“Beverly’s got the blues,” Shirley informed Lenora, “because she has to stay in bed today.”

“Beverly, was Robinson Crusoe an acrobat?” Lenora asked suddenly.

Shirley and Beverly exchanged glances.

“I’ll bite, was he?” Beverly wondered.

“Well,” Lenora said regarding Beverly from laughing eyes, “in the book I read it said that at the end of his day’s work he sat down on his chest.”

“Help!” Beverly murmured, collapsing on her pillows.

“Huh! Think you’re funny!” Shirley shouted and descended on Lenora with a pillow, wherein she proceeded to smother that young lady. Together the two tossed about the floor. “Say ‘uncle’!” Shirley demanded. “If you don’t——” She left her threat hanging in midair.

“Uncle,” Lenora managed to whisper between fits of laughter.

“Tsk, tsk!” Beverly said disgustedly, though her eyes twinkled. “Such behavior for college sophomores. You look more like freshmen.”

“I resent that,” Lenora said promptly, vainly trying to restore her hair to some semblance of order. “That is an insult to my dignity!”

“If any,” Shirley murmured audibly.

“Oooooooo!” Lenora made a dive for Shirley, and there ensued another tussle that threatened totally to wreck what was once an orderly room.

“Behave, you two,” Beverly commanded, “and tell me what happened in classes today.”

“Nothing—as usual,” Lenora said, seating herself beside Beverly on the bed. “We went to biology class and listened for ages to an endless tale about the nucleus of something or other.”

“The same thing applies to English class and all the rest,” Shirley interposed.

“Hasn’t anything happened on the campus?” Beverly asked.

“No, we’ll all be having long gray beards soon,” Lenora sighed.

“You, Beverly, have been having all the fun with your haunted house and handsome aviator,” Shirley said.

“Is it my fault?” Beverly demanded. “The rest of you are afraid to go near the place because of the skeletons.”

“Who’s afraid?” Lenora bristled to attention. “Just to show you how afraid I am, I am going to take over your explorations and go and slay the dragon in his den this afternoon.”

“Better take somebody with you,” Beverly advised.

“I’d go,” Shirley said, frowning, “but I have a history conference.”

“Rubbish!” Lenora said airily. “I like to prowl about places by myself. What part of the house haven’t you explored? I’ll take that first.”

“I’ve been all over it,” Beverly answered.

“What does the cellar look like?” Shirley asked.

“The cellar!” Beverly looked at them in dismay. “I never thought of the cellar.”

“There!” Lenora said with satisfaction. “No wonder you haven’t discovered anything. I’ll bet that is where the ghosts are hiding.”

It chagrined Beverly to admit that she had overlooked the most probable place in the whole house. Why, oh, why, hadn’t she thought to investigate the cellar?

Lenora departed light-heartedly to explore the cellar of the mansion, and Beverly devoted herself to writing letters while Shirley went off to her history conference. The sun sank farther in the west, and shadows began to lengthen in the room. It was getting nearer and nearer to winter, and the days were gradually becoming shorter. It was almost dinner time before Shirley returned and Beverly laid down her pen.

“Is Lenora here?” Rosalie asked, bursting in upon them.

“Isn’t she back yet?” Beverly asked anxiously. It was hours since Lenora had departed, and Beverly supposed she had come back long ago.

“No,” Rosalie answered. “At least, she hasn’t been near her room.”

“Don’t worry,” Shirley advised. “She will pop up for dinner.”

The dinner bell rang then, and Rosalie and Shirley descended to the dining room. Beverly dined in style these days, a tray being brought to her by one of the maids. After dinner Shirley returned to her room to be with Beverly.

“Was Lenora at dinner?” Beverly demanded as soon as Shirley had closed the door.

“No,” Shirley said. “But Rosalie remembered that Lenora had said she was going to have dinner with somebody at Foster House.”

“Did she?” Beverly asked.

“We don’t know. We shall have to wait until she comes back,” Shirley answered.

Anne and Lois dropped in for a chat, and for the hour—seven until eight, that was the social hour—the four girls laughed and chatted together. When

the bell at eight o'clock proclaimed study hour Anne and Lois departed for their room.

"I feel uneasy about Lenora," Beverly said to Shirley. "Will you run up to her room and see if she has come back?"

Shirley departed and returned almost immediately. She shook her head to Beverly's glance of inquiry.

"Telephone Foster House and see if she had dinner there," Beverly directed.

Shirley returned with the information that Lenora had not been seen anywhere in the vicinity of Foster House.

"What do you think?" Shirley asked in a worried voice.

For reply Beverly threw back the covers and jumped out of bed. She pulled off her pajamas and struggled into a heavy sweater and skirt.

"Beverly!" Shirley said in amazement. "What are you going to do? You shouldn't get up!"

"I'm going out to that house. She hasn't returned from the mansion, that is the only thing that would make her miss her dinner."

"But, Beverly, you can't go out with that cold. You might get pneumonia!" Shirley pleaded.

"I was going to start going to classes tomorrow," Beverly answered. "If I go out a few hours earlier, it won't hurt me."

"But what can you do out there?" Shirley insisted.

"I'm going to find Lenora," Beverly stated calmly, pulling on a woolly cap over her curls. "If I can't find her, I'll get Larry to help me."

"Where will you find him?" Shirley demanded. "Did he give you his telephone number?"

"No, but he always pops up at a crucial moment," Beverly said, slipping into her leather jacket.

"Well, if you go, I'm coming too," Shirley declared. "We'll make this a rescue party of two."

CHAPTER XI

Rescue Party

THE two girls ran all the way from Chadwick Hall to the end of College Avenue. They paused at the edge of the trees and looked at the old house. Tonight there were no lights dancing in the front room as there had been on the other night they came out here. The house appeared to be deserted. Where could Lenora be?

Boldly flashing her lamp before her, Beverly strode up on the porch and pushed open the door.

“Seems to be empty,” Shirley said, her voice echoing hollowly in the dusty hall.

Beverly did not answer but entered the room that had once been a library and where she had seen that horrible yellow face peering in at her through the window. The rays from the girls’ flashlights danced about, dispelling the gloom and darkness. There was nothing here, so they left that room and proceeded to mount the stairs to the second floor. Beverly was of the opinion that Lenora might have been locked in that little attic room as she had been. They searched that room first, but no Lenora came to light. They searched the other bedrooms as well, but each were equally deserted.

“Where can she be?” Shirley whispered, trembling. “I wish we could find her so we could get out of this spooky place.” The shadows that loomed up behind and around them held a thousand hidden terrors for her.

“We haven’t looked all over the first floor yet,” Shirley continued as they left the last bedroom.

They descended the steps again and this time boldly entered the room where they had seen the skeleton dance. Tonight no such hair-raising sight greeted them, and Shirley sighed audibly in relief. Little rays of dust danced in the beams cast by the flashlights. That room too was empty, and the girls

turned to leave. As Beverly was about to close the door behind them she stopped and stiffened to attention. From the room behind them came the sound of men's voices.

"I tell you, you don't know what you are talking about," one declared.

The voice sounded so close to them that the girls expected to see the man loom up out of the shadows.

"Velly blad mistlake," another high, piping voice contributed.

"The Chinaman!" Beverly whispered and drew Shirley back into the room.

"Maybe that's the s-skeletons talking," Shirley chattered nervously.

"Sh—sh—sh!" Beverly warned.

"A mistake, is it?" the first voice said again. "When the *Tamara* docks tomorrow we have to be on hand."

The voices seemed to come from the fireplace, and the two girls placed their ears against the wall and listened breathlessly. This bore out Beverly's theory of a hidden room. The men must be standing close to this wall. If only she might discover some way to enter that hidden room! What would she find?

"No bling it here." The Chinaman was speaking again.

"Yes," the other man bellowed, "we're going to bring it here, and you had better keep those fresh college kids from prowling about in the house. How that one got out of the attic the other day beats me!" he added with a growl.

Beverly smiled. So they didn't know Larry had helped her out of that situation.

"Are you ready?" the first man asked.

"Les," the Chinaman answered.

The fireplace began moving outward, and Beverly pulled Shirley back into the corner beside her. Slowly and noiselessly the whole brick frame of the fireplace opened and disclosed a yawning black hole out of which scuffled two men. They passed so close to the two girls that Beverly might have put out a hand and touched them. As the two men crossed the room to the door, the fireplace swung back into its former position, completely hiding the opening. The two girls held their breath until the men's footsteps

died away and the slamming of the front door told them that they had departed. Beverly ran to the fireplace and tugged at it, but it stood secure.

“Probably has a hidden spring,” Shirley said. “Are you going to hunt for it now?”

“It would be better to do that in the daytime,” Beverly agreed. “I’m worried about Lenora.”

“So am I,” Shirley said. “Do you suppose those men will come back soon?” she asked, trembling.

“I hope not,” Beverly answered. “Come, we’ll go into the dining room.”

With their flashlights lighting the way, the two entered the dining room. The lights played over the furniture and the walls but disclosed nothing. From there they went into the kitchen. The cellar door was standing open, and in the darkness the two girls exchanged glances. Lenora had said she would investigate the cellar. Had she gone down not to come up again?

After cautious glances about the kitchen the two girls approached the stairs descending into the cellar. From halfway down they shot their flashlight rays over the side and about the cellar. Dust, grime, and cobwebs covered everything. Broken boxes and dislodged stones from the walls lay about the floor. The flashlights played back to the steps. A broken step was next, and they both jumped over it.

Then, as their lights danced ahead of them, terror froze their voices in their throats. There, at the bottom of the steps, all in a heap lay Lenora. Her face was ghastly pale and her eyes closed. With a leap Beverly and Shirley covered the remaining steps and flung themselves on their knees beside Lenora.

“She’s unconscious,” Beverly said to Shirley.

“What will we do?” Shirley asked worriedly.

“We’ve got to get her back to Chadwick Hall somehow,” Beverly answered.

“What could have happened to her?” Shirley wondered.

“I believe she didn’t see that broken step and fell,” Beverly said frowning. “It is plain that——”

Shirley switched off the flashlights and grasped Beverly’s arm warningly.

“Someone is coming,” she whispered.

In the darkness, Lenora’s head in Beverly’s lap, the two girls waited while light footsteps sounded on the floor above them. The steps entered the kitchen, and a circle of light played down the steps. The stranger was coming down to the cellar! One foot descended and then the other. A ray of light played directly on the three girls, dazzling Beverly and Shirley. A sharp exclamation escaped the newcomer, and Beverly flashed her light on him.

“Larry!” she exclaimed.

“No other,” he answered gayly, but his tone immediately became serious. “What happened here?” he asked as he too knelt by Lenora.

“She came out here this afternoon to explore the cellar,” Beverly explained. “When she didn’t return tonight we came to look for her. We found her—like this.”

“Struck her head,” was his opinion after a quick exclamation. “I told you this place wasn’t safe. Why did you let her come?”

“Don’t preach,” Beverly said quickly. “Can’t we do something?”

“I’ll carry her up to the kitchen,” he said, lifting the unconscious girl in his arms. “She has a big lump on her head, but she isn’t seriously hurt. A little water will bring her around.”

He laid Lenora on the hastily cleared table and lent Beverly his handkerchief to bathe Lenora’s face and the bump.

“Oooooo, who pushed me?” Lenora demanded as she sat up swaying.

“You stumbled,” Beverly answered, supporting her with an anxious arm.

“My head!” Lenora murmured, pressing her hands to her temples. “It is pounding like a steam engine.”

“Can you stand?” Shirley asked.

Lenora slipped off the table, but her knees buckled under her. Beverly and Larry sprang to her aid.

“Hullo,” she said in surprise. “Are you the aviator?”

“That’s me,” Larry said grinning. “You know me?”

“You haunt this place,” Lenora said seating herself on the edge of the table. “I’ll never be able to walk to the Hall. My knees refuse to hold me.”

“I’ll carry you,” Larry offered promptly.

“You don’t need to,” Beverly said. “Shirley and I can manage.”

“Are you sure?”

“If you will light the way to the door,” Beverly said, nodding toward the flashlight. “It is rather dark out there. We don’t want to have any more falls.”

“Just a word of advice,” he said as he held the door open for them: “Hereafter keep away from this house. The men who use this mansion aren’t the kind to get mixed up with. Some one of you might get hurt.”

“You’re telling us,” Lenora groaned.

“We won’t stay away until we solve the mystery of the place,” Beverly returned jauntily.

Together, Beverly and Shirley managed to get Lenora back to Chadwick Hall and into bed without disturbing the other students.

CHAPTER XII

Thanksgiving Day

As the train pulled into New Haven two very excited girls were hanging from the steps at the imminent risk of slipping off and being hurled beneath the whirling wheels. Beverly and Anne, after many difficulties, had obtained permission to come and see the Thanksgiving Day game between Yale University and Jackson College. They were to stay overnight at a hotel. In the afternoon of the day they arrived would be the game, and at night a big dance in honor of the two football teams. The next afternoon they would board the train to go back to Vernon again. But they weren't thinking yet of parting. They were just arriving, and there were the boys!

Jim Stanton and Tommy Chandler had been chums of Beverly and Anne since early school days. They lived in the same town, only a few blocks apart. Beverly and Anne and Jim and Tommy were four of the members of a society calling themselves the Lucky Circle. The Lucky Circle consisted of boys and girls who had been friends since they all started high school. Unfortunately, the others were not able to be present to see this football game. The game meant a lot to Jim and Tommy because, since they were in their senior year, it would be the last time they would be able to play on the team. They had wanted all their home friends to see it, but Anne and Beverly were the only ones who had succeeded in coming.

As the train chugged to a halt the girls jumped from the steps, and two tall, husky young men descended on them with whoops of joy. Then prevailed such laughter and chatter as one hears only when young friends have been separated for a long while and reunited again. In Jim's car they drove to the hotel where the girls were staying, and then the boys had to leave to prepare for the game. The girls hastened up to their room to freshen up before lunch, after which they left for the field.

It was Thanksgiving Day, and the holiday crowds filled the Yale Bowl. The boys had secured prominent seats on the fifty-yard line for Beverly and Anne, and each girl was thrilled to the skies to be present at such an important game. They found their seats Without any trouble, and they interestedly watched the people as they poured into the grand stands.

“Isn’t it wonderful?” Anne asked as she munched peanuts.

“As Lenora would say,” Beverly replied, “it’s the nuts!”

The stadium echoed to the blasts of music from the college bands. The blue pennants of Yale dotted the stadium like tiny boats on a moving sea of people. The yellow-and-brown pennants of Jackson College waved spasmodically in the air. Cheery voices hurled back and forth opinions on the game. Everywhere were activity and a restless excitement.

A young man occupied the seat next to Beverly. For several minutes he had been staring rudely at her. Finally he leant over and spoke:

“Haven’t I seen you some place before?”

She looked up into the laughing, puzzled face above her. He was so evidently sincere that she could take no offense at what she thought was a mere attempt to get acquainted.

“I don’t think so,” she answered.

He snapped his fingers suddenly. “I know! You’re Jim Stanton’s girl, aren’t you?”

The color mounted to Beverly’s cheeks. “Yes,” she admitted.

“I should know you. I’ve seen your picture a hundred times,” he declared. “I’m Jim’s pal, Freddy Blakewell. Jim is on the team today, and it is going to be some game!”

“Do you always have such crowds?” Beverly asked, regarding the teeming hundreds that were still pouring into the stadium.

“Sure,” he said easily. “Everybody wants to see this game,” he explained. “Jackson hasn’t lost a game this season, and neither have we,” he added boastfully.

Whatever remark Beverly would have made was drowned in a thunderous burst of cheering as the teams ran out on the field. The crowd yelled, sang, and whistled while the band struck up the college song.

“Which one is Jim?” Beverly asked when the tumult had quieted down somewhat. “From this distance I don’t recognize him.”

“He is number seven,” Freddy Blakewell answered. “See him? There he is, talking to the coach.”

“What’s Tommy Chandler?” Beverly asked.

“Number twelve,” the young man replied.

Beverly communicated this information to Anne. While they digested a bag of peanuts the two girls watched the preparations for the game. Both had seen innumerable games when they were in high school, but this was the first big college game at which they had been present.

A coin was tossed to see which team would kick off. Jackson won. The captain of the yellow and brown backed away, ran up short, and kicked. The game was on! The ball went sailing through the air to land in the arms of the Yale quarterback. The man came running up until he was downed by a flying tackle on his own forty-yard line. Then the boys in blue tried a forward pass that fell short of its mark. Jim obtained the ball on another pass but was forced out of bounds in Jackson territory. Another man of the blue team fumbled the ball, and it bounced into the possession of a man on the yellow and brown.

The crowd cheered alternately under the direction of the white-clad cheer leaders. First a rousing cheer would go up from the Yale side as one of the boys on the blue team would gain a few yards. Then the Jackson rooters would yell as their man carried the ball deep into Yale territory.

The Yale boys advanced until they were on the Jackson five-yard line. It seemed only a matter of seconds before a Yale man would dive over the goal line for a touchdown. But the Jackson line held firm and slowly backed the blue fighters down the field. The yellow-and-brown team was grim and determined. They pushed their opponents down the field until positions were reversed. The Jackson team was on the Yale five-yard line and in imminent danger of scoring. The Jackson captain dropped back and received a pass on a long throw. As he came charging up, headed straight for the goal, a blue man detached himself from his comrades and dived for the yellow-and-brown man. He missed, and the Jackson man went over the goal line for a touchdown. The score was 6-0 in favor of Jackson.

The teams lined up for the kick that would mean an extra point for Jackson College.

“Block that kick! Block that kick!” chanted the Yale rooters.

A sudden hush fell over the thousands of spectators as the Jackson captain backed away slowly. The ball was in position, and he let it fly. By a superhuman effort a Yale man jumped up into the air and diverted the ball from its course. It fell short of the goal post. Then such a roar as welled up from the Yale spectators! The noise threatened to deafen everyone in the grand stand.

During the rest of the first half the Yale team tried its best to make a touchdown, but somehow the Jackson line always held firm and defeated every play that the boys in blue made. When the timekeeper's whistle blew, the Yale team was on the Jackson ten-yard line, but it might as well have been the fifty-yard line, so little chance had they of scoring.

During the rest period between the halves Jim's pal, Freddy Blakewell, entertained the girls with stories of the other big games that Yale had played—and won.

“Think you will win today?” Anne asked. “The score is six against you.”

“We're always better in the second half. I shouldn't be surprised if we make two touchdowns this time,” Freddy said modestly.

The girls exchanged amused glances but said nothing. It was evident that Freddy took great delight in bragging about his school, and sometimes he overshot the mark. The boys in blue would never make two touchdowns while Jackson held such a strong defense.

More uproarious cheering greeted the teams when they came on the field for the second half. The ball reverted to Jackson's possession, and the yellow-and-brown boys proceeded to struggle hard for another touchdown. But this time the Yale boys were adamant. The coach had said some harsh things about their playing in the last half, and now they were on the field, determined to show him and the world in general that their team was good. They might be good players, but even so they could not make a touchdown against Jackson.

The game entered the last quarter, and the Yale fans were holding their breath with expectancy. If Yale was beaten today it would be the first game of the season that they had lost. The Jackson team had pushed the boys in blue back to their fifteen-yard line. The ball was in possession of the yellow-and-brown team, and they decided to try a forward pass. It was a fine chance for another touchdown. The ball was hurtling through the air when it was intercepted by a Yale man. Jim had the ball tucked under his arm, and with marvelous agility he eluded the tacklers that dived for him and started on a record run down the field. Ten—fifteen—twenty——

“Run, Jim, run!” the young fellow next to Beverly was yelling, beside himself with excitement.

Eighty-five yards for a touchdown! The fans were half crazy with elation and were yelling themselves hoarse. Jim was the hero of the minute. He had intercepted the forward pass and tied the score! It was a game that would linger in the memory of all of them.

“What did I tell you?” Freddy Blakewell demanded jubilantly, falling back exhausted in his seat. It was quite evident that the game was as much a strain on him as it was on the players.

The teams were lining up for the kick. The ball went hurtling through the air and over the goal post. Another hero was added to the list of famous football players. Tommy Chandler had made the point that gave them a one-point lead over Jackson. The Yale fans were beside themselves with joy. Even the members of the team were hopping about the field like wild Indians. With difficulty, they overcame their jubilant spirits and settled down to play the rest of the quarter.

“Jim’s hurt!” Beverly cried when, after a scrimmage in which all the players piled on top of one another, the boy in the blue sweater bearing the number seven failed to rise immediately.

“Just winded probably,” Freddy consoled her.

“But he is limping!” Beverly insisted.

“The Doc’s rubbing his leg,” Freddy contributed. “He’ll be O. K.”

After a few minutes’ time out the boys were back in play, Jim as spry as ever. The Yale boys were infected with the spirit of victory now, and nothing could daunt them. They held the Jackson team back with a minimum of effort. They were advancing steadily for another touchdown over the yellow-and-brown team when the timekeeper’s whistle blew, heralding the end of the game.

The girls made their way back to the hotel slowly. They strolled, for a while, through the town, taking in the sights. They had dinner in the hotel dining room, and then the boys called to take them to the big dance.

The boys were splendid in evening clothes. Beverly wore a simple gown of blue that fell away in a shower of ruffles, reaching to the tips of her silver slippers. Anne wore a dainty dress of pink chiffon. Each had a corsage of sweet peas and lilies of the valley, gifts from the boys.

The ballroom was decorated with the school colors. Shaded lights sent colors over the dancers, harmonizing with the shades of the girls' gowns. The floor was like polished glass, and the dancers glided smoothly over it. A band furnished the sweet music.

Each couple was in a fairyland of its own. To each boy the girl in his arms was the cinderella of his dreams, and to each girl her boy partner was Prince Charming. Each youthful heart was beating rapturously as eyes met eyes and adoring smiles flashed back and forth. As the girls were whirled and twisted through the rhythm of the dance, the colors of their gowns gave the effect of gay flowers being tossed on the wind.

Between dances the couples gathered in secluded corners to have intimate tête-à-têtes, or strolled in the moonlit garden outside. It was during one of these between-dance-intermissions that Beverly and Jim strolled out into the garden.

Jim had been in love with Beverly ever since he was a boy in the third grade at school and she in the first. He had started then carrying her books home, and she had admitted him to the privileged position of her best friend. All through high-school days it had been Jim and Beverly who went together to the games and dances. Now he was entering into man's estate while Beverly still was much of the little girl he had known years ago.

"Hasn't it been a wonderful Thanksgiving Day, Jim?" she asked as with her arm tucked in his they strolled in the moonlight.

"It has for me," he answered. "Have you enjoyed it?"

"Oh, so much," she said eloquently. "Anne and I were counting our blessings this afternoon, and you would be surprised at the long list of things we have to be thankful for."

"Such as——" he encouraged.

"Our home, our parents, our friends," she enumerated them for his benefit.

Jim looked down at the girl beside him. The moonlight sent a silver radiance over her, bathing her in its purity. She looked like some slim goddess who had stepped down from her throne to walk through the world of men. He felt almost humble with adoration. The moonlight gave her clear-cut profile a classic beauty and danced with wonder over the dark curly head. She scarcely seemed the same girl who had laughed and romped and played mischievous tricks in the light of the golden sun. Tonight she seemed

grown up. She seemed so far above him that he felt as though he scarcely knew her.

Suddenly, quite suddenly, he bent over and kissed her.

“Why, Jim!” she gasped, taken utterly aback by surprise.

“Please, Beverly, don’t be angry. You looked so sweet and—lovely that—I had to see if you were real!”

CHAPTER XIII

More Mystery

“WELCOME back, prodigals!” Lenora and Shirley and Lois acted as a welcoming committee to the two girls returning after their brief Thanksgiving Day holiday.

“Cheerio!” Anne responded.

“How ya doin’?” Beverly inquired in some brand-new slang that she had acquired during the memorable football game.

“You’ve been missing things,” Shirley informed her roommate.

“How was the game?” Lenora demanded. “We listened in on the radio, but those announcers don’t tell you much. They describe the game word for word all right, but they talk so fast that half the time you can’t catch what they say.”

“It was wonderful!” Anne exclaimed.

“And exciting!” Beverly added.

“And there was the most marvelous dance afterward,” contributed Anne. “It was really the—the——” she floundered for an adjective capable of expressing her opinion.

“The nuts?” Lenora finished for her.

“Exactly,” Beverly agreed. “The nuts!”

“I wish I could have been there,” Lenora sighed. “All we did on Thanksgiving Day was to cram ourselves so full of turkey that we couldn’t move for the rest of the day.”

“That was something,” Lois declared.

“What did you mean by saying we were missing things?” Beverly asked of Shirley.

“Oh, wait until you hear.” Lenora bounced up and down excitedly on Beverly’s bed. “We have really got a mystery now.”

“What happened?”

“There has been a murder!” Lenora informed her dramatically.

“A murder!” Beverly echoed, awe-stricken. “Who? Where?”

“An unidentified man was shot,” Shirley explained.

“Right close to the Horler Mansion,” Lois added her bit of information.

“Night before last,” Lenora continued. “The police have been unable to find any clues that might lead to the murderer. They are convinced, however, that the mysterious men who haunt the mansion are responsible.”

“Haven’t they any idea who the murdered man is?” Anne asked.

“He has never been seen around these parts before,” Lois answered. “The police believe he comes from New York.”

“Have they arrested anybody?” Beverly wanted to know.

“No,” Lenora answered. “I told you, they believe the ghosts of the mansion have done it. The police can’t get a-hold of them to arrest anyone.”

“Have they seen any of the men in the house?” Beverly continued.

“One policeman insists he saw a Chinaman poking about in the front room where the fireplace is,” Shirley replied, “but when he investigated there was no one there. The Chinaman had evidently disappeared into the hidden room.”

“Have any of you seen Larry?” Beverly asked.

“No,” Lenora answered. “None of us have seen him. I suppose he is shut up in the hidden room like the rest of them, waiting until the affair blows over.”

“I wonder if he is really one of the gang,” Beverly murmured thoughtfully.

“He is awfully interested in the place,” Lenora commented.

“So are we,” Shirley reminded her.

“We are trying to solve the mystery of the house,” Lenora said.

“Maybe he is too,” Anne suggested.

The next afternoon, after classes, Beverly and Lenora walked out to the old house. It appeared gloomy and deserted. Lenora, eager to impart gruesome details, pointed out for Beverly’s benefit the spot where the body of the slain man had been found.

The girls mounted the steps to the porch and peered in the window. They opened the door and entered. The two went to the room where the fireplace was. Shirley had explained, with gestures, to the rest of the girls how she and Beverly had seen the fireplace swing out, disclosing the entrance to a hidden room. It was the girls’ desire and intention to find the hidden spring that controlled the fireplace. With this knowledge in their possession they would invade the hidden portion of the old mansion and determine what the strange men were doing there. Of course, they agreed, they should tell the police, but it would really be better to tell the authorities after they had actually discovered something. Now they only had suspicions.

The girls were interested in pressing and tapping bricks on the fireplace when heavy footsteps overhead startled them. The scuffling grew louder as the steps sounded on the stairs.

“Let’s get out of here,” Lenora said excitedly.

Beverly nodded, and they ran for the door. As they entered the hall a loud voice halted them. A man came up and flashed a light in their faces.

“Girls!” he gasped. “What are you doing here?” he demanded.

“I’m a reporter on the *Comet*, and I’m after a story,” Beverly said glibly.

“Who are you, King Tut?” Lenora asked insolently, believing she was addressing one of the ghosts.

“Don’t get fresh!” the man said and showed them his badge.

“Holy smoke!” Lenora gasped. “A policeman!”

“Yes, a policeman,” he mimicked. “And I’m going to take you to the station house.”

“But we’re not doing anything,” Beverly said. “I’m only after a story for the college paper.”

“That’s what you say,” he answered.

Another man was coming down the steps, and Lenora pounced on him eagerly. He was the father of one of the students at the college, and both girls

had met him several times.

“Oh, Mr. Maxwell,” she pleaded, “tell him who we are. He thinks we are in league with the mysterious ghosts!”

“They are girls from the college all right,” Mr. Maxwell assured the officer. “I’ve met them both.”

“Well,” Inspector Dugan said, puzzled, “if you vouch for them, Mr. Maxwell, I guess they are all right. But I don’t see what you want climbing through such a dusty old place as this.”

“We’re after a story,” Lenora repeated.

“Well, if you see any of the skeletons, you will certainly have one,” the inspector declared.

“We’ve met the whole gang,” Lenora said impressively. “The skeletons have even danced for us.”

“Then you should stay away from here,” the inspector said. “Come along, we’re leaving, and you have to go with us. I’ve given strict orders to lock up the place so no one can get in. That means you, too,” he added.

“But——” Lenora began.

“No buts about it,” the inspector said determinedly. “You can’t run through this place any more.”

“That’s the end of our mystery,” Lenora sighed. “When anything does happen in Vernon, someone is sure to spoil it!”

“Perhaps it is better that they did lock the place,” Beverly said thoughtfully. “There shouldn’t be any more murders now.”

“They haven’t solved the other one yet,” Lenora answered.

CHAPTER XIV

New York for the Holidays

“I’VE CALLED this special meeting of the Alpha Delta Sorority,” Shirley explained, “to suggest something.”

“Go right ahead,” Lenora said magnanimously.

“We’re all ears,” Lois added.

“If it is any more mysteries, we don’t want ’em,” Rosalie said.

“It’s no mystery,” Beverly assured them.

“Do you know what it is?” Anne asked her friend.

Beverly nodded. “I think it is fine.”

“Well, why keep us in suspense?” Lenora demanded. “Dish us the dirt,” she commanded slangily.

“It’s just this. The Christmas holidays are coming soon, and I’d—I’d like to have you all come home with me to New York,” Shirley said.

“All of us?” Lenora asked incredulously.

“Yes. We could have a grand time. I promise to show you all the big sights of the city until you are completely dazzled.”

“Isn’t that fine?” Beverly asked the other girls.

“I’m speechless!” Lenora declared. “Words fail me!”

“Please say you will all come,” Shirley begged. “I’ve already written my parents that I’m bringing you, and things are being planned for us.”

“What things?” Lois asked interestedly.

“Oh, dances, teas, theater parties——”

“That settles it! Say no more,” Lenora pleaded of Shirley. “I’ve always wanted to go to an honest-to-goodness tea. I’ll come.”

“Great!” Shirley declared. “What about the rest of you?”

“I’ll come,” Anne answered.

“Me too,” Lois stated.

“And I,” Rosalie agreed.

“Then all of you will be my guests for the holidays,” Shirley murmured happily. “You can be sure we will paint the town red.”

The girls left the college early in the morning. They boarded the train at the little station in Vernon. They had lunch on the train, and in early evening disembarked from the train in the Grand Central Station in New York. They drove to the Parker house on Riverside Drive in a big, shiny, black limousine, driven by a liveried chauffeur.

The girls knew Shirley’s parents were wealthy, but they were not prepared for such grandeur as met them on every hand. A butler and a maid were at the door.

“Hello, Chalmers,” Shirley said to the butler as he relieved her of her suitcase. “Are Mother and Father home?”

“Good-afternoon, miss. Your mother is at a tea at the Abberlys’. Your father is in the library,” the man answered respectfully.

“Marie!” Shirley called the maid. “Are the rooms ready for my guests?”

“Yes, miss. The two front rooms. I understood one of the young ladies was to room with you.”

“Yes. Have Carl” (the chauffeur) “bring the bags up to the rooms immediately.” Shirley turned back to the girls, who were very much impressed by Shirley’s grand manner with servants. “Come, girls, I’ll take you up to your rooms, then I’ll tell Father we have arrived.”

Shirley conducted the girls through a hall carpeted with a rich maroon rug into which the girls’ feet sank as though they were walking on pillows. Glancing into the rooms that opened off the hall the girls caught glimpses of polished floors, rich, distinctive furnishings, crystal chandeliers—everywhere the predominance of wealth. Up marble steps Shirley led them, into bedrooms on the second floor. And what rooms! The girls thought of their rooms at Chadwick Hall and sighed. The grandeur of these rooms was

amazing. Silken coverlets on the beds, damask curtains, thick rugs, even the dressing tables were complete to crystal perfume bottles.

Lois and Anne were to have the first room they came to, which was done in delicate pink and cream. Rosalie and Lenora shared the next room. This one was done in pale blue and white. Then Shirley took Beverly to her own room which Beverly was to share for the holidays.

The walls were paneled in green with flowers scattered over the surface. The furniture and the curtains were pale green, as was the rug that covered the floor. A chaise-longue piled high with lace cushions occupied one corner of the room, and a desk the opposite one. A dressing table, with the latest ebony fittings, faced the girls as they entered.

Beverly regarded the room with shining eyes. "You are overwhelmed with luxury, aren't you?" she asked.

"Hmm," Shirley answered noncommittally. "Do you mind because I haven't put you in with one of the other girls? I wanted you for myself."

"Of course I don't mind!" Beverly said, hugging her friend. "I think it was splendid of you to bring all the girls home with you for the holidays," she added.

"It wasn't splendid," Shirley confessed. "It was pure selfishness on my part. I wanted so much to have a good time these holidays. Somehow I don't think I should have without some of our gang here."

"Well, we're all here and just aching to see the sights!" Beverly said cheerfully.

"Do you mind if I leave you for a few minutes, Beverly?" Shirley asked. "I ought to go down and see my father. When you are ready, come down. I want him to meet you."

When Shirley had gone, Beverly changed her traveling suit for an afternoon frock. The other girls weren't ready yet, so she went down the great marble staircase all by herself. Servants flitted noiselessly about, bowing respectfully when they came upon Beverly. It was strange, this being a guest in a rich mansion. It was a novel experience, and Beverly reveled in it. Yet, for all her wealth, she would not change places with Shirley.

Beverly knew, from what Shirley had told her, that the latter was not happy. Her parents were too taken up, her father with his business and her mother with society, to pay much attention to Shirley. She had few friends, only those she had made at Vernon, and she traveled very seldom. Her

wealth really did her little good. Instead of being used as a source of pleasure and happiness, it had deprived her of the things every young girl should have—a happy childhood, friends, loving parents——

“Oh, Beverly, will you come in here?” Shirley’s voice hailed her from the library.

Beverly proceeded across the hall. Her feet sank deep into maroon carpet. Heavy draperies covered the windows, books lined three walls, and a few high-back chairs were scattered about. In the center of the room was a rich mahogany desk. As she entered, a man, middle aged and with an air of preoccupation, rose and came forward.

“Beverly, this is my father. Dad, this is my roommate at college, Beverly Gray, the girl who saved my life in the fire last year.”

“Ah, yes, I’m very pleased to meet you, my dear. It was brave of you, exceedingly brave.” He turned to Shirley. “Will you excuse me, my dear? I have some—er—important work to do.”

As they left the library Shirley murmured to Beverly: “That is Father.”

“He seems nice,” Beverly hazarded.

“Too busy,” Shirley answered. “He does nothing but work. He is completely wrapped up in it.”

A loud noise interrupted what she was about to say, and they turned to face the front door.

“The saints preserve us,” Shirley murmured, “here comes Mother!”

A woman, slight and nervous, dressed in the very latest fashion and with expensive furs draped about her, entered, followed by the chauffeur.

“It is inexcusable, Carl. We will say no more about it. You are discharged. See Mr. Parker for your check at once.”

“But, Mrs. Parker——” the young man pleaded.

“Ah, Shirley, my dear!” She kissed Shirley lightly on the cheek. “When did you arrive, darling? This is one of your guests?”

Shirley introduced Beverly, and after one or two murmured phrases Mrs. Parker moved off up the stairs. Shirley turned to the chauffeur.

“What happened, Carl?”

The young man looked up with a grin. “I was five minutes late in calling for Mrs. Parker at the Abberlys’. It wasn’t my fault, I was caught in a traffic

jam.”

“Mother has discharged you again?”

“Yes,” he admitted.

“Well, explain things to Dad. I’m sure he’ll keep you on,” Shirley said, smiling. “The next time, I would leave in plenty of time to arrive for Mother at the time she specifies.” She turned to Beverly as the young man moved away in the direction of the library. “Mother discharges him about three times a week, and Dad hires him again.”

“That marble balustrade was just made to slide down,” Lenora declared coming up behind them.

“Go ahead and slide down it,” Shirley invited.

“I don’t want to shock the household,” Lenora said with dignity. “I came to New York with the firm resolution that for this one week in my life I would be a lady—if it kills me!” she added humorously.

“It might,” Rosalie said unfeelingly. “You can’t do the impossible, you know.”

“Oh, is that so?” Lenora demanded. “I want you to know all my ancestors were ladies and gentlemen!”

“More likely they were savages,” Lois contributed.

“Shirley, are you going to let them insult me this way?” Lenora demanded tearfully.

“Of course not,” Shirley comforted. “We won’t listen to them. Let’s go into the sitting room and play the radio.”

“We’ll all come,” Lois stated.

“What are we going to do tonight?” Anne wanted to know.

“Anything you like,” Shirley answered. “We left the first night open because we thought you might be tired from traveling.”

“Then let’s walk about the town,” Lenora proposed.

“We’ll take the bus and ride,” Shirley said. “It will give you a chance to see the sights.”

After dinner the girls gayly fared forth for their first glimpse of New York night life. The clamor of the city enveloped them on all sides. The din and honking and rattle of the millions of automobiles nearly deafened them.

They boarded a bus, and as they rode up Riverside Drive they could see the lights on the craft on the Hudson and along the west shore. Boats were plying up and down the river, coming from and going to all parts of the world, bearing their precious cargoes.

CHAPTER XV

Sight Seeing

THE next afternoon the girls, under the protective wing of Mrs. Parker, went to a tea given by one of society's four hundred. A great musician was the guest of honor, and for an hour they listened to his playing. The girls were overwhelmed by the importance of the famous writers, politicians, and society folk that they met.

Beverly, for a moment, was standing alone by the window looking out at the gray skyline. A young man approached her and smiled easily.

"You are a stranger, aren't you?"

"Yes," she admitted.

"I thought you didn't look as bored as the rest of these experienced people," he said laughing.

"Oh, is it essential that one look bored?" Beverly asked.

"Gracious, no," he laughed again. "But after one of these affairs one acquires the habit. I'm Charlie Blaine, reporter for the *Herald Tribune*. I have to cover all the society stuff and report on the people I meet, such as Senator Whosis or the famous Mr. What's-his-name."

Right then and there Beverly was interested in knowing him. Her own desire to become a newspaper writer provided a basis for their friendship, and they found much to talk about. She told him about her position on the college paper, and he provided interesting experiences he had had as a reporter. After that the tea was not as dull as it had seemed before she met him. He kept up a cheery fire of talk that left her breathless from laughter. Lenora and Lois descended on them, and Beverly introduced him. He was interested in each one.

Before he left them he suggested a sightseeing trip under his guidance. He magnanimously promised to take them anywhere they wanted to go.

“I want to see the town from the top of the Empire State Building, and Chinatown,” Lenora said promptly.

“Two extremes,” he laughed. “Very well, you shall see them both. When do you want to go? Tomorrow afternoon? We’ll see the buildings in the afternoon and Chinatown at night.”

“Goody-goody,” Lois applauded.

“But suppose Shirley has made plans for something else?” Beverly hazarded.

“We’ll find out,” Lenora declared. She beckoned Shirley, and things were explained to that young lady.

“We were supposed to go to a show,” she answered, “but if you would rather do this, we will go to the show another night.”

Charlie Blaine, as reporter for the *Herald Tribune*, knew his city like a book and proved to be the most efficient guide the girls could have had. He took them to see Grant’s Tomb and the Statue of Liberty, things no sightseer would miss. He took them up to the top of the Empire State Building. From the dizzy height the girls regarded the world below them with interest. People and automobiles looked like flies, and the clamor of the traffic seemed strangely far away. He took them, as a final coup for the afternoon, to Radio City. There they watched many of their favorite radio stars as they broadcast. The intricacies of broadcasting were explained to them, and the girls marveled. They were loath to leave when it came time to continue on their excursion. Faithfully they promised one another again to visit the magnificent structure before they went back to Vernon.

For their dinner, Charlie Blaine took them to a Russian restaurant where they listened to sweet gypsy music while they dined. Afterward they boarded a sightseeing bus and proceeded to Chinatown. After a while they left the bus and continued on foot. Down crooked streets and past darkened alleyways where crime rears its ugly head, through smoky Chinese restaurants, Charlie Blaine showed them how squalidly the people of the underworld lived.

“See that man,” he said nodding toward a young man who lounged indolently in a doorway. “He has committed two murders and he is only twenty-three.”

“Horrors!” Anne murmured.

“Why do they leave such people at large?” Rosalie asked. “Why don’t the police put them in jail?”

“Justice,” the reporter answered, “demands that the worst criminal be given a fair trial. The jury can’t convict a man without enough evidence against him. That fellow always has a perfect alibi, but some day, sooner or later, he will slip and the police will catch him.”

Beverly and Shirley were walking together, and as they came opposite a restaurant a man stepped out into the street. The girls had one clear view of his face before his hat hid his features. Beverly grasped Shirley’s arm in a fierce grip. The man was the man she had met in the Horler Mansion. The man who had introduced himself as the “head ghost.”

“Who is that man?” she demanded of the reporter.

“That,” Charlie Blaine replied, “is Pete, commonly known as a smuggler. Why?”

“I’ve seen him some place before,” Beverly answered.

“Not likely,” the reporter laughed. “He doesn’t travel in the same world socially as you do.”

Beverly said nothing, but decided then that when she arrived back in Vernon she would go immediately to Inspector Dugan and tell him all that she had seen and heard.

It was late when the young people got back to the Parkers’, but nevertheless they gathered in Shirley’s and Beverly’s room to talk over the events of the day.

The next afternoon they spent shopping. Each had received a check for Christmas from her parents and promptly proceeded to spend it all on clothes and trinkets with which to dazzle their friends back at Vernon.

They had dinner at the Parker home and then departed for a party. They met more writers, actors, musicians, politicians, and society folk than they had supposed existed even in the big city of New York.

“Gosh,” Lenora murmured tragically, “if I have to acknowledge any more introductions I’ll bust!”

“So you can’t take it,” Lois said slangily under her breath.

“Tsk, tsk!” Lenora said, frowning on her friend. “How can you use such undignified language at a highbrow party?”

For the large part of the evening they danced or played bridge. They had a mildly good time, but each was secretly glad to leave when the time came.

“Never mind,” Shirley consoled them. “The party tomorrow night will be much different. There will be more young people there.”

A married friend of Shirley’s gave the party in her apartment, and it was a much more hilarious affair than the first one had been. There was more dancing and bridge, but this time laughter and jokes were flung back and forth with gay abandon. The high spot of the evening was a treasure hunt. Every guest picked a piece of paper out of a hat. On the slip of paper was written an object. The girl, or the young man, as the case might be, had to go out, find the object, and bring it back to the party. Giggles and groans ensued as the guests unfolded the papers and read the name of the object they must find.

“Gracious,” Shirley said, “look at this, will you? I have to find a saxophone player—male, who has red hair!”

Beverly giggled. “I have to get a life preserver from an ocean liner.”

“Good heavens!” Lenora gasped as she read what was written on her slip of paper. “I have to find a taxicab driver who has nine children!”

These and similar exclamations escaped them as they compared notes. One by one the guests departed to obtain their “treasures.”

“You might as well come along with me,” Shirley said to Beverly. “I have to ride about town until I come upon a saxophone player who has red hair.”

“You can take me down to the docks until I get my life preserver,” Beverly said as she got into the limousine beside Shirley.

“Carl,” Shirley demanded of the chauffeur, “do you know where we can find a red-headed saxophone player?”

“You’ve got me there,” he grinned. “You will have to try every place that has an orchestra. Surely one of them will have a red-headed player.”

“Well,” Shirley sighed, “proceed to the hotels. We’ll try them first.”

They traveled to one hotel and restaurant after another. Blonds, brunets, even bald-headed saxophone players, but no red-heads. Shirley gave up in

failure. They drove to the docks, and there Beverly did her best to buy a life preserver.

“I can’t sell you one, miss,” the steward of a boat insisted.

“Then let me borrow one for an hour,” Beverly pleaded.

“Say,” Shirley remarked irrelevantly, “you’ve got red hair. Do you play a saxophone?”

“Sure,” the steward admitted bashfully. “But——”

“That’s all I want to know.” Shirley grabbed his arm and pulled him toward the gangplank.

“See here,” the steward protested, hanging back. “What’s the big idea? Am I being kidnaped?”

Shirley and Beverly explained over again the situation and why they needed a life preserver. Finally the steward agreed to go along to the party and, for Beverly’s benefit, to take along a life preserver.

The two girls arrived back jubilant, their prizes in tow. Lois and Rosalie and Anne returned with their objects, but Lenora remained absent for a long while. Finally, breathless but triumphant, she strode in, pulling after her an unwilling taxicab driver.

“There he is,” she announced. “A taxicab driver who has nine children! Perhaps you can convince him that I’m not altogether insane. He thought I was playing some kind of a joke on him. I expected to be arrested any minute for asking every taxi driver I met such a personal question,” she declared to her friends. “It is really a miracle that I wasn’t.”

CHAPTER XVI

Assistant Reporter

“MISS GRAY is wanted on the telephone,” the maid announced.

It was the morning after the party, and the girls were at the breakfast table. Mrs. Parker was having her breakfast, as usual, in bed, and her husband had already gone downtown to his office.

“I am?” Beverly looked up in surprise.

“Beverly Gray,” Lenora fixed a stern eye on her friend, “have you an ardent suitor of whom you have told us nothing?”

“Yes,” Beverly laughed. “He is a taxicab driver with nine children.”

Lenora sighed dramatically. “Woe is me. I shall never be able to live that down. It will always be a shadow on my past.”

“And what a past!” Lois sighed.

Beverly excused herself from the table and went to the phone in the hall.

“Hello, Miss Gray?” a gay voice demanded.

“Yes,” Beverly answered, puzzled.

“This is Charlie Blaine from the *Herald Tribune*.”

“Oh, how are you, Mr. Blaine?” Beverly said, laughing. “I didn’t recognize your voice.”

“I’m fine, thanks,” he answered. “I have two invitations for a ball to be given tonight in honor of the Duke of Whatzisname. I thought, since you are interested in becoming a reporter, that you might like to come along and help me gather the material for my story for the society column in the morning paper.”

“I’d love it!” Beverly declared.

“Fine. I’ll call for you at eight. Good-bye.”

When Beverly told the rest of the girls about the invitation, there were envious sighs and teasing laughs.

“I’m interested in journalism too when it concerns a young and handsome reporter,” Lenora declared.

“You’re just jealous,” Beverly smiled.

“Oh-ho,” Lois laughed. “I don’t envy you. With all the parties and teas and dances we’ve been to this week, I’m about through with formal affairs.”

“You and me both,” Lenora declared. “You know,” she sipped her coffee thoughtfully regarding Shirley, “Shirley rather scares me.”

Shirley laughed. “My gracious, how is that?”

“I don’t think she is very terrifying,” Anne chimed in.

“Oh, it isn’t that she has the appearance of a monster,” Lenora hastened to explain.

“Thank goodness for that,” Shirley sighed.

“In fact, I think she is rather lovely,” Lenora continued.

“Thanks again,” Shirley laughed.

“You’re welcome,” Lenora said magnanimously. “It’s just—you have such a grand manner with servants, and you know so many distinguished people—I like you better when we’re at Vernon. There you are just one of us.”

Shirley toyed with her grapefruit absently. “To tell the truth, I like it better when we are at Vernon too. I don’t want any of you to think that I brought you here to my home just to show off my things. You were all so decent to me last year at Vernon when I was going to make a hash of my life that I wanted to do something, and this was the only thing I could think of.”

“Well,” Rosalie sighed, “you have certainly given us a good time. Vernon will seem dead after the excitement of New York.”

“Don’t you love the skyline at night?” Beverly asked dreamily. “When all the lights come out just like stars.”

“Yeah,” Lenora added, “and the auto horns make so much noise that you can’t hear yourself think.”

“Unromantic!” Lois flung at her.

“If you two will stop squabbling long enough to get dressed, we will do some more shopping,” Shirley said rising.

“Let’s go!” Rosalie added promptly.

Charlie Blaine called for Beverly promptly at eight o’clock. The girls were all waiting to see the two leave. He whirled about, showing off his evening clothes for their benefit.

“How do you like it? Isn’t it spiffy?” he demanded gayly.

“There is no other word that would adequately describe it,” Lenora declared.

He handed Beverly into the taxi as if it had been a royal gold chariot and she a princess of the highest rank.

“Who did you say this ball was given for?” she asked.

“I didn’t say,” he answered. “This morning when I telephoned you the name had completely slipped my memory. However, it is the Duke of Abernethy. There will also be a couple of counts—foreign counts are as plentiful as peanuts at a football game—a lord or two, maybe even a prince.”

“You will have plenty for your column,” she declared.

“It won’t amount to much unless something interesting happens,” he said sighing. “It is just the usual list of names. Tonight you will see some of the most famous jewels in all New York. Mrs. Cathelwaite will no doubt wear her famous emerald, worth about a quarter of a million dollars. Madame deFreigne has a diamond set in a bracelet that is worth a half million.”

“Aren’t they afraid they will be robbed? Isn’t it dangerous ‘to wear such costly jewelry?’” Beverly asked.

“It’s their worry,” he said unconcernedly. “If there is a robbery, it means a break for us reporters. Then, too, there is usually a detective or two present.”

The ballroom was crowded when they arrived. Charlie Blaine swung Beverly out onto the floor, and as they danced he kept her amused with chatter about the other guests.

“See that tall fellow with the monocle? That is the Duke of Abernethy. He is dancing with Mrs. Cathelwaite. Note the emerald.”

Beverly did and marveled.

“See those two fellows over there with the red ribbons across their chests?” he asked. “They are the Comtes Paul and Raoul le Follette. There is another count,” he pointed out. “I never saw him before. I’ll have someone introduce us.”

Charlie Blaine had no trouble in finding someone who was acquainted with him as well as with the count, and Beverly found herself being presented to the Comte de Bourgeine, of the French nobility. The count was gracious enough to dance with her, and Beverly was thrilled to her fingertips. A dance with a real count. This would be something to tell the girls!

“Ah, mademoiselle,” said the count, his foreign accent very noticeable, “I would not ’ave meest the plazure of thees dance for anything in the world.”

“You are very flattering, Count,” Beverly smiled, the high color in her cheeks.

“*Non, non,*” he declared. “Eet eez you who are ver’ beautiful! You are the most beautiful one here.”

“Even more so than Mrs. Cathelwaite with her emerald?” Beverly teased.

“Mrs. Cathelwaite! Poof!” the count scoffed. “A million times more charming even than Madame deFreigne and her diamond bracelet.”

“It is beautiful, the diamond, I mean,” Beverly said hastily.

“A gem!” he declared, and over her head his eyes sought and rested on the bracelet in question. “A gem!” he repeated.

“You are fond of jewels, Count?” Beverly asked.

“Eh? What makes you say that?” he demanded. Did his voice sound startled?

“Your eyes, just now when you looked at the diamond,” Beverly said softly. “They looked so strange.”

He laughed easily. “Eez eet not enough that I appreciate beauty? Madame deFreigne’s diamond eez beautiful, ah, yes, but eet eez not as beautiful as the Cullinan diamond which was presented to King Edward VII of England. The Cullinan diamond was appraised at nine hundred thousand dollars. Think of eet, my little dancer, nine hundred thousand dollars! Eez eet not a fortune?”

The dance was brought to a close with a loud blare of trumpets, and Charlie Blaine strolled up and demanded the next one.

“It must be wonderful to be a society reporter such as you and know everybody,” Beverly said to Mr. Blaine.

He laughed. “I thought so once, but now it is getting monotonous with all the balls here and the receptions there.”

“I don’t think I should tire of it,” she declared.

“Perhaps you wouldn’t,” he admitted. “Girls rather go for the fancy stuff. I’d much rather be assigned to a murder case or something equally as——”

A woman’s scream rang out. Instantly the music stopped and excited voices demanded to know what the matter was. Madame deFreigne had been robbed of her diamond bracelet! in the center of the dance floor, amid a hundred people or more, her bracelet had disappeared! Then ensued such a hubbub of chatter and exclamations that not even the detective could make himself heard.

Beverly and Charlie Blaine were standing on the edge of the crowd eagerly watching the proceedings. Out of the corner of her eye Beverly saw a man detach himself from the crowd and slip out. Another room, fashioned after the manner of a cloak and rest room, and which housed a telephone, was next to the ballroom, and into this the man went. The girl and the young reporter tiptoed to the door and listened. The man was speaking into the telephone.

“Hello, sure I’ve got it. Yep, O. K. Listen——”

“He stole it!” the reporter said excitedly. “Watch him until I get the police. Keep him in that room—somehow. He mustn’t get away, understand?”

Beverly nodded. “He won’t get away.”

“Good girl.” Blaine patted her shoulder encouragingly. “Keep him in there and save the diamond and I’ll spread your picture all over the front page of tomorrow’s paper.”

“I’ll keep him in there,” Beverly said determinedly, “but I don’t want my picture in the paper.”

Blaine laughed and ran back to the ballroom. The man had finished his telephone call and was coming toward the door with his overcoat over his arm.

“Good-evening, Count de Bourgeine,” Beverly said stepping into the room and closing the door. “You aren’t leaving so soon?”

A quick glance about the room showed her that it had no windows. He could leave by no means but the door against which she stood.

“Ah! Eet eez Mademoiselle Gray! I am leaving. Much as I regret to do so, I must. I have thought I heard much noise and excitement in the ballroom, no? Is something the matter?”

Beverly smiled. What an excellent actor the man was—even to the accent! “Yes,” she answered. “There is quite a lot of excitement out there. Madame deFreigne’s diamond bracelet has disappeared.”

“*Non, non!*” the count gasped in amazement. “How tragic!”

“It may not be as big as the Cullinan diamond which was presented to King Edward, but it was big enough to steal, wasn’t it, Count?” Beverly asked, regarding him steadily. “Or aren’t you a count?”

The man’s eyes narrowed watchfully. “I do not understand, Mademoiselle.”

“That eez too bad,” she said, imitating to perfection his assumed accent. “Perhaps you will understand when the police get here.”

“Police?” he asked calmly with raised eyebrows. “What eez thees, Mademoiselle? Are you insinuating that I—I, Count de Bourgeine of the French nobility, would stoop to—to theft?”

Beverly smiled quietly. “I am insinuating nothing. It is strange, when you speak into a telephone, all trace of your accent miraculously disappears. Can you explain why?”

The man tossed his overcoat to one side and bent forward. “Move away from that door.”

“Why, Count,” Beverly said in mild surprise. “You’ve lost your accent! You are the queerest Frenchman that I’ve ever met.”

He sneered audibly. “I’m not any more French than you are. I’m not a count, either.”

“But you are fond of diamonds, aren’t you?” Beverly asked sweetly.

He laughed. “A fresh little thing, aren’t you? Yes, I’ve got the diamond bracelet,” he said, and all trace of laughter had left him. “Get away from the door. When the police arrive I am going to be miles from here.”

Beverly shook her head. “You are going to be right where you are now,” she declared.

“Listen,” he said roughly, “I don’t want to hurt you, but I’m going to if you don’t let me out of here right now!”

“Why, Mr. Whatever-your-name-is, you wouldn’t be rude to a lady, would you?” Beverly asked insolently. Oh, if Charlie Blaine would only hurry!

“I’ll show you,” he answered grimly.

He grasped her shoulder and endeavored to push her to one side, but she clung to the door knob. The man was strong, and his fingers cut into her shoulders like steel talons. But she didn’t let go her hold on the knob. She must keep him in the room until Mr. Blaine got back! The man lifted her from her feet and, whirling, set her down behind him. But before he could open the door Beverly was against it again. If only there were a key in the lock with which she might lock the door, but there wasn’t. Her gown was torn and her hair mussed and ruffled from the man’s effort to obtain freedom.

What was that? Footsteps in the hall outside? The door was thrown open, and Charlie Blaine and two officers of the law rushed in. The officers threw themselves upon the bogus count, and Beverly fell half-fainting into the arms of the young reporter.

“He didn’t get away,” she gasped smilingly.

“Gosh, but you’re a game little kid,” he said admiringly.

The diamond bracelet was returned to its hysterical owner, and Beverly was the heroine of the affair. Charlie Blaine had had a little trouble in convincing the officers that the count wasn’t really a count at all but a thief in disguise, and that was what had delayed him. Of course, when the officers saw how the man and Beverly had been struggling and found the stolen bracelet in his pocket, there wasn’t any room for further doubt.

“And you said there was no excitement in being a society reporter,” she accused Charlie Blaine as that young man drove her back to the Parker house.

“You did everything tonight,” he said. “All I did was to go for the police.”

“If you hadn’t come when you did, he would have gotten away,” she declared. “I couldn’t have held him much longer.”

“For Pete’s sake, what happened to you?” Lenora demanded when Beverly entered Shirley’s room, where the girls were gathered awaiting her. “That must have been some ball!”

Beverly explained her disheveled appearance while she changed into pajamas and dressing gown.

“Nothing ever happens at the balls I go to,” Lenora wailed. “Why do some people have all the luck?”

“I didn’t enjoy it!” Beverly said emphatically. She pushed back a sleeve and displayed several bruise marks where the bogus count’s fingers had grasped her arm.

“The brute!” Rosalie hissed.

The next morning the story of how Beverly had prevented the thief from escaping and so saved the famous DeFreigne diamond bracelet was in prominent print on the front page of the *Herald Tribune*, and the girls read it through several times, relishing the details. In the afternoon, much as they regretted it, they were compelled to take the train back to Vernon College. The holidays were over, and they must now settle down to college life again for the remaining months.

CHAPTER XVII

Back at Vernon

“GIVE my regards to Broadway,” Lenora sang, hanging out the window as the train roared away from the metropolis.

“You’ll fall out on your nose,” Lois warned.

“I hope we can come back to New York again before long,” Rosalie sighed.

“Me too,” Anne agreed promptly.

As the train roared on its way, the girls opened magazines or newspapers, lavishly supplied by Charlie Blaine, to while away the time. Beverly’s eyes strayed from the printed page before her to the trees and the bushes flitting past. They had had a good time these past days, and none of them would ever forget it. Her head fell back against the cushioned seat and her thoughts raced over the past and into the future.

“Beverly!” Shirley dispelled the rosy dreams Beverly was enjoying.

“What’s the matter?” Beverly demanded.

“That man,” Shirley whispered excitedly, pointing to a man who was disappearing into the car ahead.

“What’s the matter with him?” Beverly asked lazily. “Doesn’t the country look lovely?” she asked irrelevantly.

“That’s the head ghost!” Shirley exclaimed, shaking Beverly’s arm. “He must be going back to the Horler Mansion.”

“Are you sure?” Beverly asked, sitting up straight, all laziness dispelled.

“Positive! I got a good look at his face as he passed,” Shirley declared.

“The place is locked up tight,” Beverly said thoughtfully. “How will he get in?”

“Break a window,” Shirley suggested. “If he wanted to get in, he wouldn’t let a little thing like a lock stop him. Besides, he probably has a key to the front door.”

“Was he alone?” Beverly continued.

“He was when he passed me,” Shirley said. “He might have gone to meet someone in another car.”

“We can see for ourselves when he leaves the train at Vernon,” Beverly said, settling back comfortably and reopening her magazine.

The time and the miles sped away behind them. They had dinner in the dining car, and as Beverly and Shirley entered to seat themselves at a little table they took quick glances about. The head ghost was not in the car, and they settled down to an appetizing meal.

It was evening when the train pulled into the little town of Vernon. The girls swung themselves down from the train and took in the familiar sights with eager eyes. At least two of the returned travelers looked about for a man to descend behind them, but no one but the six girls left the train at Vernon. The head ghost had either left the train before this station or he was still on it. Evidently his destination was not the old mansion.

“Ah me, oh my,” Lenora sighed ecstatically. “New York is a grand old town, but I like my Alma Mater!”

“So say we all of us,” Lois sang cheerfully.

“Let’s have a soda at Weller’s before we go to the Hall,” Lenora proposed. “All in favor say ‘aye’!”

All six voices shouted, “Aye!”

Instead of taking a table, as they usually did, in the ice-cream salon, the girls lined up on stools at the soda fountain.

“Well, have there been any more murders at the old mansion?” Lenora asked the soda clerk as he served them.

“No,” he smiled. “Everything has been as quiet as a graveyard.”

“Graveyard!” Lois echoed. “That reminds me of skeletons. Has anyone seen any more ghosts in the old house?”

“Nope,” the young man answered. “When the police locked the place, I guess they scared all the ghosts away.”

“I have a feeling that the ghosts will return,” Shirley murmured, with an owlish glance at Beverly. Since the head ghost was in the vicinity, the skeletons would be dancing again.

“You would suggest something like that,” Lois said shivering. “I hope I never see them again!”

The girls proceeded to Chadwick Hall, where the other returned students gave them a rousing welcome. New York had been exciting, and they had had lots of good times, but it was nice to get back to their old friends.

Classes started the next day, and after the afternoon sessions Beverly left her friends and strolled out to the deserted mansion. Most of the windows had been boarded up, and the door was fastened securely against any chance visitors. In the cold light of the January afternoon the house appeared gray and deserted. Beverly thought of all the things that had happened in the old place. First there had been the strange lights and figures that had frightened the village folks; then there had been her own experience with the head ghost. After that had come Larry, who had rescued her from the attic where she had been a prisoner. That young man was still a mystery to her. Where did he come from and where did he go? His comings and goings were as much of a mystery as were the skeletons. Suddenly Larry would pop up out of nowhere only to disappear into oblivion again. He was vitally interested in the doings in the mansion, that she knew. But why? Was he one of the gang of men who flitted in and out of that hidden room so mysteriously? Was he a comrade of that evil-looking Chinaman? Would she ever forget how the Chinaman’s face had peered in through that window at her?

As though her thoughts had conjured him up out of thin air, the Chinaman stood before her. He had come from the thick growth of trees to the right of the mansion. He stood grinning at her, his hands hidden in the large, flowing sleeves of his blouse.

“Go ’way,” he said threateningly.

Though she was trembling with distaste and fear, Beverly stood her ground.

“No can enter house,” he repeated. “Go ’way.”

“I’m not trying to enter it,” Beverly said, finding her voice only after great difficulty. “I’m only looking at it.”

“No look,” he said advancing a step. “Skeletons no like you watch ’em.”

Every nerve in Beverly’s body cried out for her to flee—run away from this horrible yellow man who stood leering at her. She clenched her hands tightly at her sides to keep her voice steady.

“I’m not doing anything, why should I go away?”

“Go ’way,” he said again, “or I take you to skeletons.”

That settled it! When the man advanced toward her, his hands, coming from the enveloping sleeves, disclosed a long, sharp knife. Beverly turned and ran.

She ran back through the trees to the road as fast as her legs would carry her. The thought of the yellow man lent wings to her feet, and she fairly flew across the ground. Once at the road she settled down to a fast walk. She had run away just like a child! The man wouldn’t dare have harmed her! That was what she assured herself, but she had her doubts. The knife in his hands had looked terribly vicious. The man himself looked like a ferocious animal who would have liked nothing better than to run his knife through her. He had been determined to keep her away from the old house, and he had succeeded. Why had he been so insistent that she should not even look at the old place? Had the skeletons returned, as he had intimated? Were the head ghost and his colleagues once more in the hidden room? If so, how had they entered the place? The door was securely locked, and most of the windows were boarded up. She had not been around to the back of the house. It was possible that they had broken a kitchen window and entered that way.

She turned her steps toward the town. As she had resolved that night in New York, she would go and tell Inspector Dugan everything that she had seen and heard in the mansion. If the men were smugglers and were responsible for the murder of the unknown man, she would be wrong to keep her experiences to herself.

CHAPTER XVIII

Larry Again

INSPECTOR DUGAN listened quietly to Beverly's tale. When she had finished he did not speak for several minutes.

"You say, when you overheard the conversation between the Chinaman and the other man, that they mentioned a boat named the *Tamara*?"

Beverly nodded. "I couldn't connect it in any way with the old house, but perhaps you can."

The officer nodded too. "Yes, I can. The *Tamara* is a boat that sails from the Orient. Consider, then, the boxes of powder that you saw in the attic room. They must be smuggling drugs into this country—that is the most logical explanation."

Beverly mentally rebuked herself. She had actually had proof of the man's guilt in her hands and let it slip out. Why hadn't she kept one of those little pink packets of powder to show to the police? Then they would have had unquestionable evidence.

Inspector Dugan rose to his feet. "I'm glad you told me all this, Miss Gray. I and some of my men will go out to that old house right away and try to catch that Chinaman. By the way, we have a young man that we arrested yesterday on suspicion. He was poking about the mansion, trying to get in, so I brought him along to the station house. He insists that he isn't one of the smugglers but that he is a friend of yours. Of course, if you know him and are certain that he isn't mixed up with the men about the mansion, I'll let him go."

"Who is he?" Beverly asked, puzzled.

"Wait," the inspector answered. "I'll have him brought in."

Larry, a pair of handcuffs on his wrists, was ushered in by two policemen.

“Larry!” Beverly said in surprise.

“Hello, Beverly,” he grinned. “Didn’t I tell you that she knew me?” he demanded of Inspector Dugan.

“You know him, Miss Gray?” the inspector asked again. “You seem to know so much more than I do about the old house that I think we could trust your judgment in deciding whether he is one of the smugglers.”

Beverly hesitated. It was a big responsibility the inspector placed on her. If Larry wasn’t one of the gang, there was no reason why the police should hold him. But if he was—and she asked the inspector to let him go——?

“I think you could release him,” she said slowly.

The inspector nodded and directed the policemen to remove the handcuffs from Larry’s wrists. Then he and the policemen departed for the old mansion. Beverly, too, turned her steps in that direction. She wanted to be present when the police arrested the Chinaman—if they did. As she walked along College Avenue she suddenly found Larry by her side.

“Thanks for getting me out of there,” he said smiling. “I never did like jails. I knew I could count on my friends.”

Beverly regarded him seriously. “We’re not really friends, and I don’t know whether you are one of the smugglers or not. You saved me from those men at the old house when you pulled me up through the skylight. I saved you from the police. That makes us even.”

“Oh, so it was just a gesture of gratitude on your part,” he said frowning. “I didn’t understand. I thought you were really going to let me be your friend. After all, there are a lot of worse fellows than I am in the world.”

“It isn’t that I don’t like you,” Beverly said hastily. “But for all I know you may be a friend of that Chinaman too. You may even be responsible for the murder of that unknown man.”

He swung her about until his blue eyes were gazing straight into hers. His hands were on her shoulders, and his face was strangely white and tense.

“Is that what you think of me? Do you really think I would murder a man in cold blood as that fellow was murdered?”

“You act so strangely,” Beverly said slowly, “always popping up at the most unexpected times and places, that I don’t know what to think.”

“I know,” he admitted. “It must seem strange to you. But, believe me, I’m not a smuggler, and I don’t know who murdered that man. I wish I did,” he added fervently under his breath. “I’d explain things to you, Beverly, if I could,” he declared honestly. “But I can’t.”

“We won’t say any more about it,” she answered, turning away and continuing on toward the mansion. “Inspector Dugan should capture the smugglers soon now, and then we will see if you are one of them or not.”

At the end of College Avenue Larry left her without another word, and Beverly continued on toward the house. He had seemed so sincere that for a moment she had believed him when he said he wasn’t a smuggler. If he wasn’t, why couldn’t he explain things to her? If he had no ulterior motive for prowling about the mansion, he could tell her quite frankly what he was after. But since he had to keep the motive for his actions secret, what was she to think? Had she done him an injustice in refusing his friendship?

The inspector and his men were leaving when she mounted the steps to the porch.

“Well,” the inspector said disappointedly, “we’ve searched every nook and cranny of the place from roof to cellar and can’t find a thing. Tomorrow we will be back with an ax and a pick and shovel to demolish the fireplace. We’ll gain entrance to the hidden room that way.”

“Do you mind if I prowl around inside?” Beverly asked.

“I wouldn’t stay after dark,” the inspector advised. “The men might come back, and then you would be in a fine fix. If you like, I’ll stay with you,” he added.

“No,” Beverly smiled. “That isn’t necessary. I shan’t stay long.”

She watched until the policemen were swallowed up in the group of trees. As soon as she had entered the hall and shut the door behind her, she realized that she should have borrowed a flashlight from the inspector. It was frightfully dark in here. She went immediately to the room with the fireplace. This was the only room that interested her any more. Her chief objective was to discover the hidden spring that held the stone fireplace in position. As she tapped on the bricks and pushed and pulled at them she hoped fervently that there was no one in the hidden room. She wouldn’t want to come face to face with anyone—especially the Chinaman!

There was a scratching noise on the other side of the wall, and Beverly instantly divined the meaning. Someone was coming out of the hidden room. As swiftly and noiselessly as she could, she retreated to the protective

darkness of the outer hall. She fixed her eyes to a crack in the panel of the door and watched breathlessly as the fireplace swung back, revealing a dark opening. The Chinaman shuffled out into the light, and the fireplace went back to its former position.

Beverly sank back against the wall and held her breath. Well, why didn't he come? He was awfully long covering the few feet to the door. She went back to her crack in the door and looked in. The Chinaman was going back. Evidently he had forgotten something. She watched as his slippered foot reached out and touched the baseboard about ten inches to the left of the fireplace. The stone structure swung outward, and the Chinaman disappeared within. A moment later he was out again. The fireplace swung shut, and he shuffled toward the door. He passed within two feet of Beverly, but in the darkness of the hall he did not see her. She waited for several minutes after he had closed the outer door behind him. He might suddenly decide to return, and she did not want to move for fear of discovery. When at length he did not return, she went back into the room she had just left.

A casual glance in the direction of the window electrified her heart. A face was pressed tightly against the glass. As she watched, the face was withdrawn. She thought for a moment that the face had seemed familiar. But the light was poor, and the pane was so dirty that it made recognition almost impossible. A trembling fit of fear seized her. Was it the Chinaman? Had he realized that there was another presence in the house and was spying on the front room to be sure no one discovered the entrance to the hidden room? She ran to the front door and looked out. No one was in sight. It might have been only a chance visitor. A neighbor, say, who was on his way to town and had stopped to have a glimpse at the haunted mansion.

The sun was sinking, and the long shadows of night were descending on the world. Beverly recognized the urgency for speed if she hoped to discover the entrance to the hidden room yet this afternoon. She had no desire to be caught in the house after dark, especially when she knew the Chinaman was in the vicinity. She went back to the front room and located what she thought was the exact spot where the Chinaman had pushed on the baseboard. It had been about ten inches to the left of the fireplace. About here, say. She pushed the toe of her shoe along the edge of the baseboard. Without a sound the giant, massive fireplace swung outward, and a dark hole yawned before her.

CHAPTER XIX

The Hidden Room

It had been so easy! After the hours she and Shirley had spent trying to discover the spring, she had at last located it. A gentle touch, and the magic door was open before her. She stepped from the room into the darkness of the unknown. As soon as the fireplace had closed behind her she realized the folly of her action. She should have gone for Inspector Dugan or someone to enter this place with her. She could open the door from the other side, but she did not know the location of the spring on this side of the wall! She would have to stay here until she found it or until someone found her! She recognized, too, the need for a flashlight. She would have to stumble about in the dark, and goodness knew what she might get into.

She listened breathlessly for a sound that would mean she was not alone. Everything was deathly quiet. The Chinaman must have been the only one in the place, and since he had left she had it all to herself. Cautiously she put one foot before her and then the other. She didn't want to stand against the wall all afternoon. Now that she was in here, she might as well do some exploring—what little she could do in the dark. She stumbled loudly down a short flight of three steps. She rubbed a bruised shin and grumbled to herself. Why hadn't she brought a flashlight? The way she was floundering around, she might very easily break her neck. As she rose from her knees her head came in sharp contact with some hard object.

“Ouch!” she exclaimed loudly. Her exploring fingers discovered it was a table and, what was more important, on it were a greasy candle and a box of matches. It took only a second to light the candle. The light wavered uncertainly in the damp air of the room and smoked fitfully. With the candle held before her, Beverly proceeded to explore her prison. It was a dirt floor, bumpy and uneven. The table was rickety and covered with candle grease. A dirty deck of playing cards was strewn amid the grease. Experimentally she

drew a card and tossed it face up amid the rest. The ace of spades, the death card! She shivered and turned away from the table. Boxes stood about for use as chairs. Boxes were piled jauntily on top of one another in a corner, and Beverly went toward them eagerly. This was the evidence Inspector Dugan needed! If only she could send word to him that they were here! She went back to the secret door through which she had entered. With her candle furnishing the light, she searched for a spring that would release the fireplace. She could find none and had to give up.

What was she to do? She could not stay here! She would have to, because she could not find a way out. She went back to the room and sat down on a box, placing the candle on the table before her. She had to wait for someone to come here and find her. Would the inspector and his men, when they came to demolish the fireplace, arrive first? Or would the Chinaman return in the meantime? The thought sent shivers through her. Either the Chinaman or the head ghost would be back tonight sometime, of that she felt certain. Perhaps they would bring more men with them. What could she do?

She sank her head forward on her folded arms. She had to think of something, she had to! If only she hadn't been so foolish, so headlong, as to enter this place alone! If only she had gone after Inspector Dugan or Shirley or Lenora! One of the girls might have stood guard on the outside of the fireplace and opened it for her in case the Chinaman returned. Now she was helpless. Helpless! She had no course but to await the smugglers. What would their return mean to her?

The minutes ticked slowly away. She raised her head and looked at her wrist watch. Eight o'clock. Was that all? It seemed hours and hours since she had entered this place. The wrist watch sparkled in the feeble glow from the candle. It was the same wrist watch the girls at Vernon had given her last term. On the back was inscribed: "*To Beverly Gray, for extraordinary heroism.*" She turned it over in her hand and read the engraving. She laughed strainedly, and her laugh echoed hollowly in the stillness of the room. Would they think her brave if they could see her now—half scared to death? She had been given the watch for rescuing Shirley from the Hall fire. She had been brave then. She had rushed into the building and carried Shirley out without a thought of what it might mean if she herself were to be trapped in there. Yet here she was, quaking with fear over thoughts of what might happen when the Chinaman and the head ghost returned. If events had happened one after the other with no chance for her to think about them, she might have been brave. It was just the anticipation that set her a-tremble. She

would not let her thoughts dwell on what was to be. She would force herself to think of something else. She raised her head defiantly and picked up the deck of greasy cards. She would play solitaire while she waited for the return of the smugglers. She did her best, but her thoughts jumped from the cards before her to the smugglers and then to the boxes of evidence in the corner and then back to—Larry.

Larry! Where had he gone this afternoon when he left her? He had rescued her the other time when she had been a prisoner. If only he would appear now! But the minutes ticked on and nothing happened. Larry might be miles away now, and the smugglers might be getting closer every minute.

Suddenly she heard voices. They seemed to come from the room beyond the fireplace. Fearfully she watched the opening as the fireplace began to swing open. A tall, bulky figure followed by a slighter one entered. The head ghost and the Chinaman! The fireplace swung shut behind them, and they advanced slowly to meet her. The flickering candle flame threw their shadows into bold relief on the wall. The Chinaman was grinning in his evil way, but the head ghost had a frown as dark as a thundercloud on his face.

“Oh, it’s you again,” he said harshly. “How did you get in here?”

“The same way you did,” Beverly answered. She was determined to keep up a brave front. He should not guess how her knees were trembling.

“Are you alone?” he demanded.

What a question! He had only to look about the room to see that she was.

“No,” she retorted. “I have an army of policemen waiting for me.”

“Well, that is just too bad,” he said advancing threateningly. “I’m afraid they will have a long wait.” He flung a few words in Chinese over his shoulder at his companion. Grimacing, the Chinaman drew his long knife from his sleeve and ran it caressingly through his fingers.

Beverly sat down on the box she had been occupying before the entrance of the smugglers. She sat down because her knees refused to support her any longer, but the head ghost didn’t know that.

“You don’t mind if I continue with my game of solitaire, do you?” she asked sweetly.

“Oh, did we interrupt you?” he asked in feigned surprise. “Please do continue.”

They made a queer trio, the wily Oriental playing with the sharp blade of his knife, the bulky white man standing menacingly over the slim girl seated at the table toying with a pack of disreputable cards.

Despite her strongest efforts, Beverly's hands trembled, and more than one card dropped from her nerveless fingers.

"You aren't nervous, are you?" the head ghost asked with pleasantly masked hatred in his voice.

"It's rather damp in here," Beverly said idly. "You should really get more pleasant houses to haunt."

"We didn't think we would have guests," he said and laid a heavy hand on her shoulder.

Beverly shook off his grasp and continued with her card playing. The Chinaman slid onto a box opposite her, and his almond, drowsy eyes were fixed dreamily on her face. Was he thinking what a pleasure it would be to sink his knife into her? Beverly wondered fearfully. Why didn't they do something? She could stand anything but this awful menacing silence! She decided on a bold step—anything to bring things to a climax and end this dreadful waiting.

She swept the cards into a heap and stood up. "Well, that ends the game for tonight. Now, if you will open the door, I'll go. Thanks for the hospitality of your room."

The head ghost smiled hardly. "You want to leave, do you?" He looked at the Chinaman. "Wah Fang, the lady wants to leave. Do you think we should let her?"

The Chinaman grinned, shaking his head. "Allee same stay here. We tleat her fine."

Beverly whirled on the head ghost. "You can't keep me here. My friends—the police—they will come, and then it will go hard with you."

"Of course they will come," he soothed. "But we won't be here," he added in a hard tone. "We're going to leave bright and early in the morning. You're coming with us. We might take you to New York. We might even put you on a boat bound for China."

Beverly paled at the suggestion. "You can't! You can't make me go with you!"

“How can you help it?” he demanded. “You’re here and you can’t leave. Besides, I know if once you escaped us and went to the police you could send us to prison for a long while. Oh, no, my dear young lady, you are going on a little trip with us.”

“I won’t,” Beverly said again, but her voice was thick with terror in her throat. She quite realized the futility of her position. She had expected something horrible, but to be shipped to China!

Suddenly the three of them became alert. Voices were heard in the room beyond the fireplace. It couldn’t be more smugglers, because in that case the head ghost and the Chinaman wouldn’t look as startled as they did. It must be someone looking for her! The thought set her pulses leaping. How to let them know she was in here? She knew voices coming from this room could be heard by the others out in the front room of the old mansion, so she let out a loud, sharp scream.

“Stop that, you little cat!” The head ghost clapped his hand across her lips.

She brought her firm, white teeth down hard on his fingers, and he released her with a howl. She sprang out of his grasp and screamed again. The Chinaman leaped for her, but she eluded him. She picked up one of the box-chairs and hurled it at Wah Fang. He ducked and sprang after her. She dodged around the table and sent it tumbling upon the two. The candle came in contact with the head ghost’s leg, and he howled again as it burnt him. All the while she was letting out those blood-curdling screams to urge haste upon the men in the outer room. Already they were hammering on the wall. Was it fancy, or did she hear someone shout her name?

The head ghost sprang after her again. This time, when she backed away, the Chinaman caught her. His yellow fingers closed on her throat. She fought like a tiger, tearing and scratching him. But the yellow fingers clung. They were closing tighter and tighter—shutting off her breath. A dizziness was beginning to overwhelm her. She tried to pull away the fingers that were choking her, but they clung tighter—ever tighter—there was a buzzing sound growing in her ears, and a mist before her eyes. The last thing Beverly remembered before she fainted in the arms of the fiendish Chinaman was the sound of a loud crash that seemed to be rending the world apart.

The portion of the wall that had been attached to the fireplace crashed in. Larry sprang through the opening and upon the head ghost. Wah Fang dropped the unconscious girl, and, with the blade of his knife gleaming in the glare of many flashlights, sprang upon Larry. Inspector Dugan aimed his

revolver and fired. The Chinaman's knife fell short of Larry's back, and he himself collapsed on the floor. Larry, after a fierce struggle, succeeded in subduing the head ghost and turned his attention to Beverly, who had not stirred.

CHAPTER XX

Explanations

BEVERLY, blue, bruised marks on her throat where the Chinaman's fingers had pressed, sat down in the chair the inspector pushed forward for her and smiled.

"Now, tell me everything that I missed," she commanded.

They were in the inspector's office back at Vernon on the day after the exciting time at the old mansion. Beverly had been taken to the college infirmary after the excitement had subsided somewhat. Her throat was sore and bruised, but she felt no other effects from the Chinaman's unsuccessful attempt to choke her. This afternoon she had come down to the inspector's office to hear the end of the affair.

The inspector smiled and leaned back in his desk chair. "We have to wait for a young man."

"Larry?" Beverly asked. "He was there last night, wasn't he? I seem to remember seeing him before——"

"Yes," the inspector nodded. "He was there. He narrowly escaped being knifed in the back by the Chinaman, too. That boy is brave. He surprised me when he told me about—— But suppose we let him tell the whole story when he gets here."

"If I don't die of curiosity before that," Beverly complained. "I'm sure you could tell me about it and save time."

The inspector laughingly shook his head. "No, it is Larry's story. Let him tell it all. I'll bet you will be as surprised as I was."

"Then he wasn't one of the smugglers?" Beverly sighed. "I wasn't quite sure."

The inspector indulged in another hearty laugh. “No, he wasn’t a smuggler. Ah, here is the gentleman in question.”

Larry, as care-free and as gay as ever, entered. He was dressed, as Beverly had always seen him, in his aviator’s outfit.

“Greetings, everybody! How is the throat this morning?” he asked, smiling down at Beverly.

“Fine,” she said promptly, “but my curiosity is running away with me.”

“We’ll soon remedy that,” he promised. “What do you want to know first?”

“Everything,” she answered.

“That’s a large order,” he grinned.

“You better start at the beginning,” the inspector chimed in. “Miss Gray will grasp the facts better if you start from the time you started on the case.”

“Started on the case?” Beverly echoed. “Don’t tell me you are a detective!”

“Something of the sort,” Larry admitted.

“And to think we arrested him on suspicion,” the inspector laughed. “I don’t see why you didn’t tell me about it then.”

“I couldn’t,” Larry said. “If I wanted to tell anyone, I wanted to tell Beverly. But for government reasons and my own personal reasons, I couldn’t tell a soul.”

“Please,” Beverly said. “I’m getting confused already. Start at the beginning.”

“Perhaps,” Larry said, seating himself on the edge of the inspector’s desk, “I better start off by saying I am in the Secret Service. I’ve been in the Service chasing smugglers and thieves ever since I graduated from college three years ago.

“Recently our office received orders to track down and arrest a new gang of smugglers who were bringing illicit drugs into this country. We knew nothing whatever about the gang, except the fact that frequently they shipped their stuff from the Orient on a steamer called the *Tamara*. I and another man were assigned to the case. The clues to the identity of the gang came from various parts of the country, and I found my airplane mighty useful. Once we were sure we had the leader of the gang cornered down in

Florida, but it proved to be a false alarm. From there I went to Maine on another false clue.

“Finally we traced the gang’s activities down to this vicinity. We knew they were located somewhere within a radius of a hundred miles of Vernon, but we could not put our finger on the exact spot. I happened to be in Weller’s one day when the talkative soda clerk started telling me about the strange lights and figures that had been seen in the old Horler Mansion. It did not take me long to put two and two together. Since the smugglers were about here somewhere and the old house had suddenly developed spooks, I was almost sure I was on the right trail at last. I began to snoop about the place, picking up bits of evidence. Beverly knows how often she found me there. I even became suspicious of Beverly for a while. Every time I went to the mansion I was sure to find her prowling around. I soon realized, however, that she was merely out for adventure.

“Then came the news of the murder of the unknown man. Remember, I said there was another man with me on the case? He was the other man. Pete—you, Beverly, know him as the head ghost—confessed this morning to the murder. He knew the Secret Service agent was hot on his trail. The agent had gained an entrance to the hidden room, and Pete knew the police would soon be there. He did what he did to keep the agent’s evidence from reaching the police.”

“Horrible!” Beverly shivered.

“Last evening, after I left you at College Avenue, Beverly,” Larry continued, “I was going to my plane. But for some reason I turned back. It must have been a premonition that I felt. I saw the Chinaman entering the patch of trees, and I looked in the window of the front room.”

“Then yours was the face I saw pressed against the pane!” Beverly murmured.

“Yes. I entered the house to see you. When I reached the room you had disappeared. I searched the whole house but could not find you. Then the thought came to me that you must have entered the hidden room. I had not yet discovered the way to swing the fireplace, so I came here for Inspector Dugan. I showed him my credentials and told him the story of my search. He was more than willing to help me round up the smugglers.

“When we reached the house and entered that room we heard you, Beverly, scream. Boy, what a scream! It nearly scared the life out of us! We broke through the wall, which after all was only a thin partition of plaster, and the result—two smugglers are now in jail.”

“But weren’t there more than two?” Beverly asked.

“Yes,” Larry admitted. “And the others are likely to stay free because these two won’t tell who they are. Anyway, Pete was the leader, and we have him.”

“How’s Wah Fang?” the inspector asked.

“What’s the matter with him?” Beverly wanted to know.

“The inspector put a bullet through him last night,” Larry answered, “but he is all right. He will live to serve a nice long term in prison.”

“Thus endeth the tale of the mansion ghosts,” concluded the inspector.

“That reminds me,” Beverly said excitedly, “what about the skeletons? There must be some explanation for them.”

Larry laughed. “There is. The smuggler gang dressed up in black suits, on which were painted the bones in phosphorescent paint. They held the dance to keep the people hereabouts scared away from the house. If no one entered the old place, they and their smuggled goods were safe. Their plans began to go wrong when Beverly went there to get a story for her paper.”

“And what a story!” Beverly declared. “It will be big news for Allison.”

The inspector stood up and shook hands with Larry. “And now I guess your work in this part of the country is done.”

Beverly rose also. “I have to get back to the Hall and explain the phenomenon of the skeletons to the girls.”

Larry accompanied her out of the inspector’s office and up the Avenue.

“You know,” he said smiling as they strolled along, “you helped me a lot with this case. I wish there was something I could do for you.”

Beverly laughed. “I’ll take you up on that. You can give me a ride in your airplane. I’ve always had a longing to soar above the clouds.”

“Easiest thing in the world!” he declared. “I’m off to New York this evening, but I’ll be back in a few days and we’ll go sky riding together.”

CHAPTER XXI

The “Red Bird”

“‘IN the good old summer time,’” Lenora sang through chattering teeth. “Believe me, I’ll never complain of the heat again!”

“Not until next August,” Lois confirmed.

The six friends were crossing the campus from the afternoon classes. A strong March wind whistled around them, whipping them, whipping the red color into their cheeks. All that could be seen of any of them was the laughing eyes peeping over the edge of fur collars.

“Brrrr,” Anne shivered. “March is certainly coming in like a lion.”

“Whoops!” Lois wailed. “There goes my notebook. I’ll lose my history notes!”

A sudden gust of wind had whirled the book from under her arm, and the papers went scurrying away.

“There goes Napoleon all over the campus!” Lenora giggled.

The girls rushed frantically here and there, rescuing the slips of paper from bushes and mud puddles.

“Oh,” Lois groaned, regarding her spattered notes tragically, “now I’ll have to copy them all over.”

“You might shock the Professor if you handed them in in that condition,” Rosalie laughed.

“He could stand a few shocks,” Shirley declared emphatically.

“What did he do to you?” Beverly wanted to know.

“This afternoon he calmly informed me that if I didn’t catch up with my back notes I would flunk the exam. The old buzzard!” Shirley added

disgustedly.

“Shirley Parker!” Lois said with mock dignity. “How can you talk that way about our estimable teacher?”

“Who called that teacher estimable?” Lenora demanded. “I’m afraid he is going to flunk me too.”

“You don’t seem to be worrying,” Anne smiled.

“I’m not,” Lenora said blissfully. “I refuse to worry over such a thing as history.”

“Listen to the girl,” Rosalie asked. “She spent all last night poring over her history book.”

“I was looking at the pictures,” Lenora defended.

The girls laughed and ran up the steps into the Hall. They divested themselves of their coats and descended on the other girls in the living room. Lenora seated herself at the piano, and the girls gathered around. They blended their voices to the accompaniment of Lenora’s nimble fingers on the ivory keys, and the music rang loud and long through the building.

It was interrupted by the entrance from her office of Mrs. Dennis, the house mistress.

“Is Beverly here?” Mrs. Dennis asked.

“Yes,” Beverly stood up.

“Will you come into my office for a moment, Beverly?”

“Uh-oh, what did she do now?” Lenora asked in a low whisper as Beverly followed the house mistress.

“She didn’t do anything,” Shirley declared promptly in defense of her roommate. “I wonder what the matter is.”

In a few moments Beverly reappeared, and with her was Larry.

“What-ho!” Lenora, the irrepressible, murmured. “The bird man!”

“See you later, girls,” Beverly said beaming. “I’m going sky riding.”

“Lucky girl!” Lois shouted after her.

It was not a long walk to the little airport on the outskirts of Vernon, and Larry and Beverly covered it briskly. Two mechanics were wheeling a red monoplane from the hangar, and Larry pointed to it proudly.

“There is my chariot—the *Red Bird*,” he said, smiling. “Flashy, isn’t she?”

“A knockout!” Beverly said expressively.

“And can she fly!” Larry murmured. “Just like an eagle. The motor hums like a song.”

“How far can we go this afternoon?” Beverly asked eagerly.

“I thought we would fly to Edmonton and back,” Larry proposed. “It ought to take about an hour each way.”

“Is that all?” Beverly asked disappointedly. “I want to go far.”

“See if you like it, first,” Larry laughed. “Perhaps we can go farther on another day.”

“I know I shall like it,” Beverly declared confidently.

“Here, put this helmet and goggles on,” Larry directed. “That’s it.”

He helped Beverly into the cockpit and showed her how to fasten the safety belt. From his cockpit he looked back at her.

“O. K.?”

“O. K.!” Beverly shouted back.

A mechanic swung the propeller, and the engine broke into a roar. Slowly the plane lumbered over the ground, ever increasing speed until it glided into the air as smoothly as a bird leaving its nest. The ground fell away beneath them until the hangar and the mechanics were mere specks on the brown earth. Larry circled over the airport and then streaked away to the north. He dipped low over the old Horler Mansion and grinned back at Beverly. Soon they were over the staid old college buildings. Chadwick Hall stood out white against the brown background of trees and grass; the spires of the chapel reached up into the sky like slim fingers; little moving specks among the other buildings were the girls moving about the campus. Everything looked so infinitely far away.

The clouds floated past the plane like ships passing on an ocean. Once the earth was blotted out, and Beverly knew a cloud was passing between the ship and the ground. Birds flew past, viewing askance this giant red man-made thing that invaded their realm. The propeller cut through the air like a whetted knife, and the miles fell away behind them.

It was glorious, this sailing through the sky with no effort at all. When next Larry sent back a glance at her Beverly flashed him a radiant look. She was thrilled beyond words. Here, away from the common ordinary things, she felt so free and light-hearted. She felt as if she had left the old material world behind and drifted into a new fairyland where everything was sunshiny and bright. She wanted to stay here forever. She wanted to follow the trail of the rainbow and find the pot of gold that was supposed to nestle at its end.

The girls, her friends, had laughingly and lovingly referred to her more than once as a dreamer. She was; she admitted it. She liked to dream of things beyond the realm of everyday life. Her thoughts were like a magic carpet on which she sped to far lands and distant seas. From her dreams she gathered courage, and faith, and love, and laughter. Was it so strange? Was it strange to dream of beauty, and of joys that you hoped to experience in the days to come? Columbus had cherished a dream when he set out to find a new passage to the Far East. Washington had cherished a dream of a new nation which he fathered. Moderns dashed about in the pursuit of wealth and pleasure, but how much pleasure did they really have? Hurry, hurry, hurry, seemed to be the hue and cry of the day. Beverly considered herself modern, but she made time to dream and appreciate the little things in life. She lived her life to the fill of each moment. She did not snatch, as did so many, at the first pretty bubble that life put in her way, only to regret it later. Oh, she did headlong, rash things—who did not? But in the main she knew the dream of what she hoped some day to be, and she strove to fashion her life accordingly.

The earth, with blotches that were houses and rivers and lakes, flew past beneath them. Larry turned and pointed a finger downwards. Did she want to go down? Down? She shook her head emphatically—no. She wanted to fly straight up to some star. She wanted to keep on flying like this—the wind in her face and clouds drifting by.

Suddenly something was wrong. The engine spluttered and stopped. It started and hummed merrily for a moment, only to stop again. Beverly held her breath: what did it mean? Were they in imminent danger of falling? She could see the anxious set of Larry's shoulders in the cockpit ahead. Then suddenly he turned and pointed downward. She looked over the side. An airport! They could land there and have the trouble remedied. On the descent several times the motor started and stopped. Beverly wondered if Larry were a sufficiently good flyer to glide to a safe landing. Evidently he wasn't worrying, for time and again he flung a merry smile at her. The plane circled

round and round before it straightened out over the field. Larry set her down gently in the runway, and two mechanics came running from the hangar at the farther end of the field.

Larry hopped out and explained the trouble to the repair men before he turned to help her from the ship.

“Looks as though we will be stuck here until they get the ship repaired,” he grinned.

Beverly had promised Mrs. Dennis to be back at the Hall in time for dinner. “How long will it take?” she asked anxiously.

“About an hour or two,” he answered. “Why?”

“I’ll have to phone the Hall,” she said.

“Good, and we’ll have our supper here. There must be a coffee shop somewhere around,” he declared.

There proved to be a coffee shop adjacent to the airport which, besides its tables and chairs and edible properties, also housed a telephone. Beverly talked to Mrs. Dennis and explained the delay and promised faithfully to be back at the Hall no later than eight o’clock. That would give the mechanics two hours to fix the plane and give them an hour to fly back to the Vernon airport.

Beverly and Larry chattered gayly over their waffles and coffee. Larry entertained Beverly with tales of his experiences in the air.

“You know,” Beverly said suddenly, “I don’t even know your name. ‘Larry’ is the name you gave me when I thought you were one of the smugglers.”

“My name is Larry,” he insisted. “Larry Owen, late of the New England Owens; graduate of Columbia and personal friend of Miss Beverly Gray!”

“What a reference!” Beverly smiled.

“Ah, here comes Sir Galahad,” Larry laughed. The two had secretly christened the chief mechanic Sir Galahad because they could conceive no one who might look less like the famous knight.

The man informed them that the plane was in good condition once again, so they went out gayly to their chariot of the skies and climbed aboard.

“Where to, fair lady?” Larry shouted.

“Home, James,” Beverly called back.

“Right!” he grinned. “Contact!”

The plane roared away from the hangar and down the field until it began gently to lift up into the night. The sun was gone and the stars were peeping from their cloud bed. The moon was just showing above the horizon, a half-round yellow thing that looked much like a broken saucer.

Beverly watched the ground below her. Lights blinked here and there in buildings, and once a succession of moving lights told her where a train was running. She looked about the sky to see how many of the countless stars she could identify. There were the Milky Way and the Dipper and——

Almost before the two young people were aware that there was danger in the air the friendly moon and stars were blotted out by dark clouds. A strong, terrific wind sprang up and rocked the plane from side to side. Rain splashed them in the face and pattered against the wings of the *Red Bird*. They were caught in the midst of a terrific storm and were tossed about like helpless things.

Beverly grasped the edges of the cockpit to keep from being thrown from side to side. She had started out on the ride for a thrill, and she was certainly getting it. She could think of a thousand places she would rather be during a heavy storm than in an airplane. They had been cruising along so nicely, too. Why did something always pop up to spoil things? They wouldn't be back at the Hall at eight o'clock. In fact, she admitted, they would be lucky if they reached there at all tonight.

The plane was tossing about like a boat on a mountainous ocean. They were at the mercy of the elements, and the winds were not gentle. Once Beverly's view of Larry's head and shoulders was totally blotted out, and she knew they were passing through a dense cloud. No longer could the friendly lights of the earth below them be seen. There was nothing but the black night around them and the rain pitter-pattering on the plane surface.

Would they weather the storm and come out of it rightside up? Or would they crash, as so many had done? Storms were demons, wreaking havoc with everything in their grasp. Countless hundreds had lost their lives in plane wrecks during storms. Was the *Red Bird* to follow the same path those others had taken? The *Red Bird* was a staunch, sturdy little ship, but she was fighting against tremendous odds. She was struggling constantly against the heavy wind that blew her off her course. If once she gave up fighting and allowed herself to toss at the mercy of the wind, then indeed would the storm wreak its havoc on her.

Thank goodness the motor was still running. But even as Beverly listened, the motor spluttered, died away, and started again. It was stalling! The mechanic had not reached the basis of the trouble after all. She felt a surge of anger at his carelessness. His mistake might cost them their lives! He should never have let them take off with a plane not in the best of condition. She relented the next moment, however. Perhaps the trouble now was with something totally different. The engine coughed and died away again. This time it did not resume its hum.

Beverly wiped the rain from her goggles and looked ahead at Larry. His chin, as he looked back at her, was set and determined. He was endeavoring to shout something above the whistle of the wind. She could see the movement of his lips but could hear no word. The plane was floundering helplessly now. Larry was striving to keep her on an even keel and her nose up, but they were falling.

Beverly looked over the side. The lights of the earth still were not visible. How high were they? she wondered. It would not take long for them to crash at the rate they were falling. Larry was endeavoring to glide the plane down, but the wind tossed it about as if it were made of paper.

They were going to crash. There would be no lucky airport this time at which they could land. Even if they had parachutes they would scarcely be able to open them. It was strange that she should be so calm. She felt hardly a flutter of excitement. After all, it was not a time to get nervous and excited. Every crisis called for a cool head and a clear brain that functioned quickly.

Larry was working feverishly to start the motor and so perhaps avert a crash, but it was impossible. Now and then he looked back at her and his lips moved, but the wind swept the words away.

The *Red Bird* slipped, slid, and circled down, down—— It was not long that they fell through space, but it seemed long to the two who could do nothing but wait for the crash. The earth loomed up dark and mysterious under them. The waving tops of trees could be seen as they rushed straight toward them. There came the whistle of the wind, the crack of the wings as the *Red Bird* dove into the trees, a deafening, splintering crash, and then—— silence, while the storm raged on.

CHAPTER XXII

The Crash

DINNER at Chadwick Hall went on as usual. The girls chattered about the coming examinations, the chance of the basketball team for the championship, or anything else that occurred to them. During social hour they either talked and laughed together, or sang songs to Lenora's accompaniment on the piano, or buried themselves in magazines. When the bell rang, heralding study hour, they reluctantly dragged themselves back to literature and history books. They studied for an hour and a half and then spent the next free half hour in preparations for bed.

Just before the lights-out bell rang at ten o'clock Mrs. Dennis entered the room shared by Shirley and Beverly. Shirley was seated at her desk writing letters. She stood up hurriedly as the mistress of Chadwick Hall entered.

"Has Beverly returned yet?" Mrs. Dennis asked.

"No," Shirley answered. "I don't know where she can be."

"She promised faithfully to be back at eight o'clock." Mrs. Dennis frowned. "It isn't like Beverly to disobey. She knows I like to have my girls all in the building at ten o'clock."

"Perhaps something happened to delay them," Shirley suggested.

"I telephoned the airport where she said they had to land to have the plane repaired, and the mechanic told me they left at six-thirty."

"I suppose we can do nothing but wait for them to arrive," Shirley said, smiling. "Perhaps they were forced to land again. Beverly usually keeps her promises. She will be back as soon as she can."

Mrs. Dennis smiled too. "I think you are right, Shirley. I hope nothing serious has happened to that young lady."

Shirley added her fervent hopes to those of Mrs. Dennis. The mistress of Chadwick Hall went back to her office to await the return of Beverly, and Shirley donned her pajamas. She crossed to the window and flung it wide. It was beginning to rain. The clouds promised a heavy storm, too. Beverly had better hurry or she would certainly get wet. Shirley flung a pillow on the floor and knelt on it, her arms crossed on the window sill. The wind stirred the red curls and cooled her flushed face.

It was March. Soon her sophomore term would be over. Half of her college life was through and done with. Last term she had become interested in theatricals and had decided to devote herself to them this term. But had she? She had not had the chance. What with the mystery of the old Horler Mansion and the pressing need to study her history, all her time had been taken up. How did she expect to be an actress after college if she didn't get any experience now in amateurs? Firmly she resolved to enter dramatics next term. This time she would keep her resolution.

What could be keeping Beverly? She had promised to be back at eight o'clock, and now she was more than two hours late. Had something happened? The storm outside was growing worse, and she rose and shut the window. Had the plane been caught in the storm? She sincerely hoped not. There were so many accidents in heavy storms. It would be horrible to have anything happen to Beverly. Ever since Beverly had rescued Shirley from the Hall fire last term the two had been the firmest of friends, and such a possibility was terrifying.

For all her worry about her chum, Shirley was young, and tired nature must take its course, so she slept. The sun was streaming in her window when she rolled over sleepily for a cat-nap before she had to get up and start another day of classes. She yawned prodigiously and stretched lazily. The Hall was astir, doors were banging, and light feet running from one room to another. Breakfast was in a half hour, and she had just time for a shower and to dress.

A sudden thought struck her, and she looked across at Beverly's bed. The covers were smooth and unwrinkled as they had been last night. The bed had not been slept in. Her glance traveled to the closet where Beverly's leather jacket usually hung. The hanger was empty. That made Shirley sit up abruptly, a worried frown on her face. Beverly had not come home. What could have happened?

She hurried out of bed and through her shower. She would go down and talk to Mrs. Dennis. Surely Beverly had sent some word to explain her

absence. Shirley rushed through her dressing and left her room in a whirl. She passed Rosalie and Lenora on the steps.

“Hi, there,” Lenora called.

“Hello,” Shirley flung back over her shoulder, not stopping.

“What in the world is the matter?” Rosalie wondered to Lenora.

“Must be something important to make her hurry like that so early in the morning,” Lenora declared, stifling a yawn. “I don’t see how she does it.”

“Everybody isn’t a sleepyhead like you,” Rosalie teased.

Shirley hurried immediately to Mrs. Dennis’ office and knocked. The house mistress bade her enter and looked up in surprise at the girl standing there.

“Did—did Beverly come home last night, Mrs. Dennis?” Shirley asked. “She hasn’t been to her room.”

“She hasn’t!” Mrs. Dennis echoed. “I thought surely she had come in some time last night. I worked here in my office until late. I went up to your room once, but everything was quiet, so I thought she had returned and was asleep.”

“Well, she hasn’t come back, and I’m beginning to get worried,” Shirley confessed.

“Quite naturally, too,” Mrs. Dennis said. “That was a bad storm we had last night. I hope the plane wasn’t caught in it. I’ll call the Vernon airport and see if the *Red Bird* landed.”

Shirley listened to the short conversation Mrs. Dennis had with the airport official. No, the *Red Bird* had not landed at all last night. In fact, they were thinking about sending out a searching party for it. They knew the pilot had planned to return before nightfall.

Then Mrs. Dennis telephoned the airport where they had stopped for repairs. No, the plane had not returned there. There had been no news of any plane crashing during the storm, and at least that was comforting.

“I say, why so glum?” Lois hailed Shirley as she left Mrs. Dennis’ office.

“Beverly hasn’t returned from her sky ride yesterday,” Shirley answered shortly, significantly.

“She hasn’t!” Anne echoed anxiously.

“Where did they go, Europe?” Lenora chimed in.

“They’ve been gone long enough,” Rosalie declared. “What could have happened?”

“There was a bad storm last night,” Lois said.

“But there has been no report at the airport of any crash,” Shirley said. “Mrs. Dennis just telephoned.”

“At least that is something,” Rosalie said hopefully.

“But where can they be?” Anne demanded.

“Maybe they eloped,” Lenora suggested helpfully. “Larry is awfully good-looking, and he was fond of Beverly.”

“Don’t be silly!” Shirley said promptly.

“Yes, ma’am.” Lenora subsided.

“Maybe they ran out of gas some place and have to walk home,” Lois added her suggestion.

“Next time Beverly better take roller skates,” Lenora suggested.

“I wish you would stop joking about it,” Shirley said seriously. “Frankly, I’m worried. Beverly promised to be home at eight o’clock last night. Where can she be?”

That question was destined not to be answered for many hours. The girls were summoned to the breakfast table. Afterward they went off to their various classes.

“I think classes would continue if the world was coming to an end,” Lois said distastefully.

The others said nothing but they agreed with her. It was hard to sit attentively in class listening to a lecture while their thoughts were occupied by their missing member. Their too active imaginations conjured up all sorts of horrible pictures of what might have happened.

At lunch time they descended on Mrs. Dennis in a body. No news yet. Disappointedly they turned away. They forced themselves to eat some lunch, but they could not say afterward what they had had. More classes. They met on the campus after the last class and turned back to Chadwick Hall.

“If we don’t hear something soon,” Anne sighed, “I think I had better wire her parents.”

“I wouldn’t,” Lois said hastily. “There might be no cause to worry them, after all.”

“But where can she be?” Rosalie asked for perhaps the twentieth time.

When they got to the Hall Mrs. Dennis was waiting for them. She ushered them all into her office and bade them seat themselves. They did so, silently. Five worried pairs of eyes fixed themselves on her and never wavered.

“You must all be brave,” she said quietly. “I know you and every other girl in Vernon love Beverly, but we can do nothing but face things bravely.”

“What have you heard?” Shirley asked through dry lips.

“I telephoned the Vernon airport about an hour ago,” Mrs. Dennis continued slowly. “They have found the *Red Bird*.”

The five girls waited for the next sentence in hushed silence.

“It is in a woods about an hour’s drive above Vernon. It is wrecked—demolished.”

“And—” Anne said expectantly, fearfully—“Beverly?”

“Neither of the occupants was found,” Mrs. Dennis answered. “Both cockpits were empty. The men are now searching the surrounding woods.”

The girls received the news quietly. The plane wrecked, smashed, and the cockpits—empty. What could have happened to the passengers?

“Is that all?” Shirley asked.

“Yes. Not very definite, is it?” Mrs. Dennis smiled wryly. “We now have to wait for news of what the searching party may find.”

“Can’t we do anything but sit here and wait?” Lenora cried nervously. “If it were one of us, I’m sure Beverly wouldn’t sit about doing nothing.”

“You’re right!” Shirley said jumping up. “I’m going into Vernon and explain things to Inspector Dugan. He and Beverly are friends. If he goes up to help in the search I’m going too.”

“You may,” Mrs. Dennis smiled sympathetically. She knew what a strain it was on Beverly’s best friend to sit idly by. Indeed, she felt much like going with her.

Lenora ran out with Shirley. If there was any action, she was not going to miss it. Lenora might be mischievous and gay, but she was more than willing to help any friend in distress. She might joke about something that was serious, but it was just her nature not to let things weigh heavily on her. She

was the sort of person who can continually find sunshine even on the darkest of days.

The two girls went immediately to the office of the police inspector in Vernon. He was not in his office, and the girls spent fifteen anxious minutes waiting for him. When he finally did come in they pounced on him excitedly.

“Just a minute,” he laughed. “Come into my office and tell me what the excitement is all about. One of you tell me—when you both talk it’s all a jumble.”

“You tell him,” Lenora said to Shirley, controlling herself with an effort.

So Shirley told the inspector the news about Beverly and Larry. He listened with a thoughtful frown on his face. He shook his head worriedly when she finished.

“That’s too bad,” he murmured.

“We thought you might go up there and help in the search, since it is one of the college girls,” Shirley added.

“And we thought you might let us come along,” Lenora added hopefully.

He regarded them silently for a moment. “All right,” he said at length. “I’ll get a car and we’ll drive up there, though I don’t see what good we can do. The place is probably overrun by now.”

“Anyway, we will be doing something,” Shirley said thankfully.

CHAPTER XXIII

What Happened

THE rain falling gently on her face brought Beverly back to a full realization of where she was. The storm was still continuing, although its fury was abating somewhat. The ground felt cold and damp beneath her, and she endeavored to sit up. She fell back with a sharp exclamation of pain. Her side seemed all caved in. It hurt unbearably and made her weaker than she otherwise would have been. An experimenting hand beneath her coat brought another grimace of pain to her lips. What was it—a broken rib? Whatever it was, it sent black waves eddying over her every time she moved. She propped herself up on her elbow and looked around.

The airplane lay a huddled mass of wood and iron off to her right. What was that lying so grotesquely there by the side of the wreckage. Larry! Both of them had been thrown clear when the plane crashed. At least it was something not to be mingled in the wreckage of the *Red Bird*. If only her side didn't hurt so, she could make her way to Larry and ascertain how badly he was hurt. How long had they lain unconscious here in the storm? She looked off to the east. A gray light was beginning to show along the rim of the world. Morning was on its way and night was fading. It was hours, hours since the *Red Bird* had tossed about amid the clouds. Hours since it had fallen amid the trees with that blinding, deafening crash that had blotted out the world. Her glance came about to rest again on Larry's prostrate figure. She pulled herself forward a few inches, and the pain in her side almost made her faint from the effort. It was like a knife there in her left side, cutting her every time she moved. If only the rain would stop! It was annoying the way it trickled down into her face and caused her more pain to wipe it away. She must get to Larry. There might be something she could do for him. He might be hurt even worse than she was. There really was nothing wrong with her but that annoying rib. Why did one have ribs, anyway? she wondered.

What were the girls back at Vernon thinking? Were they worrying about her? Would they guess that something had happened to the plane, or would they think she had stayed of her own accord? She went forward a few more inches and had to rest again to fight off the faintness. If only Larry would stir. Perhaps he had been killed! The thought had not occurred to her before, and she wished it had not occurred at all. Suppose he had been killed, what would she do? He might be dead or dying! The thought terrified her.

As if he had divined her thoughts a loud groan issued from Larry, and he proceeded to roll over with his face to the sky. She watched him anxiously. At least he wasn't dead, for no dead man gave out such human groans. She endeavored to go a few inches nearer to him but gave it up. The pain in her side was getting worse, and she feared she was going to faint.

Larry raised himself on an elbow and shook his head dazedly.

"Hullo," he said with what was intended for a cheery smile. "The crack-up didn't finish us after all, did it?"

"Not quite," she answered slowly. The earth was beginning to swim around her.

"Are you all right?" he asked anxiously, crawling to her side. "My arm seems to be a little the worse for wear. I'm afraid it's broken, but it will mend again."

"If only the earth would stop doing that crazy dance! She tried to smile to Larry, but it was a poor attempt.

"Poor kid," Larry said kindly. "All tuckered out, aren't you? Beverly!"

That anxious "Beverly" was the last she heard for some time. When next she opened her eyes it had stopped raining and she was using Larry's shoulder for a pillow.

"Did I faint again?" she asked, scorn for herself in her voice.

"You did," he said promptly, "and scared me half to death. What's the matter?"

"My side," she answered weakly. "A broken rib, I guess."

"Of all the luck," he groaned. "I guess you'll never take another airplane ride with me."

She laughed and caught her breath suddenly as a pain plunged into her side. "It wasn't your fault," she answered. "You didn't know a storm was coming."

“I’d like to get my hands on the mechanic who ‘fixed’ the engine,” Larry said vindictively. “I’ll wring his neck!”

Beverly said nothing; right then she was having another attack of that devastating weakness. At length she looked up and endeavored to grin.

“Where do we go from here?” she asked.

“Ask me another,” Larry retorted. “We might be a million miles from nowhere, for all I know. I could walk until I came to a house, but I hate to leave you.”

“You won’t leave me!” Beverly declared promptly. “If you go wandering, so do I.”

“But your side——” Larry murmured. “You can’t.”

“I can too,” Beverly said, setting her chin defiantly. She had given in to the pain too much already. She would not be a quitter now. They couldn’t stay here any longer. Larry’s arm needed setting, and she herself needed attention. They would go on, and she wouldn’t hang back.

Larry stood up and surveyed their surroundings grimly. “Not a sign of a house or anything,” he said, sighing. “We’ll just have to tramp about until we come to something.”

Beverly prayed they wouldn’t have to go far, because she knew, despite her firm resolution, that she couldn’t.

“Which way do you want to go?” she asked.

“Let’s toss a coin and you say,” he suggested. He fished a coin from his pockets and tossed it into the air.

“Heads,” she guessed.

“Heads it is! Which way do we go?”

“To the right,” she said. “There seems to be a clearing there farther on.”

“To the right it is!” he said cheerily. “Can you rise?” he asked as she propped herself up on her elbow.

“I think so, if you will help,” she added.

Larry lent his assistance, and between them she managed to stand upright. Once on her feet she clung to Larry’s coat lapel for several seconds, steadying herself and fighting to master the pain.

“I’m sorry to be such a baby,” she said apologetically.

“You’re the bravest girl I ever met,” he said sincerely, and he meant it. “If I had a cracked rib, I should probably lie right here until somebody came along or I starved to death!”

“Cheerful, aren’t you?” she murmured lightly. “You have a broken arm now and you aren’t making any bones about it.”

“What’s a broken arm!” he said inconsequentially, and yet she knew he suffered a great deal of pain from it. “Shall we start?”

“Might as well now as later,” she answered and essayed a few steps forward.

“Let me help,” he said quickly, tucking his good arm within hers.

They went on slowly arm in arm. Step by step they left the wreckage of the *Red Bird* behind them. They entered the woods and kept on, stumbling over fallen logs and vines that snared their feet. They halted frequently, for Beverly found it difficult progress. Larry, too, was beginning to show signs of fatigue. His chin was set, but there was a telling whiteness about his lips. Beverly realized that his arm must be hurting horribly, and she tried not to lean too heavily on him.

The sun came up and flooded the world with its light. It filtered through the trees where Beverly and Larry walked. Just the sight of the dancing beams gave them a little more courage. They continued on, at times talking, even trying to hum a little song. But at last Beverly did not talk or hum. She conserved all her strength for the walk ahead of her. They had come quite a distance from the scene of the crash, and still there was no house in sight. Who knew?—they might have a long, long walk ahead of them. Neither Beverly nor Larry had ever been in this part of the country before, and it was impossible for them to tell where they were. They might be miles from a doctor or telephone, their chief needs.

They rested often now, and each time it was harder to start forward. The man was grim and determined, and the girl pale and anxious.

“Beverly, don’t you think it would be better if I went on to find help and come back for you?” Larry pleaded.

“No. It would be so easy for one of us to get lost, and then things would be worse than they are now.”

“But you can’t go any farther,” he said, looking down at the girl resting on the cold, damp earth.

Beverly had been gazing off through the trees, and now she grasped Larry's arm with fingers that trembled.

"Look, Larry. Isn't that a road out there?"

"Where?" He looked up quickly. "Wait here while I go see."

He ran through the trees. Beverly watched him as he looked up and down. In a minute he was back again.

"It's a road or a wagon track," he said, smiling. "We can follow it and see where it brings us out."

"Let's go," Beverly said quickly.

They went on, slowly and painstakingly following the rough wagon road. It had sent hope surging in them, for where there was a road there must be habitation. Little by little the track widened, and finally they came within sight of a house. A thin spiral of smoke was curling upward from the chimney. An excited dog, just what breed was difficult to determine, was dancing at the end of a chain and barking at them viciously.

A woman appeared in the doorway. She gave one startled glance at the two bedraggled young people who were coming to her house and called her husband.

After explanations had been given, the kindly farmer's wife tucked Beverly between warm blankets in the spare room and made Larry comfortable on the divan in the living room while her husband took his rattling old flivver and went for the doctor. She served them both hot drinks that revived them remarkably. The doctor, a wizened, gray old man, treated them both and left strict orders for them to sleep and rest for that day and much of the morrow.

When Beverly awoke it was late in the afternoon and shadows were beginning to form in her room. She lay and looked about the farmer's spare room. It was crude, most of the furniture having been hewed by hand from the trees that grew so abundantly within reach. She had scarcely believed that there were people who lived in this modern day and age with only the necessities of life. She herself was used to comfort and color, and yet these kindly people lived only with the things that were absolutely necessary.

"Are you awake, dearie?" The farmer's wife was peeping around the corner of the door.

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Thomson," Beverly smiled.

“And feeling right perky, too, by that smile,” the farmer’s wife said with a pleased grin. “Dr. Grimm certainly knows how to fix folks that aren’t well.”

“He does that,” Beverly said promptly. “I’m feeling fine now.”

“The bandage isn’t too tight?” Mrs. Thomson said, seating herself on the side of Beverly’s bed.

“No. I ought to be able to walk around as good as ever tomorrow,” Beverly declared.

“I wouldn’t, dearie,” Mrs. Thomson said quickly. “You should take things easy for a day or two. You young-uns always want to be up and doin’ right away.”

Beverly laughed. “But I have to go back to school. Did you telephone as I asked you?”

“I told Dr. Grimm to do it when he got back to his place. Telephones aren’t much used in this neck of the woods.”

“How long have you lived here?” Beverly asked with interest.

“Nigh onto twenty years now,” Mrs. Thomson said with pride. “Me and Jake came here when there was nothin’ but woods.”

“Doesn’t it ever get lonesome?”

“It used to at first,” Mrs. Thompson admitted, “but we’ve kinda grown used to it.”

“Don’t you even have a radio?” Beverly asked incredulously.

“No. Jake has been savin’ up to buy one, but every time he gets enough money something happens and we have to spend it.”

“I—I’d like to send you one,” Beverly said shyly. “You’ve been so good to Larry and me. By the way, how is Larry?”

“Oh, he’s fine. The Doc set his arm, and he has been on the front step with Jake nearly all afternoon.”

There was a loud noise and a rattle outside and Mrs. Thomson jumped up to look out the window.

“I declare to goodness, we’re gettin’ more visitors. A flivver with a man and two girls has driven into the yard. The engine is smokin’ like a steam engine. I reckon they want some water. Well, I declare! The two girls are huggin’ that young fellow who came with you. Do you know ’em?”

“What do they look like?” Beverly asked excitedly.

“One is kinda tall and has red hair and——”

“Girls from Vernon! Bring them in here, will you?”

“ ’Course I will. I’ll go right out and get ’em.”

The farmer’s wife bustled out of the room, and in a few seconds Beverly heard the chatter of Shirley and Lenora as they burst into the house. In another minute she was besieged by two pairs of arms that threatened to undo all the good work the doctor had done.

“We’ve been worried half crazy!” Shirley confessed.

“Can you come home with us?” Lenora demanded.

“I suppose so,” Beverly said, frowning. “The doctor has my side bandaged so tightly that it wouldn’t hurt much to move.”

“Fine! I’ll go tell Larry and Inspector Dugan.”

While Lenora departed to tell the others that they would return to Chadwick Hall immediately, Shirley and Mrs. Thomson helped Beverly to dress. Soon Beverly was installed in the inspector’s car, and they waved farewell to the kind farmers.

CHAPTER XXIV

Napoleon

“I TELL you I’ll never learn it!” Shirley said disgustedly. “I have absolutely no ambition to study Napoleon!”

“But you have to,” Beverly insisted.

Beverly had completely recovered from the broken rib she had sustained in the wreck of the *Red Bird*. Larry’s arm, too, was healed, and he had gone back to New York to resume his work on more Secret Service cases.

It was nearing examination time, and the Alphas had called a special meeting to coach Shirley with her history. Shirley was a wizard at geometry, and she knew her literature from beginning to end, but she was bewildered when it came to history.

The six were gathered in Beverly’s and Shirley’s room, each with an open history book in her hand.

“When did Napoleon fight the battle of Waterloo?” Lenora shot at Shirley.

“I don’t know, and what’s more, I don’t care,” Shirley sighed.

“On June 18, 1815,” Lenora informed her.

“How old was he when he died?” Rosalie inquired next.

Shirley shook her head hopelessly. “I’m completely flabbergasted,” she confessed. “He might have been a hundred, for all I know.”

“He was fifty-one,” Anne said, consulting her book.

“Oh,” Shirley tossed her book into the air and caught it again, “let’s go to Weller’s.”

“No!” Beverly said decidedly.

“We are going to stay here until you learn about Napoleon from beginning to end,” Lois added.

“You will have a long gray beard by that time,” Shirley retorted. “I’m sick of reading, hearing, and talking nothing but Napoleon, Napoleon, Napoleon!”

“You’ll be a whole lot sicker when you get your examination paper back, if you don’t get down to work!” Lenora said bluntly.

“I might as well die after the exam as before,” Shirley said heavily. “If I have to read any more Napoleon this afternoon, I’ll scream.”

“It’s no picnic for us, either,” Lois said evenly.

“Oh,” Shirley said contritely, “I know it isn’t. You must think I’m an awful dunce. I guess I am,” she sighed. “I really do appreciate your coaching me this way, but I’m afraid it is no use.”

“Nonsense!” Beverly said cheerily. “The trouble with you is, you won’t try to learn it. You take one look at the book and say, ‘Oh, what’s the use?’ Haven’t you any pride? Don’t you want to pass? Do you want everybody at Vernon to laugh because you failed over such a simple subject as Napoleon? You think you have your troubles with history. All of us have our troubles, too. Anne has a hard time with literature. Look at me, I’m a positive dunce when it comes to geometry, yet I passed the exam. Just make up your mind that you will study and you will learn it. First thing you know, you will be liking history. It really is an interesting subject.”

“You show me,” Shirley answered.

“Don’t be so stubborn,” Lois stormed. “You are like the girl who goes to a party and sits back in the corner with that go-ahead-amuse-me attitude. She does nothing to make the party a success. She expects the others to cater to her, and when they don’t she declares the party a bore. You are like that, because you expect to pass the exam without studying at all. You won’t get anything unless you work for it. You’ve got to buckle down with grim determination to learn about Napoleon, no matter how hard it hurts.”

“I suppose you’re right,” Shirley sighed. “In fact, I know you are, but it is going to take a lot of will power.”

“The point is, have you got any?” Lenora took up the thread. “You can do ‘most anything if you’ve got the will power to stick to it until the thing is accomplished. If you get tired in the middle and stop, you will find yourself right back where you started.”

“This sounds like a lecture on perseverance,” Shirley laughed.

“It is,” Lois said promptly. “And you are the subject. See here, Shirley Parker, if you don’t pass the examination after all the work we’ve had drilling Napoleon into you, we’ll—we’ll—what will we do, girls?”

“We better wait and see if she passes,” Beverly laughed. “If she doesn’t, we can make the punishment fit the crime.”

“Oooooo!” Shirley quavered. “Don’t threaten me. I’ll study hard, and I’ll pass too.”

“Good!” Lenora applauded. “To celebrate that firm resolution we will go to Weller’s. How about it?”

“Lead on,” Anne said jumping up.

“When we come back——” Beverly began.

“I’ll grab my history book,” Shirley promised, eager to escape even for a few minutes.

They tripped gayly down the stairs arm in arm. Singing as they went, they left Chadwick Hall and marched down College Avenue.

“There goes that snobbish May Norris,” Lois whispered.

“You should become friends with her,” Lenora said to Shirley; “she is what is commonly called a ‘teacher’s pet.’ She and Professor Leonard” (the history professor) “are as thick as two peas in a pod.”

“And still she doesn’t know much about Napoleon,” Shirley giggled. “She is almost as dumb as I am.”

“She is a queer person,” Rosalie commented. “Since she has begun helping Professor Leonard with the papers and research work she has nothing whatever to do with any of the girls.”

“’Tis sad,” Leonard murmured mournfully mocking. “What to do about it?”

“Why do anything?” Lois demanded. “If May wants to be scholarly, that is up to her. Personally I think it is a crime to have as much brains as she makes out to have.”

“I’d rather pass my exams,” Anne laughed.

“She better pass her history exam,” Lois said wisely, “or the Professor will get a new assistant.”

There were more girls in Weller's, and the Alphas joined them hilariously. All problems of history and the like were forgotten as the girls chattered and indulged themselves in sweets.

CHAPTER XXV

Robbery

AFTER dinner Beverly and Shirley went immediately to their room to prepare for the examination in history on the morrow. Beverly reviewed her notes and helped Shirley with hers. Shirley was still bent attentively over her book when Beverly closed hers and donned her pajamas.

Beverly went to the window and knelt there, breathing in the fresh night air. The window of their room faced directly on the campus, overlooking Penfield Hall, where they had their history class. The shadows lay heavy beneath the trees, and silence was over all. The white cement walks gleamed like silver against the dark grass and thick bushes that grew along each side.

As Beverly watched, a slim figure slunk along under the trees, standing momentarily thrown into bold relief by the moonlight. Beverly's interest stirred. Who would be astir on the campus so late? Was one of the girls sneaking in from the evening show at the theater in Vernon? As she watched, the girl continued, gliding silently and mysteriously from dark shadow to shadow across the campus. She stood several minutes, as still as the trees beside her, as if debating something. Slowly she continued on until she stood in front of Penfield Hall. What could she want in there? Beverly leant over the sill interestedly. It was like watching a moving picture, a human drama being played before her eyes.

"I say, what is making you gawk out the window like that?" Shirley drawled from behind her.

"Come here," Beverly whispered. "Look over there at Penfield Hall. See the girl standing in front? I've been watching her. What is she sneaking about the campus for?"

"Who is it?" Shirley whispered back, leaning beside Beverly, half out the window.

“I don’t know. I wonder what she is after.”

As Shirley and Beverly watched, the girl seemed to decide on her next course of action. Casting a quick glance about her, she slipped into the shadow alongside the building. Shirley and Beverly exchanged mystified glances.

“What next?” Shirley demanded.

“I wonder,” Beverly answered in equal mystification.

The girl was gone for at least ten minutes. When she reappeared she seemed to melt in the shadows as she ran from the Hall back to her dormitory. The girls watched her enter Courtney Hall, and as the door closed behind her they leaned back and surveyed one another.

“Who was it?” Shirley demanded.

“I don’t know.” Beverly shook her head. “She kept in the shadows, so we couldn’t see her face. I wonder what she was doing about Penfield Hall at this hour?”

“It’s funny,” Shirley agreed. “Oh, well, we won’t let it bother us. Honestly, Beverly, I’ve read so much about Napoleon tonight that I know I will dream about him.”

“Ah!” Beverly said dramatically. “A newspaper headline! The Man in Her Dreams!”

Shirley laughed. “Tomorrow night it will be a nightmare.”

“Here’s hoping the exam is easy,” Beverly said as she jumped between the covers.

“It won’t be,” Shirley said pessimistically. “Professor Leonard never gives easy exams. I wonder if May Norris will pass?”

“She better,” Beverly murmured sleepily, “or she will be retired from active service as the Professor’s assistant.”

The next morning was just like a hundred mornings that had gone before. The girls rose and breakfasted amid jesting and gay banter and prepared for classes. With books swinging under arms, the girls departed from Chadwick Hall. First class was biology, and they listened to the lecture, dutifully jotting down notes. Second class was literature, and they again listened to the droning voice of the teacher, at the same time scribbling down words into their little notebooks. Each face was turned to the teacher, and eyes were fixed attentively on her. But their minds were busy with thoughts of the next

class. Now had come the time for that long promised history examination, and each was aware that she should have spent much more time in preparing for it.

Professor Leonard was at his desk when the class entered, and the piercing glance he bent on several members puzzled the girls. It was almost as if he could look into their brains and tell if they had prepared the lesson or not. As the class settled down in their seats, the Professor rose and regarded them appraisingly. A hush descended, and they waited breathlessly for the Professor's first words.

"Unfortunately," he began, his glance darting here and there over the sea of faces before him, "we are not able to have the examination today."

Incredulous glances were exchanged.

"Instead," he continued sternly, "each one of you will prepare a ten-thousand-word biography on the life of Napoleon Bonaparte."

Low groans and sighs from the listening members of the class.

"The reason for the change in my plans," he continued, and for the first time the girls noted that Miss Wilder, the Dean, was sitting at the back of the room, "the reason for the change is that someone entered the classroom last night and stole the set of examination questions from my desk."

A silence so profound that a pin, if dropped, would have sounded like an explosion held the group.

"Of course," the Professor said again, "I have an exact copy of the questions, but it would hardly be of any use in giving the examination now. The one who has the questions would have an unfair advantage over the others. I am inclined to think that the one who stole the papers was one who has not been overly brilliant in her class work." For a moment his glance rested on Shirley and then traveled to another girl, on the other side of the room.

"I need not stress the seriousness of the position each of you is in," said Professor Leonard. "Each one of you is under suspicion, and that suspicion will be lifted only when we find the actual thief. I need not remind each young lady present that Vernon is an honorable college, and Miss Wilder has agreed with me that, if caught, the thief is liable to expulsion."

If the Professor had hoped that the thief would disclose her identity after this announcement, he was mistaken. Each girl sat silent, eyes fixed

expectantly on his face. Each realized the seriousness of what had just been said, and each was regarding her neighbor with suspicious eyes.

“If any of you have any information that might eventually lead to the identification of the culprit,” the Professor resumed, “I trust that you will bring it to either Miss Wilder or me. Such an outrage must not be permitted to go ignored. The thief must be caught and properly punished. That such dishonesty, regarding even a trivial matter, should prevail at Vernon is a great blow to the members of the faculty as well as the Dean. If the news of such a matter should leak out to the public, Vernon would not long hold the envious place that it does at present. Vernon College, in the public eye, is a school where only the choicest young ladies are admitted. It is a school long famous for its noble ideals. A school where young people are taught the finer things in life, how to be courageous and fine, and clean in heart and mind. We endeavor to teach you the value of honor and strength of character. When such a thing as this happens, we are inclined to think that all our teaching has been in vain.

“Each one of you in this class has been here two years. For two years you have been, whether knowingly or not, absorbing the refined influence of Vernon College. And yet, last night, one of you deliberately stooped so low as to steal examination questions. In my opinion there is nothing so low in the world as a common thief. The girl who perpetrated this—‘crime’ is not worthy of four years at Vernon.”

The girls listened quietly to the Professor as he talked, and when they were dismissed they filed out of the room silently, each thinking over the biting words the Professor had uttered. The six Alphas drifted together and walked across the campus to Chadwick Hall for luncheon.

CHAPTER XXVI

Accusation

“BEVERLY, I wonder if the girl we were watching last night was the one who stole the examination questions,” Shirley said, looking up from her book.

“I’ve been wondering the same thing all afternoon,” Beverly said, frowning. “Do you think we should tell the Professor about her?”

“Why?” Shirley asked. “We really know nothing that would identify her. We don’t know who she was.”

“That’s so,” Beverly admitted.

“What-ho, more Napoleon?” Lenora demanded bursting into the room and regarding the open books and the studying girls with smiles.

“No, ma’am!” Shirley said positively.

“Hullo!” Anne and Lois appeared in the doorway. “Holding open house? We might as well join the convention.”

“We haven’t had a chance to gab about the robbery yet,” Lenora reminded them. “Come, now, confess. Which one of you has the questions?”

“I wish I knew,” Beverly declared.

“So do I,” Lois said. “I agree with the Professor, it was a cheap thing to do. Of all the things in the world to steal, somebody picks on examination questions!”

“She must have been crazy about Napoleon,” Anne laughed.

“The Professor certainly expressed himself with vigor this morning,” Shirley declared. “And did I burn up when he said that he thought it was someone who hadn’t been overly brilliant in her class work and looked right at me!”

“Console yourself,” Lenora begged; “as long as you have a clear conscience that is all that matters.”

“I have that all right,” Beverly answered. “But does the Professor know it? He might seriously think that I am guilty.”

“Nonsense,” Beverly said smiling. “For that matter, the Professor thinks all of us are guilty.”

“Miss Wilder never said a thing this morning, did she?” Lois continued.

“She didn’t get a chance,” Anne laughed. “The Professor was so excited he forgot she was there.”

“Well, ta-ta,” Lenora said, getting to her feet. “I’m on my way to the library to prepare for my biography.”

“I’ll come along,” Anne said promptly.

“So will I,” Lois continued. “We might as well get started on the old thing.”

When the other girls had departed, Beverly and Shirley, too, decided to take a walk. They declared laughingly that they would take it upon themselves to play detective and see if they could solve the identity of the girl they had seen last night and who, they each believed, had stolen the examination questions. They walked out the walk from Courtney Hall, the way the unknown had done, and paused in the exact spots she had done. They came at length to Penfield Hall. The classrooms were deserted and the doors locked.

“So far not a thing has come to light,” Shirley frowned. “What do we do next, Sherlock Beverly?”

“Let’s go along the side of the Hall as she did last night, Watson,” Beverly suggested smilingly.

They left the walk and crossed the grass and walked along the side of the building. The windows that opened into the history classroom were right above them. They looked about for what they laughingly called “clues,” but there was nothing to be found.

“Curses!” Shirley giggled dramatically, twirling an imaginary mustache. “Foiled again!”

“I wonder if she climbed in the window,” Beverly murmured.

“That is an inspiration,” Shirley said promptly. “How else could she have entered? Boost me up and I’ll see if one of the windows is open, the means by which the villain gained entrance to the scene of the crime!”

After much struggling and breathless laughter Shirley surveyed her chum from her perilous perch on the stone window sill.

“So far, so good,” she declared. “And, by some strange coincidence, the window is unlocked. I will now demonstrate for your gratification how the criminal must have acted.”

Stealthily Shirley pushed the window open and dropped to the floor inside. In a moment she had crawled out again and, closing the window behind her, lowered herself to the ground.

“How did she get up on the window sill in the first place?” Beverly demanded. “I had to help you. Do you suppose she had an accomplice?”

“There it is!” Shirley shouted jubilantly.

“There is what?” Beverly demanded.

“The accomplice,” Shirley answered and swooped down on a box half hidden in the shrubbery. She dragged it over beneath the window and stood upon it. “See? It would be easy to climb to the sill from this box.” She demonstrated again for Beverly’s benefit.

“That is what she must have done,” Beverly admitted. “Well,” she said after Shirley had re-hidden the box and they turned away from Penfield Hall, “we have discovered how and what. The question now is, who?”

“Let’s go to Courtney Hall. Perhaps we can pick up a clue there,” Shirley suggested.

The two directed their steps to Courtney Hall and spent the rest of the afternoon talking with more girls about the robbery. No one admitted having been out of the building at all last night, and Beverly and Shirley were in just as much bewilderment about the identity of the mysterious girl as they had been before. They went back to Chadwick Hall for dinner and then to their room, to begin work on the ten-thousand-word essay to be written on Napoleon.

Shirley was summoned to Mrs. Dennis’ office during study hour, but Beverly thought nothing of it. Often Shirley had done errands for Mrs. Dennis in Vernon, and Beverly surmised that this visit was in relation to one of them. She continued on with her writing until the door was thrown open

and Shirley strode into the room, tears welling in her eyes. She threw herself on her bed and gave way to a gust of sobbing.

“Whatever in the world is the matter?” Beverly asked wonderingly.

More smothered sobs were the only answer she got.

Beverly crossed and sat down beside Shirley, putting a comforting arm about her chum. “Shirley, honey, what is it? Did you have bad news from home?”

“No,” Shirley gulped.

“Then what is it?” Beverly asked bewildered.

But it was long before Shirley could control the weeping sufficiently to sit up and explain. She clung to Beverly as a forlorn child might have done. Beverly, not understanding, comforted her as best she could. It must be something gigantic to make Shirley, the dignified, cool Shirley Parker, cry like this.

“Beverly, do you think I’m a thief?” Shirley asked at last, controlling her emotion with a big effort.

“Don’t be silly,” Beverly smiled. “Of course not. What do you mean?”

Shirley took the handkerchief Beverly unobtrusively slipped into her hand and wiped away the tears.

“Professor Leonard says I stole the examination questions,” Shirley continued tearfully. “He is positive that I was the one.”

“What possessed the man?” Beverly demanded in surprise. “Didn’t he offer any proof?”

“He said that I wasn’t good in history and that I was afraid of flunking this exam, s-so I s-stole them.”

“But you didn’t,” Beverly said. “I know that. You didn’t leave your room that whole night.”

“He doesn’t believe me.”

“Is that all the proof he offered?” Beverly continued.

Shirley nodded. “He said I was to appear before the faculty members tomorrow morning. Further proof would be offered then. What he means, I don’t know.”

“He can’t be serious!” Beverly said again. “He ought to know you wouldn’t do such a thing.”

Shirley smiled miserably. “He is only too ready to believe I’m guilty. I’m to go on trial, as it were, tomorrow morning. You know how much the teachers will believe what I say when he is dead set against me. What am I going to do?” she asked, regarding her friend with tragic eyes. “If the teachers believe as he does, I’m to be—expelled!”

Beverly rose resolutely. “You wait here until I come back.”

“Where are you going?” Shirley demanded.

“I’m going to see Miss Wilder. I know she is fair, and she will see that none of the teachers are prejudiced against you. You wait for me, and don’t cry any more, honey—you will only give yourself a headache and it won’t do any good.”

“I can’t help it,” Shirley mumbled. “I was so proud to be a student at Vernon, and now I’m about to be kicked out. Funny, isn’t it?”

Funny! It was a tragedy. A tragedy that never should have happened, Beverly thought, as she hurried from Chadwick Hall to the office of the Dean. The Professor couldn’t be so unfair as to accuse Shirley without some grounds for his accusation. What those grounds were, she meant to find out. Probably she or Shirley could explain everything, and nothing would come of it. She knew how Shirley felt about her college. She was proud of her standing, scholastically and athletically, at Vernon, and now to be confronted by such an accusation—especially when she was not guilty! It was hard, infinitely hard to stand. She, Beverly, would have to do something to help her friend, that was why she was going to see Miss Wilder.

Miss Wilder was a friend to Beverly, as she was a friend to every girl under her charge. She had been a personal friend of Beverly’s mother ever since Mrs. Gray’s own days at Vernon, and she watched with keen interest the shaping of Beverly’s career. She was in her office, with a visitor, when Beverly arrived.

The girl sat down to wait and mentally reviewed what she was going to say. Somehow she had to make the Dean see that Shirley wasn’t guilty. She had to give Miss Wilder the impression of Shirley as being clean and straight and in every sense a good sport, as she was. She had to make Miss Wilder see that Shirley would never stoop to anything underhanded. Especially the theft of examination questions! It was such a trivial thing, really, and yet at the same time it was immense. The girl who would stoop to assure her

success in an examination that way was not the kind of girl she should have been.

The door to the Dean's office opened, and two people stepped out. One was Miss Wilder, the other Professor Leonard.

"Ah, here to take up the fight for your roommate, Miss Gray?" the Professor smiled sarcastically.

"Good-evening, Professor," Beverly said in a cool voice and turned from him to Miss Wilder.

The rebuff had been unmistakable, and the Professor drew back with a cold smile. He would always have it in for her now, Beverly thought gloomily, but she didn't care. She couldn't be pleasant to him when he had so misjudged Shirley. Miss Wilder ushered Beverly into her office and motioned her to a chair opposite her own.

"You weren't very pleasant to the Professor," she rebuked kindly.

"I don't like him," Beverly said slowly.

"In this world there are a lot of things none of us like," Miss Wilder said gently, "but we can't show our likes and dislikes quite so plainly as you did just now."

"I'm sorry," Beverly said. In her heart she still insisted she wasn't a bit sorry, but she hadn't come to argue about liking the Professor.

"What did you want to see me about?" the Dean asked with a slow smile. She liked this straightforward, impulsive girl who sat before her.

Beverly looked up into the gray eyes smiling so steadily and confidently into hers and smiled too. No wonder Miss Wilder was chosen to head this college. Just by looking at her she seemed to make you understand that your troubles weren't so terrible after all. She seemed to radiate a quiet strength and friendliness.

"I came to talk to you about Shirley," Beverly said.

"I'm glad," the Dean said quickly. "I hated to think that your roommate, above all the other girls, was the culprit. I thought that after two years you must have had some influence on her, and anyone who won your friendship could not be as bad as——"

"As the Professor painted her," Beverly finished viciously.

Miss Wilder shook her head. "I wasn't going to say that."

“But it’s so, isn’t it?” Beverly demanded. “He called Shirley all kinds of names, I’ll bet, and prejudiced you against her so that you won’t even let her defend herself.”

Miss Wilder smiled kindly. “You should know me better than that, Beverly. I always listen fairly to anything the girls have to say.”

“I know you do, and I’m sorry I said that,” Beverly said contritely. “I didn’t mean it, but I’m truly worried. Tell me, Miss Wilder, do you honestly believe Shirley stole those examination questions?”

“It is the duty of every jury to believe the prisoner innocent until she is proved guilty. I feel the same way. I’ll believe Shirley innocent as long as I can.”

“That doesn’t tell me much, does it?” Beverly murmured. “But surely you know Shirley, you know that she is high in scholastic standing, she had no need to do such a thing.”

“She was not high in history,” Miss Wilder pointed out.

“If that is all the proof the Professor has against her,” Beverly blazed, “then it won’t amount to much. There were a lot of others in the same fix. How about that May Norris, his assistant? She was as low in her marks as Shirley was, if not lower.”

The Dean laid a restraining hand on Beverly’s arm. “Please, Beverly, don’t let your enthusiasm run away with your judgment. Try to see things from the Professor’s point of view.”

“If you are asking me to believe Shirley is guilty, I won’t!” Beverly said defiantly. “I know Shirley, and I know she didn’t do it. She didn’t leave her room all that night.”

“But you see, dear,” Miss Wilder said slowly, “Shirley’s silver bracelet, with her name engraved on it, was found just inside the window.”

“When?” Beverly asked tensely, a sudden thought occurring to her.

“The Professor went back to his desk late this afternoon and saw it gleaming where it lay on the floor.”

“I can explain that,” Beverly said eagerly.

“You can? How?” Miss Wilder leaned forward interestedly.

“It begins last night,” Beverly answered. “Shirley and I were standing at the window in our room. We saw a girl across the campus, keeping always in

the shadows. We watched her, to see where she was going. For a while she stood in front of Penfield Hall and then slipped into the shadows alongside the building. She was out of sight for a long while. When we saw her again she was running away from the building. She crossed the campus and went into Courtney Hall.”

“Why didn’t you tell the Professor this?” Miss Wilder asked.

“Because we don’t know who she is. This afternoon,” Beverly continued, “Shirley and I decided to play detective. We went to the Hall and found the box that the girl must have used when she climbed in the window. Shirley climbed from the box up on the window sill and into the room as the girl must have last night. When she came out again, we put the box where we found it and went to Courtney Hall. We could find no one that had been out of the building at all last night. Don’t you see, Shirley must have lost her bracelet this afternoon.”

“Yes, I see,” Miss Wilder answered. “It is quite possible that is what happened. I would suggest that you go and speak to Professor Leonard. Tell him what you have just told me.”

“Now? Tonight?” Beverly asked.

“Yes.”

“Very well,” Beverly said, rising. “And then I will come back and let you know what he says.”

Beverly went to the suite of rooms occupied by Professor Leonard and told him the story she had told Miss Wilder. The Professor listened in stony silence. A cold smile hovered about his lips, and his fingers toyed idly with his pince-nez. When Beverly had finished she stood waiting for him to speak. He placed the glasses slowly and carefully on the narrow bridge of his nose and slipped his hands into his pockets.

“Miss Parker is fortunate in having such a staunch friend as you, Miss Gray,” he said slowly. “But I am afraid that this is something which she will have to face for herself.”

“What do you mean?” Beverly asked, checking her rising temper at his surly tone.

“I mean that, although I appreciate your courage in standing up for your friend, I cannot put absolute faith in what you say. It is unfortunate that you do not know the identity of the mysterious girl. As it is, I don’t know

whether your loyalty to your roommate has led you to tell me this tale, or whether you actually saw her.”

“Then you don’t believe me,” Beverly stated rather than asked.

He spread deprecatory hands. “I do not exactly disbelieve you, but Miss Parker can speak for herself tomorrow before the members of the faculty.”

“I see,” Beverly said slowly. “Good-night, Professor.”

She left him and went back to Miss Wilder. Now, more than ever before, she was opposed to Professor Leonard. Why couldn’t he be more human, more understanding, instead of the cold, calculating man that he was?

“What did the Professor say?” Miss Wilder asked when Beverly was again seated opposite her.

“He said I wasn’t telling the truth, that I was making up the whole story because Shirley is my roommate.”

“He didn’t!”

“Perhaps he didn’t say it so bluntly,” Beverly acknowledged, “but that is what he meant.”

“You have no clue to who the girl might have been, have you?” Miss Wilder asked thoughtfully.

“No,” Beverly admitted. “But, Miss Wilder, I know it wasn’t Shirley. She didn’t leave her room the whole night. The Professor won’t believe me, but you have the final say, Miss Wilder, and you can’t expel Shirley for something she didn’t do!”

“The members of the faculty together tomorrow morning will decide what is to be done,” Miss Wilder said slowly.

“You mean she might be expelled for the theft of the questions, even though——”

“Let’s wait and see what the faculty decides, shall we?” Miss Wilder said gently. “I believe you, Beverly, that Shirley didn’t steal the questions, but the matter is not in my hands alone.”

“Grant me this, that you will give me a week to uncover the real culprit,” Beverly begged. “I’m sure that I and my friends can find the real thief.”

“Optimistic, aren’t you?” the Dean murmured. “Very well, I will grant that.”

“Thank you,” Beverly said as she stood up to leave. “If the faculty decides tomorrow morning that Shirley is to be expelled, you will wait a week before making her leave?”

The Dean nodded. “Yes, you have my word on that, and I hope you can find the real thief, sincerely I do.”

Beverly left the Dean’s office in no light frame of mind. She had been sure that Miss Wilder would be able to help them out of the difficulty, instead of which she could really do nothing. Tomorrow morning Shirley would go before the faculty and tell her story. Would they believe her, or would they all feel as Professor Leonard did? Miss Wilder, at least, would listen with a fair, unprejudiced mind. She would give Shirley the benefit of the doubt, but would the rest?

If Shirley had to leave college under such a cloud, it would break her heart. She had changed so since last term, and now she counted so much on graduating from Vernon that it was difficult to determine just how she would take it. Would she storm against the faculty and cry as she had done this afternoon? Or would she take it quietly, courageously, with just a bitter smile? Somehow Beverly thought the latter would be the course Shirley would take. Last term she might have ramped and raged, but she had changed since then. She seemed to have grown bigger mentally and spiritually. She was more sweet and lovable, and then, too, her sense of humor had developed.

Beverly stopped on the campus and looked toward Chadwick Hall. A light was burning in the room she shared with Shirley. Shirley was waiting for the news Beverly was bringing, and it was not pleasant news. If only Miss Wilder had promised to support Shirley, it would have gone far in determining the view of the faculty. Instead, she had given Beverly a week to catch the real culprit, and Beverly had not the faintest idea of whom that might be. She could not start and trace down the doings of every girl in the sophomore class. It would take more than a week to do that. Whatever was to be done must be done quickly. She mounted the steps to Chadwick Hall and paused on the threshold. Her shoulders straightened, and she summoned a little smile. There was no need to let Shirley know exactly how bad things were.

CHAPTER XXVII

The Thief

THE next day being Saturday, Beverly remained in her room while Shirley went off to face the faculty members. Beverly had called a special meeting of the Alphas, and she sat at her desk, chin on clenched hands, staring into space, trying to figure some way out of the muddle, when the girls swooped in.

“Greetings, my little gumdrop,” Lenora said, bouncing up and down riotously on the bed. “Where is the fair Shirley?”

“Yes, how dare she run off when there was a special meeting of the Alphas called for this morning?” Rosalie demanded.

“Shirley doesn’t know about this meeting,” Beverly said slowly.

“What-ho, secrets!” Lenora hissed.

“Dish us the dirt,” Lois commanded slangily.

“Do you mean to say you haven’t heard?” Beverly asked.

The girls looked from one to the other, puzzled. They confessed that they had heard nothing out of the ordinary. Beverly realized then that the news of the accusation against Shirley had not yet spread about the campus.

“Shirley has been accused of stealing the history exam papers,” she said steadily.

“She—has—what?” Anne gasped.

“Of all things!” Lois said incredulously.

Beverly went on to tell them of the finding of Shirley’s bracelet and how it had come about. Then she continued with the story of her own visit to Miss Wilder and her talk with Professor Leonard. The girls received the

information with cries of dismay and incredulity. Of all things, that a member of their own sorority should be falsely accused of such a thing—— It was preposterous. The five of them were up in arms at once.

“Shirley said once that the Professor was an old buzzard,” Lenora said with satisfaction, “and I heartily agree with her.”

The other girls added their declamations against the history professor with equal vigor.

“What are we going to do?” Beverly said again. “We have only a week in which to prove the real thief.”

“First of all we better find out who the thief is—we can get the proof later,” Rosalie frowned.

Beverly had told them of the mysterious girl she and Shirley had seen on the campus, and now the girls were silent, each busily trying to find a clue that would lead to her identity. Beverly took up her post by the window. She watched for Shirley’s figure to come toward the Hall. The minute her roommate came into view, all hint of a serious meeting would be dispelled. She was bound to try to keep up Shirley’s spirits. She told this to the Alphas, and each heartily agreed to do her part in dispelling any tragic atmosphere in the room. They would continue to laugh and joke as if the situation were not serious at all.

“I’ve got it,” Lenora said, snapping her fingers so suddenly that the rest jumped.

“What is it?” Lois asked eagerly.

“May Norris lives in Courtney Hall,” Lenora answered.

“She does!” Beverly cried eagerly.

“We’ll get after her first of all,” Anne suggested.

“There are a lot of other sophomores that are in our history class living in Courtney Hall, too,” Rosalie continued. “It might have been any of them.”

“Because May is the Professor’s assistant,” Lois continued slowly, “she has access to his desk at any time. She wouldn’t have had to climb in the window late at night.”

“That leaves us right where we started,” Lenora sighed. “This is going to be harder than I thought.”

Lois looked about at the girls all deep in thought and smiled. "We ought to re-christen our organization the Thinker's Club."

"No sarcasm," Lenora said loftily. "At least it is something to know we can think when the occasion arises."

"Here comes Shirley," Beverly warned.

Immediately the gloom was dispelled, and Lois and Lenora began one of their senseless, good-natured arguments. When Shirley entered the room the girls were all laughing.

"I've told the girls," Beverly said immediately with a cheery smile. "How did you make out?"

Shirley smiled slowly, bitterly. "They have suspended sentence for a week. Each member of the faculty has to carefully consider the matter, and they will meet again next Saturday and pass judgment." She spoke harshly, and each girl knew she was deeply hurt.

"Well, for a week we can eat and be merry," Lenora said lightly. "Let's go to Weller's and the matinee at the movies."

"The motion is carried unanimously," Beverly declared, catching up her jacket and leading the way to the door. She slipped an arm within Shirley's and propelled the girl along with her.

"Please, Beverly, I'd rather not go," Shirley said reluctantly. "I don't feel like the movies this afternoon."

"Do come," Beverly said seriously; "it will do you worlds of good. It wouldn't help any to sit in the room and think about how bad things are. Who can tell?—the real thief might be uncovered before next Saturday."

"And then everything will be hunky-dory," Lenora added, joining them and slipping her arm through Shirley's free one. "You must come, I shan't enjoy Mickey Mouse if you don't."

"Horrors!" Shirley said with a valiant attempt to rally to their cheerfulness. "We couldn't let such a thing happen."

The girls walked jauntily down College Avenue and entered Weller's much as they might have done on any other day. There was no hint of anxiety or seriousness about most of them. If, now and then, Shirley lapsed into silence, no one noticed. They were seated about a table digesting their concoctions of ice cream and fruit when another girl entered. Immediately Lenora became all smiles and nods.

“Hi, May!”

May Norris looked about to see who was greeting her so jubilantly. Girls seldom became hilarious or friendly with her. Her gaze fell on the Alphas, and the color rose to her cheeks as she swept past them.

“Methinks the little lady is embarrassed,” Lenora said sadly. “What did I do now?”

“Why don’t you greet her as an assistant to a professor should be greeted?” Lois commented. “Instead, you bellow at her and scare her half to death.”

“I’d like to do more than that to her,” Lenora whispered under her breath.

“I agree,” Lois murmured back.

The girls went to the matinée after their sojourn at Weller’s. All through the picture Lois and Lenora kept up a rapid fire of nonsensical chatter until the other girls pounced on them and demanded silence. After the show they strolled back to Chadwick Hall and had dinner. After dinner they spent the time singing and laughing until it was time to retire. The girls had left no time for Shirley to be alone to brood over the suspense she was under. They fully realized how trying it was, but they were determined to lift her out of herself until, as she herself expressed it, the sentence was pronounced. They had hopes of something happening in the week before she was officially expelled, and there was no use worrying over something they could not help. So they went on, Lois and Lenora as nonsensical as ever, and the other girls equally gay.

Shirley herself wondered at their seeming indifference. It was not like Beverly to be so unconcerned when a friend was in trouble. She refused to discuss the subject, and even the rest of the Alphas never mentioned the robbery in Shirley’s presence. Shirley began to think they were not as good friends as she had once believed them to be, when something happened to show her that they were standing by her.

Lenora dashed into Shirley’s and Beverly’s room in search of Beverly to help prepare a literature assignment. Beverly was absent, but Shirley offered her services.

“Gracious, Lenora,” she said in surprise, “what happened to you?”

Lenora had a long scratch on the side of her cheek and flushed uncomfortably when Shirley drew attention to it. Lois entered then, and she

turned from Shirley in relief. She did not want to explain.

“Just a minute,” Shirley said as the girls prepared to leave for English class. “I want to know what happened to Lenora.”

“Oh,” Lenora said uncomfortably, “somebody said something I didn’t like.”

The news of the accusation against Shirley had spread about the campus, and the Alphas had let it be known that they stood firmly by their member, and anyone who had any doubts as to Shirley’s innocence would have to deal with them. Lenora, coming from class one day, heard two girls saying uncomplimentary things and took them to task for it.

Shirley realized what the “something” had been and threw a friendly arm about Lenora’s shoulders.

“I don’t want you quarreling with any of the girls on my account,” she said sternly. “It doesn’t matter in the least what they think.”

“No,” Lenora admitted reluctantly. “It doesn’t matter what they think as long as they don’t say it aloud when I’m around.”

“We must stick together,” Lois agreed.

“Gosh, Shirley,” Lenora said confusedly, “we may not seem very sympathetic at times, but we are all friends of yours. You don’t think we are going to stand for some of the things the girls have been saying?”

“What does it matter?” Shirley asked hopelessly. “I probably won’t be here after Saturday.”

Lois swung on her fiercely and shook her. “Don’t talk like that! If you sit quietly by and do nothing to prove that you are innocent, everyone will really believe that you did steal the questions.”

“They believe it anyway,” Shirley answered, “so what difference does it make?”

“I never thought she would take it like that,” Lois said to Lenora as the two made their way across the campus, “not even fighting for her rights.”

May Norris, Professor Leonard’s assistant, was coming toward them, and as they passed her she kept her eyes from meeting theirs, and the color was high in her cheeks.

“I wonder what is the matter with her lately,” Lois asked. “She acts guilty every time she sees us.”

“Has been talking about Shirley again, I’ll wager,” Lenora said darkly.

“Here it is already Tuesday, and we have discovered nothing,” Lois said disappointedly. “What are we going to do? Where is Beverly this afternoon?”

“She is over at Courtney Hall with Alison Cox, editor of the *Comet*,” Lenora answered. “I wonder if she has discovered anything that would help Shirley?”

Up to that time Beverly hadn’t discovered a thing. She had been talking to Alison about a story to appear in the next issue of the *Comet*. The girls were alone in the living room of Courtney Hall when May Norris entered.

“There is a queer girl,” Alison whispered when May had gone up to her room. “She prowls about awf’ly mysterious at night.”

“She does?” Beverly asked interestedly.

“Yes, last Thursday night one of the girls had a chocolate spree after lights-out, and as I was going to her room, I met May in the hall. She looked awf’ly surprised and startled when she saw me, as though I had caught her in the midst of a crime or something.”

Thursday night! The night the history exam questions had been stolen! Beverly turned on Alison excitedly.

“Was she dressed for out of doors?”

“She didn’t have on pajamas, if that is what you mean,” Alison answered. “Come to think of it, she was breathing hard too, as if she had run quite a distance.”

“Which is May’s room?” Beverly demanded quickly. “I’ve got to talk to her!”

“It’s on the third floor. The one at the end of the hall,” Alison ended, “but what do you——”

“I’ll explain later,” Beverly flung over her shoulder and bounded up the steps. She was taking a bold step, and she might be altogether wrong, but she would take the chance. May had been out last Thursday night. Wasn’t it natural to assume that she might be the mysterious girl?

When Beverly reached the third floor May was leaving her room.

“I’d like to talk to you a moment, May,” Beverly said.

“What about?” May demanded suspiciously.

“About the theft of the history questions,” Beverly answered.

“You should talk to Professor Leonard about them,” May answered with a toss of her head. “I have nothing to say.”

She swept past Beverly, head high, and proceeded down the steps. By the time Beverly recovered from her surprise and descended after her, May was disappearing on the campus. Now, more than ever, Beverly felt sure that May knew something about the robbery. She had seemed as if she were almost afraid to talk to Beverly. Did she think Beverly knew something against her? The idea, telling her to talk to Professor Leonard! Beverly fumed with indignation. Talk to him, what good would it do? If Beverly were to suggest that May might be the guilty one, he would freeze her with a look. As assistant, May was the apple of his eye. Never would he believe her guilty of such an act.

The next day Beverly arose determined once more to confront May. She had thought about the girl all night, and the more she thought about her the more she was convinced that May knew something. May was poorer in history than Shirley was, therefore she had a perfectly good reason to steal the examination questions. Too, the Professor had reluctantly informed her that unless she was high in scholastic standing he would be forced to get another assistant. That was a bitter blow to May, for she reveled in her privileged position.

When afternoon classes were over Beverly went immediately to Courtney Hall and May’s room. She knocked several times on the door, but no one answered. Evidently May had not come home yet. Beverly sat down on the top step of the stairs. May would come in sooner or later, and she did not propose to miss her.

“Hullo,” Alison said, laughing as she mounted the steps, “what a position for a *Comet* reporter. Are you waiting for a story to come along?”

“Yes,” Beverly giggled. “I’m waiting for a story, and if I get it there will be a sensation about Vernon.”

“What is it all about?” Alison demanded excitedly.

Beverly laughed. “Wait and see. I’ll guarantee you a surprise. Has May Norris come in yet, do you know?”

“She came in about an hour ago,” Allison answered.

“I knocked on her door but no one answered,” Beverly said.

“Maybe she went out again,” Alison replied. “When you get your story, bring it right to me.”

“I will,” Beverly promised.

So May had been in and gone out again. Probably to do some work for Professor Leonard, Beverly decided. There was no course but to wait for her. She had to see her this afternoon. It was Wednesday, and that left only two days in which to find the mysterious girl who had robbed the Professor’s desk. Shirley, poor kid, was already packing her trunk, so certain was she that she would be expelled. Beverly had tried to persuade her that something might turn up, but Shirley was certain that she was “doomed.” The other girls in the Alpha Delta Sorority had tried time and again to uncover a clue as to the identity of the mysterious girl, but they had all failed.

A door was cautiously opened behind her, and Beverly looked about. May Norris was noiselessly closing her door. So she had been in her room and hadn’t opened when Beverly knocked. The girl carried a roll of papers under her arm, and as she turned to come down the hall one slipped from her arm and fell to the floor. She did not notice her loss, but Beverly did.

“Just a minute, May,” Beverly said, rising and detaining the Professor’s assistant. “I think you dropped something.”

“It doesn’t matter,” May said, anxious to escape.

“Oh, but it does,” Beverly assured her. “It might be something important.” She was instantly suspicious of May’s obvious unconcern. Why did the girl always try to avoid her? She grasped May’s arm in a firm grip and pulled the girl back down the hall. Beverly picked up the paper and glanced at it. Her heart leapt within her.

“This looks like history exam questions,” she said with a keen glance at May.

The girl’s face had grown white, but she stood her ground firmly.

“The Professor is making up a new set for next week,” she answered.

“But there is last week’s date on this paper,” Beverly continued, “how do you account for that?”

“It is strange,” Beverly went on when May did not answer. “These couldn’t by any chance be the stolen papers, could they?”

“What do you mean?” May asked faintly. “Are you accusing me of stealing the questions?”

Beverly regarded her thoughtfully. The remembrance of Shirley, broken-hearted and humiliated, came to her and her anger rose.

“Yes,” she said, “I’m accusing you. Dare you deny it?”

“Of course I do!” May shouted. “You have no right to accuse me of such a thing. I shall go to Miss Wilder at once and report you. It is an outrage.”

Beverly was aware of the opening of doors and girls taking cautious peeps into the hall. May’s voice had been loud enough to be heard all the way down in the living room. In a moment the house mistress would be on them, and Beverly’s opportunity would be gone. May’s voice had been loud but it had not been confident. In the depths had lurked terror and uncertainty.

Beverly opened the door to May’s room and pushed the girl inside with the sibilant whisper: “You are going to tell me how you stole those papers.”

“I won’t,” May wailed. “I didn’t!”

No one at Vernon ever knew just what took place inside that room during the fifteen minutes that Beverly was with May. May’s voice had hushed, and even the girls who had been listening wide-eyed to the conversation in the hall could not hear a sound. Quite obviously and expectantly they stood about the hall and waited for the two to come out of May’s room.

It was a different May than any they had ever seen that came out, followed closely by Beverly. May’s face was white and her eyes red with recent weeping. Beverly was white and determined. Without a glance about them the two girls marched down the steps and out of Courtney Hall. May carried a roll of papers under her arm, and Beverly kept careful watch that she did not lose any.

They marched silently into Miss Wilder’s office, and the Dean looked up in surprise at the two girls who stood before her.

“What is the trouble, girls?” she asked kindly.

“May has something to say to you, Miss Wilder,” Beverly said. “Tell her now, May.”

“Oh, Miss Wilder,” May began tearfully, “Shirley Parker didn’t steal the exam questions from Professor Leonard’s desk. I did. There they are,” she laid the roll of papers on the Dean’s desk, “all of them.”

Beverly waited to hear no more. She strode out of the Dean’s office onto the campus. She had to get away from May or she might shake her. The idea, protecting herself all this time at Shirley’s expense! Letting Shirley be

expelled for something she, May, had done. It was disgusting. Vernon was not the place for such a girl. She had no sense of honor. She did not even know the meaning of the word. Beverly was still inwardly fuming when she entered her room. Shirley was there, on her knees before her trunk, packing.

“What’s the matter?” she asked anxiously. “You look like a thundercloud.”

“Don’t talk to me for a few minutes,” Beverly said. “I’m mad clean through. Wait until my temper goes down.”

Shirley obediently kept quiet. Beverly went to the window and stood looking out. Finally the sight of the cool, even campus and the stately, dignified college buildings had the desired effect, and her anger died slowly away.

She turned and faced Shirley. “I thought you said you wouldn’t pack any more until you really learned for certain how things were going.”

“I can make a good guess,” Shirley answered. “But tell me, what made you so angry? Were you quarreling with someone—over me?”

Beverly shook her head. “No, I wasn’t quarreling.” She decided not to tell Shirley the good news, but to let Miss Wilder surprise her.

One by one the other Alphas dropped in to chatter for a few minutes before dinner. They were all gathered when Shirley was sent for to appear immediately before Miss Wilder. They all, that is, all but Beverly, exchanged startled glances.

“Well,” Shirley said sighing, “here comes the bad news.”

When Shirley had departed Anne shook her head hopelessly. “Poor Shirley, I wonder what she will do?”

“It isn’t ‘poor Shirley’ any more,” Beverly said, whirling about from where she had been staring out over the campus. “It’s going to be happy Shirley.”

“What do you mean?” Lois demanded quickly.

“May Norris confessed to the theft this afternoon,” Beverly said, enjoying the sensation she created.

“No!” Rosalie cried.

“So that is what it was,” Lenora said gleefully. “Couldn’t you all see the twinkle in Beverly’s eyes when we came in? I knew she was bursting to tell

us something!”

“Hurrah!” Lois shouted, hurling pillows into the air. “That calls for a celebration!”

“A big one tonight,” Anne seconded.

A moment later Shirley burst in, breathless, for she had run all the way from Miss Wilder’s office. She flung herself on Beverly and hugged her ecstatically.

“Everything is fine!” she repeated over and over, as though she did not yet realize it herself.

“Didn’t we tell you?” Lenora demanded after some of the jubilation had died down.

“Yes,” Shirley confessed, “but I never believed it. Miss Wilder told me whom I had to thank,” she said with a fond glance at Beverly.

“Now you know why I was so mad this afternoon,” Beverly explained. “I had just left May.”

“I feel sorry for May,” Shirley said slowly. “I wish we could do something.”

“Such as to beg Miss Wilder not to expel her?” Lois said with sarcasm.

“We could,” Shirley said seriously. “And I’d like to.”

“What a girl!” Lenora shouted. “After what she did? You might have been expelled in her place, and yet you forgive her?”

“Yes,” Shirley said. “I’m so happy now, I could forgive anybody. Will you go with me, Beverly, to see Miss Wilder?”

“Yes,” Beverly agreed reluctantly.

The two went across the campus to the Dean’s office and told her what they wished to do.

Miss Wilder smiled. “Beverly was so angry this afternoon I never thought she would make a request like this.”

“It wasn’t my idea,” Beverly acknowledged readily enough. “Shirley suggested it.”

“Well,” Miss Wilder said slowly, “I think if Shirley would appear before the faculty and ask for leniency for May, together with the fact that Professor Leonard is so fond of the girl, that May might not be expelled.”

“I’ll do it,” Shirley said promptly.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Auf Wiedersehen

It was a warm June night. The stars were out in countless numbers, and the moon was overdoing itself in brilliance.

It was the last day of the term, and, as had been planned, the Alphas were having their meeting. They were in Beverly's and Shirley's room again, seated cross-legged on the floor, sipping cool drinks.

"Madam President." Lenora stood up impressively and bowed to Beverly. "I have appointed myself spokesman for this august assemblage."

"I'm opposed!" Lois said loudly.

"It won't do you any good," Lenora said imperturbably. "Tonight is the last time we shall be together for almost four months."

"I'm tearful at the prospect," Lois, the irrepressible, murmured.

Lenora threw her a murderous glance and continued. "During the past weeks of our sophomore term we have all had a wonderful time."

"Oh, yeah?" said the same mischievous voice.

"This term has been notable for more than one reason. It has been essentially a term of mystery. First of all there were the skeletons of the Horler Mansion, and then the stolen examination questions. And what is, I modestly think, the most important of all, the term saw the formation of an organization that will year by year become a greater——"

"Sorority," Lois supplied.

"Exactly," Lenora acknowledged. "Our sorority, the six Alphas. But now, as I said before, has come the time for us to part——"

"Boo-hoo," Lois murmured tragically.

“—to meet no more for four months.”

“How will you get along without me?” Lois asked interestedly.

Lenora brought her impromptu address to a close by making a sudden lurch after the mischievous Lois. “Interrupt my speech, will you?” she murmured, properly chastising her victim with a pillow.

“Who said it was a speech?” Lois retorted and retaliated by a well aimed cushion that caught Lenora squarely in the face.

Then the merriment began in earnest, and soon the whole six were engaged in a pillow war that threatened to wreck the room entirely.

Let us leave Beverly and her friends in this hilarious moment, to take up new adventures when they foregather again at Vernon. In *Beverly Gray, Junior*, Beverly has some exciting adventures with gypsies, in which the Alpha Sorority joins, and the excitement runs high.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Beverly Gray Sophomore* by Clair Blank]