

Chase Josephine

Marjorie Dean, High School Sophomore



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Pauline Lester

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CHAPTER I

WHEN DREAMS COME TRUE

"Come on in, Connie. The water's fine!" invited Marjorie Dean, beckoning with one round, dripping arm to the girl on the sands, while with the other she kept herself lazily afloat.

The sun of a perfect August morning poured down upon the white beach, dotted here and there with ambitious bathers, who had grasped Time firmly by his venerated forelock, and fared forth with the proverbial early bird for a morning dip in a deceitfully dimpled and smiling sea.

It was not yet nine o'clock, but, fearful of losing a minute of her precious seaside vacation, Marjorie Dean had come down to her favorite playground for her usual early morning swim.

"I know it's fine," laughed Constance Stevens, "but this nice white sand is even finer."

"You'll never learn to swim if you just sit on the beach and dream," reminded Marjorie. "I feel that it's my stern duty to see that your education as a water paddler is not neglected. So here goes!"

With a few skilful strokes she brought up in shallow water. There was a quick rush of lithe feet, the sound of sweet, high laughter, then a little, good-natured gurgle of protest from the golden-haired, blue-eyed girl curled up on the sand as she found herself being dragged into the water by a pair of sturdy young arms.

"Now – sink or swim, survive or perish!" panted Marjorie, as the lapping shallows broke over the yielding figure of her friend. "You'll simply have to be a water baby, Connie, dear. It's as important as being a sophomore in Sanford High, and you know just how important that is! Now, watch me and do likewise."

Her day dream thus rudely interrupted, Constance Stevens laughingly resigned herself to Marjorie's energetic commands, and, now thoroughly awake to the important business at hand, tried her best to follow her friend's instructions. A fifteen minutes' lesson in the art of learning to float followed, and at the end of that time, by common consent, the two girls waded ashore and flung themselves on the warm sand.

"I'll never learn to swim. I feel it in my bones," asserted Constance, as she lazily rose, wrung the water from her bathing suit and seated herself on the white beach beside Marjorie, who lay stretched at full length, her head propped upon her elbows, her alert gaze upon the few bathers who were disporting themselves in the water.

"Then your bones are false prophets," declared Marjorie calmly. "You know how to float already, and that's half the battle. We'll rest a little and talk some more, and then we'll try it again. Next time I'll teach you an easy stroke. Isn't it funny, Connie, we never seem to get 'talked out.' We've been here together five whole weeks and yet there always seems to be something new to say. You are really a most entertaining person."

"That's precisely my opinion of you." Constance's blue eyes twinkled.

The two girls laughed joyously. Two wet hands stretched forth and met in a loving little squeeze.

"It's been wonderful to be here with you, Marjorie. Last year at this time I never dreamed that anything so wonderful could possibly happen to me." The golden-haired girl's voice was not quite steady.

"And I've loved being here with you. What a lot of things can happen in a year," mused Marjorie. "Why, at this time last year I never even knew that there was a town called Sanford on

the map, and when I found out there was really such a place, and that I was going to live there instead of staying in B – and going to Franklin High, I felt perfectly *awful* about it."

It had, indeed, been a most unhappy period for sunny, lovable Marjorie Dean when the call of her father's business had made it necessary for him to remove his family from the beautiful city of B – , where Marjorie had been born and lived sixteen untroubled years of life, to the smaller northern city of Sanford, where she didn't know a soul.

All that happened to Marjorie Dean from the first day in her new home has been faithfully recorded in "Marjorie Dean, High School Freshman." In that narrative was set forth her trials, which had been many, and her triumphs, which had been proportionately greater, as a freshman in Sanford High School. How she had become acquainted with Constance Stevens and how, after never-to-be-forgotten days of storm and sunshine, the friendship between the two young girls had flowered into perfect understanding, formed a story of more than ordinary interest.

Now, after several happy weeks at the seashore, where the Deans had rented a cottage and were spending their usual summer outing with Constance as their guest, the two friends were enjoying the last perfect days of mid-summer before returning to Sanford, where, in September, Constance and Marjorie were to enter the delightful realm of the sophomore, to which they had won admission the previous June.

There had been only one shadow to mar Marjorie's bliss. She had hoped that her childhood friend and companion, Mary Raymond, might be with them at the seashore, but, owing to the ill-health of Mary's mother, the Raymonds had been obliged to summer in the mountains, where Mary was needed at her mother's side. That Constance and Mary should meet and become friends had ever been Marjorie's most ardent desire. It was Constance's remarkable resemblance to Mary that had drawn her toward the girl in the very beginning.

"It's all been so perfectly beautiful, Connie." Marjorie gave a little sigh of sheer happiness. "I've only one regret."

"I know – you mean your chum, Mary," supplemented Constance, with quick sympathy.

Marjorie nodded.

"It seems strange I haven't heard from her. She hasn't written me for over two weeks. I hope her mother isn't worse."

"No news is good news," comforted Constance.

"Perhaps there will be a letter for me from her when we get back to the cottage. Suppose there should be! Wouldn't that be glorious?"

"Perhaps we'd better go up now and see," suggested Constance. "It must be time for the postman."

"We're not going until after you've had fifteen more minutes' instruction in the noble art of swimming, you rascal," laughed Marjorie. "See how self-sacrificing I am! You don't appreciate my noble efforts in your direction."

"Of course I appreciate them, Marjorie Dean." Constance's habitually wistful expression broke up in a radiant smile that set her blue eyes dancing. "But I must confess, this minute, that I can live and be happy if I never learn to swim."

"That settles it. In you go again."

Marjorie sprang energetically to her feet, and began dragging her protesting friend down the beach to the water. Another fifteen minutes' instruction followed, punctuated by much laughter on the part of the two girls.

"There! I'll let you off for to-day," conceded Marjorie, at last. "Now, come on. I have a hunch that there *is* a letter for me. I haven't had any letters for two whole days."

It was only a few rods from the bathing beach to the "Sea Gull," the cottage in which the Deans were living. As they neared it, a gray-uniformed figure was seen hurrying down the walk.

"It's the postman! What did I tell you?" Marjorie broke into a run, Constance following close at her heels.

The two girls brought up flushed and laughing at the pretty, vine-covered veranda, where Mrs. Dean sat, in the act of opening a letter. Half a dozen other postmarked envelopes lay in her lap.

"Oh, Captain," Marjorie touched a hand to her bathing cap, "how many of them are for me?"

"All of them except this, Lieutenant," smiled her mother, holding up the letter she had been reading. "But why all this haste? I hardly expected you back so soon. Five minutes before luncheon is your usual time for reappearing," she slyly reminded.

"Oh, I had an unmistakable hunch that there was a letter here for me from Mary, so I let Connie off easy on her lesson. I'll make up for it to-morrow."

By this time Marjorie held in her hand the half-dozen envelopes, each bearing its own special message from the various friends who held more or less important places in her regard, and was rapidly going over them.

"Here's one from Jerry and one from Hal." The pink in her cheeks deepened at sight of the familiar boyish hand. "One from Marcia Arnold, another from Muriel Harding. Here's a tiresome advertisement." She threw the fifth envelope disdainfully on the wicker table at her side. "And – yes, here it is, in Mary's very own handwriting!"

Laying the other letters on the table with a carefulness that bespoke their value, Marjorie hastily tore open the envelope that contained news of her friend and drawing out a single closely written sheet of paper said apologetically, "You won't mind if I read this now, will you, Connie and Mother?"

"Go ahead," urged Constance. "We couldn't be so hard-hearted as to object."

Mrs. Dean smiled her assent. Marjorie's thoughtfulness of others was always a secret source of joy to her.

Marjorie read down the page, then uttered a little squeal of delight. "Mother!" she exclaimed joyously, "just listen to this:

"Dearest Marjorie:

"You will wonder, perhaps, what has happened to me. I know I have owed you a letter for over two weeks, but I have been so busy taking care of mother that I haven't had very much time to write. Of course, we have a nurse, but, still, there are so many little things to be done for her, which she likes to have me do. She is much better, but our doctor says she must go to a famous health resort in the West for the winter. She will start for Colorado in about two weeks, and now comes the part of my letter which I hope you will like to read. I am going to make you a visit. Father and I are coming to see you on a very mysterious mission. I won't tell you anything more about it until I see you. Part of it is sad and part of it glad, and it all depends upon three persons whether it will ever happen. There! That ought to keep you guessing.

"You wrote me that you would be at home in Sanford by the last of next week. Please write me at once and let me know just exactly when you expect to reach there. We shall not try to come to the seashore, as father prefers to wait until you are back in Sanford again. With much love to you and your mother,

"Yours Mysteriously,

"Mary."

Marjorie finished the last word with a jubilant wave of the letter.

"What do you think of that, Captain? What do you suppose this mysterious mission can be?" Marjorie's face was alight with affectionate curiosity.

"I am not good at guessing," Mrs. Dean smiled tolerantly. The ways of schoolgirls were usually shrouded with a profound mystery, which disappeared into nothingness when confronted with reality.

"It must be something extraordinary. She says it's part sad and part glad. I hope it's mostly glad. I know *I'm* glad that I'm going to see her. Why, it's almost a year since we said good-bye to each other! Oh, Connie," she turned rapturously to Constance, "you two girls, my dearest friends, who look alike, will actually meet at last! You'll love Mary. You can't help yourself, and she'll love you. She can't do anything else."

"I hope she will like me," said Constance a trifle soberly. "I know I shall like her, because she is your friend, Marjorie."

"You'll like her for yourself, Connie," predicted Marjorie loyally, and secure in the belief that neither of these two girls, whose friendship she held above rubies, could fail her, Marjorie Dean dreamed of a kingdom of fellowship into which the three were fated to enter only after scaling the steep and difficult walls of misunderstanding.

CHAPTER II

THE SHADOW

"Listen, Connie! Do you hear that train whistling? I'm sure it's Mary's train."

Marjorie Dean peered anxiously up the track in the direction of the sound. In the distance her alert eyes spied the smoke of the approaching train before it rounded the bend and appeared in full view, and her heart beat high with the thought that the longer-for moment had come at last.

Since her return to Sanford, five days before, Marjorie had been in a quiver of affectionate impatience. How slowly the days dragged! She read and re-read Mary's latest letter, stating that she and her father would arrive at Sanford on Wednesday on the 4.30 train and her impatience grew. It was not alone that she desired to see Mary. There was the "mysterious mission" to be considered. What girl does not love a mystery? And Marjorie was no exception. At that moment, however, as she waited for her childhood's friend, all thought of the mystery was swept aside in the longing to see Mary again.

As the train rumbled into the station and after many groans and shudders stopped with a last protesting creak of wheels, Marjorie's anxious gaze traveled up and down its length. Suddenly, at the far end, she spied a tall, familiar figure descending the car steps. Close behind him followed a slender girl in blue. With a cluck of joy and a "There she is!" Marjorie fairly raced up the station platform. Constance followed, but proceeded more slowly. To Marjorie belonged the right to the first rapturous moments with her chum. In her girlish soul lurked no trace of jealousy. She understood that with Marjorie, Mary must always be first, and she was filled with an unselfish happiness for the pleasure of the girl who had braved all things for her and would forever mean all that was best and highest to her.

"Mary!" Marjorie exclaimed, her clear voice trembling with emotion.

"Oh, Marjorie, it's been ages," quavered Mary Raymond. Then the two became locked in a tempestuous embrace.

"Here, here, where do I come in?" asked an injured voice, as the two young women continued to croon over each other, all else forgotten.

Marjorie gently disengaged herself from Mary's detaining arms and turned to give her hand to Mr. Raymond.

"I'm so glad to see you," she said fervently. "Mother is waiting in our car, just the other side of the station. But first, let me introduce my friend, Constance Stevens. Why, where is she? I thought she was right behind me. Oh, here she comes. Hurry up, Connie!"

Constance approached rather shyly. In spite of the fact that the old days of poverty and heartache lay behind her like a bad dream, she was still curiously reserved and diffident in the presence of strangers. The decision of her aunt, Miss Susan Allison, to take up her abode in Sanford in order that Constance might finish her high school course with Marjorie had brought many changes into the life of the once friendless girl. Miss Allison had purchased a handsome property on the outskirts of Sanford, and, after much persuasion, had, with one exception, induced the occupants of the little gray house to share it with her. Soon afterward Mr. Stevens, Constance's foster-father, whose name she still bore and refused to change, had accepted a position as first violin in a symphony orchestra and had gone to fulfill his destiny in the world of music which he loved. Uncle John Roland and little Charlie, once puny and crippled, but now strong and rosy, had, with Constance, come into the lonely old woman's household at a time when she most needed them, and, in her contrition for the lost years of happiness which she had so stubbornly thrust aside, she was in a fair way to spoil her little flock by too much petting.

The fact that from a mere nobody Constance Stevens had become the social equal of Sanford's most exclusive contingent did not impress the girl in the least. Naturally humble and self-effacing, she had no ambition to shine socially. Her one aim was to become a great singer, and it was understood between herself and her aunt that when she was graduated from high school she was to enter a conservatory of music and study voice culture under the best masters.

It seemed to Constance that she now had everything in the world that she could possibly hope for or desire, but of the great good which had come to her in one short year she felt that above all she prized the friendship of Marjorie Dean and in whatever lay Marjorie's happiness, there must hers lie also.

This was her thought as she now stepped forward to meet Mary Raymond. She was prepared to give this girl who was Marjorie's dearest friend a loyalty and devotion, second only to that which she accorded Marjorie herself.

"At last my dearest wish has come true!" exclaimed Marjorie when Constance had been presented to Mr. Raymond and she and Mary had clasped hands. "I've been so anxious for you two to know each other. Now that you're here together I can see that resemblance I've told you of. Connie, you look like Mary and Mary looks like you. You might easily pass for sisters."

Constance smiled with shy sweetness at Mary and Mary returned the smile, but in her blue eyes there flashed a sudden, half-startled expression, which neither Constance nor Marjorie noted. Then she said in a tone intended to be cordial, but which somehow lacked heart, "I'm awfully glad to know you, Miss Stevens. Marjorie has written me often of you."

"And she has talked to me over and over again of you," returned Constance warmly.

"Now that you know each other, you can postpone getting chummy until later," laughed Marjorie. "Mother will wonder what has happened to us. She'll think you didn't come on that train if we don't put in an appearance."

Possessing herself of Mary's traveling bag she led the way with Mary through the station and out to the opposite side where Mrs. Dean awaited them. Constance followed with Mr. Raymond. In her heart she experienced an odd disappointment. Was it her imagination, or did Mary's cordiality seem a trifle forced? Perhaps it would have been better if she had not accompanied Marjorie to the station to meet Mary. Perhaps Mary was a trifle hurt that her chum had not come alone. She decided that she would not ride to Marjorie's home with the party, although she had been invited to dine with them that night. She could not bear to think of intruding. She managed to answer Mr. Raymond's courteous remarks, but her thoughts were not centered upon what he was saying. Without warning, her old-time diffidence settled down upon her like an enveloping cloak, and her one object was to slip away as quickly and as unobtrusively as possible.

"I think I had better not go home with you, Marjorie," she said in a low voice. They had reached the waiting automobile and Mary and Mrs. Dean were exchanging affectionate greetings.

"Oh, why not, Connie?" Marjorie's happy face clouded. "You know we'd love to have you, wouldn't we, Mary?"

"Of course." Mary again smiled at Constance, but again her smile lacked warmth.

Constance shook her head almost obstinately.

"I think I had better not come," she repeated, and in her speech there was a shadowy return of the old baffling reserve that had so greatly disturbed Marjorie in the early stages of their friendship.

"But you promised to take dinner with us to-night," remarked Marjorie.

"I – I have changed my mind. It will be best for me to go home, I think. I'll come over to-morrow."

Mrs. Dean added her persuasions, but Constance was firm, and, after bidding a courteous farewell to the Deans' guests, she hurried away, more agitated than she cared to admit.

"Why, what ails Constance, Marjorie?" asked Mrs. Dean in surprise.

"Nothing – that is, I don't know." Marjorie looked after her friend's rapidly disappearing figure, a puzzled expression in her brown eyes.

Mary Raymond viewed Marjorie with a faint frown. It was rather provoking in Marjorie to express so much concern over this Constance Stevens. After their long separation she felt that her chum's every thought ought to be for her alone. And in that instant a certain fabled green-eyed monster, that Mary had never believed could exist for her, suddenly sprang into life and whispered to her that, perhaps, after all, she was not first in Marjorie Dean's heart.

CHAPTER III

SOWING THE SEED OF DISCORD

"Before you talk of another single thing, Mary Raymond, please tell me what you mean by a 'mysterious mission' that is 'part sad and part glad,'" exclaimed Marjorie.

Mr. Raymond was occupying the front seat of the automobile, beside Mrs. Dean, who drove the car, a birthday present from her husband, and the two girls had the tonneau of the automobile to themselves. They had scarcely deposited Mary's luggage on the floor of the car and settled themselves for the short ride to the Deans' home when Marjorie had made her eager inquiry into the nature of the "mysterious mission" that had so aroused her curiosity.

"Well," began Mary, brightening, "father and I *have* come to see you on a mission, but the only mystery about it is that you don't as yet know why we've come. I thought 'mysterious mission' looked rather well on paper so I set it down."

"But you're going to tell me about it this instant, you wicked, tantalizing girl," insisted Marjorie with pretended sternness.

"I thought perhaps you might be able to guess certain things from my letter," continued Mary. "You see, I wrote you that mother would have to go to Colorado for the winter and –"

"You are going with her," supplemented Marjorie.

"No, that's a wild guess. I'm not going west with her. Father says I must stay in the East and go through my sophomore year in high school."

"But you can't stay at home by yourself, Mary. Just think how dreadful that would be for you, with your father away most of the time," reminded Marjorie.

Mary's father was a traveling salesman for a large furniture manufactory, and spent the greater part of his time on the road.

"That's just the point," responded Mary. "I know I can't stay at home alone. Mother's illness and what is to become of me when father goes on the road again is the sad part of it, but the glad part is – oh, Marjorie, can't you guess now?" Mary caught Marjorie's hand in hers. "We've come all the way to Sanford to see if," her voice rose high with excitement, "there isn't a little corner in the Dean barracks that a certain lieutenant can call her own for this year and –"

"Mary!" It was Marjorie's turn to become excited. "Do you really mean that you wish to come to live with me and enter Sanford High? That we'll be sophomores together?"

Mary clung to Marjorie's hand and nodded. For a moment she was too near to tears for speech. But they were tears of happiness. Marjorie really desired her for a best friend after all. Her sudden jealousy of Constance Stevens vanished.

"I should say that was a *glad* part of your mission," laughed Marjorie happily. "I don't know what I've ever done to deserve such good fortune. Mother will be glad, too. She loves you almost as much as she loves me."

"Oh, Mother," Marjorie leaned impulsively forward, "Mary's coming to live with me this year while her mother is in Colorado. You'll have two lieutenants instead of one to look after. We are going to win sophomore honors together and be promoted to be captains next June!"

"There," declared Mr. Raymond with comical resignation, "now you have let the cat out of the bag with a vengeance, Mary Raymond. All this time I had been planning to ask Mrs. Dean, in my most ingratiating manner, if she thought she might possibly make room for a certain very frisky member of my family for a while. I had intended to proceed carefully and diplomatically so that she wouldn't be too much shocked at such a prospect, but now –"

"It's all settled, isn't it, Mother?" interrupted Marjorie. "You are just as anxious as I for Mary to come and live with us, aren't you?"

"Shall I stop the car in the middle of the street and assure you of my willingness to increase my regiment?" laughed Mrs. Dean.

"No, no," protested Marjorie. "Let's hurry home as fast as we can and talk it over. We're only two squares from our house now. Besides, I've planned everything already. Mary can have the spare bedroom next to my house." Marjorie always referred to her room as her "house." "There's only the bath between and we'll use that together, and have a regular house of our own. Oh, Mary, won't it be perfectly splendid?"

Regardless of what passersby might think, Mary and Marjorie embraced with an enthusiasm that threatened to land them both in the tonneau of the rapidly moving car, while their elders smiled at this reckless display of affection.

The automobile had hardly come to a full stop on the broad driveway, that wound through the wide stretch of lawn that was one of the chief beauties of the Deans' pretty home, when Marjorie swung open the door and skipped nimbly out of the car with, "Welcome home, Mary!"

Mary was only an instant behind Marjorie in leaving the car, and the two hugged each other afresh out of pure joy of living.

"Take Mary up to her room at once, dear," directed Mrs. Dean. "I'm sure she must be tired and hungry after her long ride in the train. We will have an early dinner to-night. I expect Mr. Dean home at almost any moment," she continued, turning to Mr. Raymond.

"Come on, Mary." Marjorie had lifted Mary's bag from the automobile. Now she stretched forth an inviting hand to Mary, and piloted her across the lawn and up the short stretch of stone walk to the front door. The door opened and a trim, rosy-cheeked maid appeared as by magic. She reached for Mary's bag, but Marjorie waved her gently aside.

"I'll do the honors, Delia. You can look after mother and Mr. Raymond. We are very self-sufficient persons who don't need anything except a chance to go upstairs and talk ourselves hoarse."

A wide smile irradiated the maid's goodnatured face, as she stepped aside to allow Marjorie and Mary to enter the hall.

"What a darling house!" Mary's glance traveled about the pretty Dutch hall to the large, comfortable living room beyond. "You have oceans of room here, haven't you?"

Marjorie nodded. "Yes; when first we came here I felt lost. It was actually lonesome. It took me a whole week to grow accustomed to looking out without seeing rows of brick houses across the street and on each side of me. Don't you remember, I wrote you all about it? You see, I didn't enter high school until we'd been here almost two weeks, and in all that time I never met a single girl. I felt like a shipwrecked sailor on a great, big, lonely, old island. Shall we go upstairs now? I'm so anxious to have you see my 'house.' It's a house within a house, you know. Mother had it all done up in pink and white for me, and I spent hours in it. Your house is blue. I made general and captain let me have one of the spare bedrooms done in blue, so that when you came to visit me you'd feel at home. And now it's going to be your very own for a whole year! It's too good to be true."

Releasing Mary's hand, Marjorie led the way up the stairs to the second floor and down the short hall to her "house." Mary cried out in admiration at her friend's dainty room. She walked about, exclaiming over its perfect details after the manner of girls, then three minutes later the two somehow found themselves seated side by side on Marjorie's pretty white bed, their arms about each other's waists, and fairly launched into one of the good, old-time confabs they were wont to indulge in when the top step of the Deans' veranda in B – had been their favorite trysting place.

Half an hour later Mrs. Dean entered the room to find them still talking at an alarming rate, the rest of their world apparently forgotten.

"I might have known it," she smiled. "Why, you haven't even taken off your hats, and dinner will be ready in ten minutes. Marjorie, you are a most neglectful hostess."

"Oh, we don't mind having dinner with our hats on," returned Marjorie cheerfully. Then, rising, she took off her broad-brimmed Panama, and began gently pulling the pins from Mary's hat. "Make it fifteen minutes, instead of ten, Captain, and we'll be as spick and span as you please."

"Discipline seems to be very lax in these barracks," commented Mrs. Dean. "I am afraid I ought to call upon General to help me enforce my orders. Under the circumstances I'll be lenient, though, and stretch the time to fifteen minutes. There, I hear General downstairs now!"

She disappeared from the doorway and immediately a great scurrying about began, punctuated with much talk and laughter. To Marjorie it seemed as though she had not been so happy for ages. It was wonderful to know that her beloved Mary was actually with her once more, and still more wonderful that she would continue to be with her indefinitely.

At dinner she beamed joyously across the table at the little blue-eyed girl, while their elders discussed and settled her destiny for the coming year. Mr. and Mrs. Dean met Mr. Raymond's request in behalf of his daughter with the whole-heartedness that so characterized them. In fact, they were highly in favor of receiving Mary as a member of their little household.

"Two soldiers are better than one," asserted Mr. Dean humorously. "I believe in preparedness. 'In times of peace prepare for war,' you know. With such a valiant army under my command I could do wonders if attacked by the enemy."

After dinner they all repaired to the living room, where the discussion of the all-important subject was continued, and when at eleven o'clock two sleepy, but blissfully happy, lieutenants climbed the stairs to bed, Mary Raymond lacked nothing except actual adoption papers, signed and sealed, to admit her into the Deans' hospitable fold.

Yet there was one tiny drawback to Mary's joy. Try as she might she could not forget Constance Stevens and Marjorie's too evident fondness for her. From Marjorie's early letters she had formed the conclusion that Constance was merely a poor nobody, whom her chum, with her usual spirit of generosity had tried to befriend. Marjorie's later letters had contained little pertaining to Constance. Mary had not known of the long period of estrangement between Constance and Marjorie that had so nearly wrecked their budding friendship, and of the many changes that time had wrought in the life of the girl who looked like her. She had, therefore, been quite unprepared to meet the dainty, well-dressed young woman whom Marjorie appeared to hold in such strong affection. She reflected that night, a trifle resentfully, after Marjorie had kissed her good-night and left her, that it was very strange in Marjorie not to have put her in possession of the real facts of the case. Still, it was really not her affair. If Marjorie chose to become chummy with Constance without even writing a word of it to her, there was nothing to do except to be silent over the whole affair. Perhaps Marjorie would tell her all about it later. Certainly she would ask no questions. And then and there, little, blue-eyed Mary Raymond made her first mistake, and sowed a tiny seed of discord in her jealous heart that was fated later to bear bitter fruit.

CHAPTER IV

INTRODUCING MARY TO THE GIRLS

"We've come for a last inspection, Captain. How do we look?"

Marjorie Dean danced into her mother's room, her brown eyes sparkling with anticipation, her charming face all smiles. Mary Raymond followed her excited chum.

"Halt! Company, attention!" commanded Mrs. Dean, as she turned from her dressing table to pass an opinion upon the waiting brigade of two. Her brown eyes rested approvingly upon the trim figures drawn up in their most soldierly attitude before her. Marjorie's frock of pink linen, with its wide lace collar and cuffs, exactly suited her dark eyes and hair, while Mary's gown of pale blue of the same material served to accentuate the fairness of her skin and the gold of her curls.

"Shall we do, Captain? Are we absolutely spick and span?" Marjorie turned slowly about, then made a laughing dive at her mother and enveloped her in a devastating embrace.

"Now see the havoc you've wrought," complained Mrs. Dean. "I shall have to do my hair over again. Never mind. I'll forgive you, and, being magnanimous, will state that I am very proud of the appearance of my army."

"You're a gallant officer and a dear, all in one." Marjorie caught her mother's hand in hers. "Now, we must be on our way. We are going to school early because Mary will have to see Miss Archer. Besides, I'm anxious for her to meet Jerry Macy and some of the other girls. If only she had come to Sanford sooner, I'd have loved to give a party for her. Then she'd know every one of my friends. Oh, well, there is plenty of time for that. Good-bye, Captain. We'll be back before long. There is never very much to do in school on the first day."

Dropping a gay little kiss on her mother's smooth cheek, Marjorie left the room, followed by Mary, who stopped just long enough to kiss Mrs. Dean good-bye.

Three weeks had slipped by since Mr. Raymond and Mary had come to Sanford upon the so-called mysterious mission that had made Mary Raymond a member of the Dean household. They had returned to the city of B – the following day. From there Mr. Raymond had gone directly to the mountains, for his wife, who, in spite of her ill-health, had insisted on returning to her home to oversee the making of Mary's gowns and the choosing of her wardrobe in general. Two days before coming to Sanford, Mary had seen her mother off on her journey to Colorado in quest of health. She had put on a brave face and smiled when she wished to cry, and it was alone the thought that she was going to live with Marjorie during her mother's absence that kept her from breaking down at the last sad moment of farewell.

It was a sober-faced, sad-eyed Mary that Marjorie had met at the train, but, under the irresistible sunniness of Marjorie's nature, Mary had soon emerged from her cloud, and now the prospect of entering Sanford High School filled her with lively anticipation.

As Marjorie and Mary emerged from the house and swung down the stone walk in perfect step, they beheld a stout, and to Marjorie, a decidedly familiar figure turning in at the gate. In the same instant a joyous "Hello" rent the air, and the stout girl cantered up the walk at a surprising rate of speed. There was a delighted gurgle from Marjorie, that ended in a fervent embrace of the two young women.

"Oh, Jerry, I'm so glad to see you! I was afraid you wouldn't be back in Sanford before school opened. I saw Irma day before yesterday and she said she hadn't heard a word from you for over a week."

"We didn't get here until last night at ten o'clock. Maybe I'm not glad to see *you*." Jerry beamed affectionately upon Marjorie.

"This is my friend, Mary Raymond, Jerry," introduced Marjorie. "She is going to live with us this winter and be a sophomore at dear old Sanford High. There will be six of us instead of five now."

"I'm glad to know you." Jerry smiled and stretched forth a plump hand in greeting. "I've heard a lot about you."

"I've heard Marjorie speak of you, too. I'm ever so pleased to meet you." Mary exhibited a friendliness toward Jerry Macy that had been quite lacking in her greeting of Constance Stevens.

As the three stood for a moment at the gate Jerry's eyes suddenly grew very round.

"Why, Marjorie, your friend looks like Connie, doesn't she?"

"Of course she does," replied Marjorie happily. "Don't you remember I told you long ago that that was why I felt so drawn toward Connie in the first place?"

"Yes, I remember it now. Isn't it funny that your two dearest friends should look alike? Have you met Constance, Mary? I'm going to call you Mary. I never call a girl 'Miss' unless I can't bear her. I'm sure I'm going to like you. Not only because you're Marjorie's chum, but for yourself, you know. If you turn out to be even one half as nice as Constance Stevens, I'll adore you. Connie is a dear and no mistake about it."

The shadow of a frown touched Mary's forehead. Why must she be compelled to hear continually of Constance Stevens? And why should this Jerry Macy place her and Constance on the same plane in Marjorie's affection? She did not propose to share her place in her chum's heart with anyone. Of course, this girl could not possibly know just how much she and Marjorie had always been to each other. Later on they would understand. They would soon see that Marjorie preferred her above all others.

Comforted by this reflection the shadow passed from Mary's face and the trio started down the street for school, chatting and laughing as only carefree schoolgirls can.

Once inside the school building, Jerry said good-bye to them and turned down the corridor toward the study hall. Marjorie smiled with tender reminiscence as she and Mary climbed the familiar broad stairway to the second floor. She was thinking of another Monday morning that belonged to the past, when a timid stranger had climbed those same stairs and diffidently inquired the way to the principal's office. How far away that day seemed, and how much had happened within those same walls since that fateful morning.

"I'll never forget my first morning here," she said to Mary, as they walked down the corridor toward their destination – the last room on the east side. "Captain had a headache and couldn't come with me. I had to march into Miss Archer's office all by myself. I felt like a forlorn stranger in a strange, unfriendly land. Then I met such a nice girl, Ellen Seymour, a friend of mine now, and she took me to the office and introduced me to Miss Archer."

Before Mary had time to reply they had entered the cheerful living-room office that had so greatly impressed Marjorie on her first introduction to Sanford High. A tall, dark girl, seated at a desk at one end of the room, glanced up at the sound of the opening door. She hurried forward with a little exclamation of delighted surprise. "Why, Marjorie!" she exclaimed. "I was just thinking of you. I was wondering if you'd be in for the first day. I had made up my mind to run down to the study hall a little later and see." She now had Marjorie's hands in an affectionate clasp.

"I've been wondering about you, too," nodded Marjorie. "You are another stray who didn't come back until the last minute."

"I'm a working girl, you know," reminded Marcia. "Doctor Bernard was dreadfully disappointed because I wouldn't give up high school and keep on being his secretary. But I couldn't do that."

"Of course you couldn't," agreed Marjorie, "especially now that you are a senior."

Mary Raymond had drawn back a little while Marjorie and Marcia Arnold, Miss Archer's once disagreeable secretary, but now a changed girl through the influence of Marjorie, exchanged

greetings. Marjorie turned and drew her chum forward, introducing her to Marcia, who bowed and extended her hand in friendly fashion.

"Is Miss Archer busy, Marcia?" asked Marjorie, after she had explained that Mary was to become a pupil of Sanford High School.

"Wait a moment, I'll see." Marcia went into the inner office, returning almost instantly with, "Go right in. She is anxious to see you, Marjorie."

Miss Archer's affectionate welcome of Marjorie Dean brought a blush of sheer pleasure to the girl's cheeks. Her heart thrilled with joy at the thought that there was now no veil of misunderstanding between her and her beloved principal.

"And so this is Mary Raymond." Miss Archer took the newcomer's hand in both her own. "We are glad to welcome you into our school, my dear. Your principal at Franklin High School has already written me of you. How long have you been in Sanford?"

Mary answered rather shyly, explaining her situation, while Marjorie looked on with affectionate eyes. She was anxious that Miss Archer should learn to know and love Mary.

"I will put you in Marjorie's hands," declared Miss Archer, after a few moments' pleasant conversation. "She will take you to the study hall and see that you are made to feel at home. We wish our girls to look upon their school as their second home, considering they spend so much of their time here. Please tell your mother, Marjorie," she added, as the two girls turned to leave the room, "that I shall try to call on her this week."

"How do you like Miss Archer? Isn't she splendid?" were the quick questions Marjorie put, as they retraced their steps down the long corridor.

"I know I'm going to love her," returned Mary fervently. "I hope I'll be happy here, Marjorie." There was a wistful note in her voice that caused Marjorie to glance sharply at her friend. Mary's charming face was set in unusually sober lines.

"Poor Mary," was her reflection. "She's thinking of her mother." But Mary Raymond's thoughts were far from the subject of her mother. Instead, they were fixed upon what Jerry Macy had said that morning about Constance Stevens. Miss Archer had asked about Constance, too. She had spoken of her as though she and Marjorie were best friends. What had she meant when she said, "Well, Marjorie, you and Constance deserve fair sophomore weather after last year's storms." The flame of jealousy, which Mary had sought to stifle after her first meeting with Constance, was kindled afresh.

"What did Miss Archer mean when she spoke of you and Miss Stevens – and last year's storms?" she asked abruptly.

"Oh, I can't explain now. It's too long a story. Here we are at the study hall." Her mind occupied with school, Marjorie had not caught the strained note in Mary's voice.

"She doesn't wish me to know," was Mary's jealous thought. "She is keeping secrets from me. All right. Let her keep them. Only I know one thing, and that is – I'll *never, never, never* be friends with Constance Stevens, not even to please Marjorie!"

CHAPTER V

AN UNCALLED-FOR REBUFF

The great study hall which Marjorie and Mary entered had little of the atmosphere supposed to pervade a hall of learning. A loud buzz of conversation greeted their ears. It came from the groups of girls collected in various parts of the hall, who were making the most of their opportunities to talk until called to order. Marjorie gave one swift glance toward the lonely desk on the platform. It had always reminded her of an island in the midst of a great sea. She breathed a little sigh of relief. Her pet aversion, Miss Merton, was not occupying the chair behind it. This, no doubt, accounted for the general air of relaxation that pervaded the room. Her alert eyes searched the room for Constance Stevens. She was not present. She gave another sigh, this time it was one of disappointment. She had seen Constance only twice since Mary's arrival. On one occasion she had taken dinner at the Deans' home. The three girls had spent, what seemed to Marjorie, an unusually pleasant evening. Constance, feeling dimly that Mary did not quite approve of her, had dropped her usually reticent manner and exerted herself to please. So well had she succeeded that Mary had rather unwillingly succumbed to her charm and grown fairly cordial.

Totally unconscious of the shadow which had darkened the pleasure of Constance's first meeting with Mary, and equally ignorant of Mary's secret resentment of her new friend, Marjorie had retired that night inwardly rejoicing in both girls and planning all sorts of good times that they three might have together.

Several days later Constance had entertained them at luncheon at "Gray Gables," the beautiful, old-fashioned house Miss Allison had purchased, on the outskirts of Sanford. Mary had been secretly impressed with its luxury and had instantly made friends with little Charlie. The quaint child had gravely informed her that she looked like Connie and immediately taken her into his confidence regarding his aspirations toward some day playing in "a big band." He had also obligingly favored her with a solo of marvelous shrieks and squawks on his much tortured "fiddle." Mary loved children, and this, perhaps, went far toward stilling the jealousy, which, so far, only faintly stirring, bade fair to one day burst forth into bitter words.

"I'll see you in school on Monday," Marjorie had called over her shoulder, as she and Mary had taken their departure from Constance's home that afternoon. But now Monday had come and there was no sign of the girl Marjorie held so dear in the study hall.

"Connie had better hurry. It's five minutes to nine. She'll be late." Marjorie's gaze traveled anxiously toward the door. An unmistakable frown puckered Mary's brows, but Marjorie did not see it.

"Oh, Marjorie Dean, here you are at last. We've been waiting for you." Susan Atwell left a group of girls with which she had been hob-nobbing and hurried down the aisle. "Come over here, you dear thing. We've been looking our eyes out for you." She stopped short and stared hard at Mary. "Why, I thought –" she began.

"You thought it was Connie, didn't you?" laughed Marjorie. She introduced Mary to Susan.

"The girls over there thought you were Constance Stevens, too," smiled Susan, showing her dimples. "You see, Marjorie and Connie are inseparable, so, of course, we naturally mistook you for her. I never saw two girls look so much alike. If we have a fancy dress party this year you two can surely go as the Siamese Twins. Wouldn't that be great?"

Mary smiled perfunctorily. She had her own views in the matter, and they did not in the least coincide with Susan's.

A moment later they were hemmed in by an enthusiastic bevy of girls, each one trying to make herself heard above the others. Marjorie was besieged on all sides with eager inquiries. The

girls had discovered, as she neared them, that her companion was not Constance Stevens. Marjorie, at once, did the honors and Mary found herself nodding in quick succession to half a dozen girls.

"You fooled us all for a minute, Miss Raymond," cried Muriel Harding.

"She didn't fool me," announced Jerry Macy, who had joined them just in time to hear Muriel's remark. "I knew she was coming, but I kept still because I wanted to see you girls stare."

"Look around the room, Marjorie," observed Irma Linton in a guarded tone. "Do you miss anyone? Not Constance. I wonder where she is?"

"I don't know." Marjorie's eyes took in the big room, then again sought the door. "She said she would meet me here this morning. Let me see. Do I miss anyone? Do you mean a girl in our class, Irma?"

Irma nodded.

Marjorie cast another quick look about her. "Why, no. Oh, now I know. You mean Mignon."

Again Irma nodded. Under cover of a burst of laughter from the others she murmured, "Mignon won't be with us this year. You will observe, if you look hard, that I'm not weeping over our loss."

Marjorie was silent for a moment. The past rode before her like a panorama, as the thought of the elfish-faced French girl and of how deeply she had caused both herself and Constance Stevens to suffer. Her pretty face hardened a trifle as she said, in a low voice, "I'm not sorry, either, Irma. But why won't she be in high school this year? Has she moved away from Sanford? I haven't seen her since we came home from the beach."

"She has gone away to boarding school," answered Irma. "Between you and me, I think she was ashamed to come back here this year. Susan told me that her father wanted her to stay in high school and go to college, but she teased and teased to go away to school, so finally he said she might. She left here over two weeks ago. One of the girls received a letter from her last week. In it she said she was so glad she didn't have to go to a common high school and that the girls in her school were not milk-and-water babies, but had a great deal of spirit and daring."

Marjorie's lip curled unconsciously. "I'd rather be a 'milk-and-water baby' than as cruel and heartless as she. I'll never forgive her for the way she treated Connie. Let's not talk of her, Irma. It makes me feel cross and horrid, and, of all days, I'd like to be happy to-day. There's so much to be happy over, and I'm so glad to see all of you. Life would be a desert waste without high school, wouldn't it?"

Marjorie's soft hand found Irma's. She was very fond of this quiet, fair-haired girl, who, with Jerry Macy, had stood by her so resolutely through dark days.

"Here she comes – our dear teacher. Look out, girls, or you'll be ushered out of Sanford High before you've had a chance to look at the bulletin board," warned Muriel Harding's high-pitched voice. Her sarcastic remarks carried farther than she had intended they should, as a sudden hush had fallen upon the study hall. Miss Merton, Marjorie's pet aversion, had stalked into the great room. She cast a malignant glance, not at Muriel, but straight at Marjorie Dean.

"Oh," gasped Muriel and Marjorie in united consternation.

"That's the time you did it, Muriel," muttered Jerry Macy. "I always told you that you ought to be an orator or an oratress or something. Your voice carries a good deal farther than it ought to. Only Miss Merton didn't think it was you who made those smart remarks. She thought it was Marjorie. Now she'll have a new grievance to nurse this year."

"I'm awfully sorry." Muriel was the picture of contrition. "I didn't intend she should hear me – but to blame you for it! That's dreadful. I'll go straight and tell her that I said it."

Muriel made a quick movement as though to carry out her intention. Marjorie caught her by the arm. "You'll do nothing of the sort, Muriel Harding. My sophomore shoulders are broad enough to beat it. Perhaps she didn't really hear what you said. She can't dislike me any more for that than she did before she thought I said it."

"Young ladies, I am waiting for you to come to order. Will you kindly cease talking and take seats?" Miss Merton's raucous voice broke harshly upon the abashed group of girls. They scuttled into the nearest seats at hand like a bevy of startled partridges.

"What a horrid woman," was Mary Raymond's thought, as she slipped into a seat in front of Marjorie, and stared resentfully at the rigid figure, so devoid of womanly beauty, in its severe brown linen dress, unrelieved by even a touch of white at the neck.

With a final glare at Marjorie, the teacher proceeded at once to the business at hand. Within the next few minutes she had arranged the girls of the freshman class in the section of the study hall they were to occupy during the coming year. Marjorie awaited the turn of the sophomores to be assigned to a seat with inward trepidation. She had had no opportunity to introduce Mary to Miss Merton. What should she do? She half rose from the seat, then sat down undecidedly.

Miss Merton had arranged the freshmen to her satisfaction. Now she was calling for the sophomores to rise. Perhaps she would not notice Mary. If she did not, then Mary could pass with the sophomores to their section. As soon as the session was dismissed, she would introduce her to Miss Merton.

But Miss Merton was lynx-eyed. "That girl there in the blue dress," she blared forth. "You were not in the freshman class last year."

Mary turned in her seat and shot a glance of appeal to Marjorie. The girl rose bravely in friend's behalf.

"Miss Merton," she said in her clear, young voice, "I brought Miss Raymond here with me. She –"

"You are not supposed to bring visitors to school, Miss Dean," was the teacher's sarcastic reminder.

Marjorie's eyes kindled with wrath. Then, mastering her anger, she made courteous reply. "She is not a visitor. She expects to enter the sophomore class."

"Come down to this front seat, young woman," ordered Miss Merton, ignoring Marjorie's explanation. "I'll attend to you later."

Mary sat still, surveying Miss Merton out of two belligerent blue eyes.

"Do as she says, Mary," whispered Marjorie.

Mary obeyed. Walking down the aisle with maddening deliberation, she seated herself on the bench indicated.

"No talking," rasped Miss Merton, as a faint murmur went up from the girls in the sophomore section.

Once the classes had been assigned to their places for the year there was little more to be done. Nettled by her recent resentment against Marjorie, Miss Merton took occasion to deliver a sharp lecture on good conduct in general, making several pointed remarks, which caused Marjorie to color hotly. More than one pair of young eyes glared their resentment of this harsh teacher who had never lost an opportunity in the past school year of censuring their favorite.

The moment the short session was over the girls of her particular set gravitated toward Marjorie.

"Well, of all the old cranks!" scolded Geraldine Macy.

"She's the most hateful teacher in the world," was Muriel Harding's tribute.

"I wouldn't pay any attention to her, Marjorie. I'd go straight to Miss Archer," advised Susan Atwell. "Just see her now! She looks as though she'd actually snap at your friend."

Miss Merton was engaged in interviewing the still belligerent Mary, who stood listening to her, a sulky droop to her pretty mouth.

"Oh, I must go and help Mary out. Wait for me outside, girls."

"Do you need any help?" inquired Jerry. "I never was afraid of Miss Merton, if you'll remember."

"Oh, no." Marjorie hurried toward her friend, and stood quietly at Mary's side.

"Well, Miss Dean, what is it?" Miss Merton eyed Marjorie with her most disagreeable expression.

"I came to tell you, Miss Merton," began Marjorie in her direct fashion, "that Miss Raymond saw Miss Archer this morning before we came to the study hall. She sent us – "

"That will do, Miss Dean," interrupted Miss Merton. "I hope Miss Raymond is capable of attending to her affairs without your assistance. I should greatly prefer that you go on about your own business and leave this matter to me. I believe I have been a teacher in Sanford High School long enough to be trusted to manage my own work."

A bitter retort rose to Marjorie's lips. She forced it back and with a dignified bow to Miss Merton and, "I will wait for you in the corridor, Mary," walked from the room, her head held high, her eyes burning with resentful tears.

CHAPTER VI

MARY'S DISTURBING DISCOVERY

Once outside the study hall Marjorie Dean's proud manner left her. Her recent joy in returning to high school gave place to a feeling of deep dejection. Everything had certainly gone wrong. She had had so many pleasant little thrills of anticipation that she had quite forgotten Miss Merton and the teacher's unreasoning dislike for her, which she had never taken pains to conceal. Muriel's injudicious remarks had made a bad matter worse. Marjorie knew that from now on she would have to be doubly on her guard. It was evident that Miss Merton intended to take her to task whenever the slightest opportunity presented itself. Marjorie even had her suspicions that Miss Merton had known that it was Muriel instead of herself who had uttered those distinctly unflattering words.

"I'll have to be very careful not to offend Miss Merton," she ruminated gloomily, as she stood waiting for Mary, her eyes fastened on the big study-hall door. Then her thoughts switched from Miss Merton to Constance Stevens. Why hadn't Connie come to school? Surely she could not be ill. Perhaps Charlie was sick.

The opening of the study-hall door interrupted her worried reflections. Mary emerged from the hall, looking like a young thundercloud. She closed the door after her with a resounding bang, which conveyed more than words.

"Of all the hateful old tyrants!" she exclaimed, as she hurried toward Marjorie. "I despise her. How dared she treat you so?"

"Oh, never mind," soothed Marjorie. "Let us forget her. Tell me, are you or are you not a sophomore? Or must we go to Miss Archer to straighten things?"

"I'm a sophomore all right enough," said Mary grimly. "I told her what Miss Archer said, and after that she treated me more civilly. Such a teacher is a disgrace to a school. Why is she so bitter against you, Marjorie?"

Marjorie shrugged her shoulders. "I don't know. She has always acted like that toward me. It's just a natural dislike, I suppose. Sometimes, after a teacher has taught school a great many years, she takes sudden likes and dislikes. I've been in her black books since my very first day in Sanford High."

"Poor old Lieutenant." Mary patted Marjorie's hand with sympathetic affection.

"Oh, it doesn't matter. I don't really care much. There are so many nice teachers here who *do* like me that I'm not going to worry over Miss Merton. Come along." She linked her arm in Mary's. "The girls will be waiting for us outside. We are all going down to Sargent's for ice cream. Then we'll go home and report to Captain. After luncheon, I think we had better walk over to Gray Gables. I am afraid Connie or, perhaps, little Charlie is sick. You know Connie promised us, when we were there on Friday, that she'd see us at school."

Mary's face clouded. "I – I think I won't go to Gray Gables with you. I must write to mother. Besides, you and Constance may wish to be by yourselves."

Marjorie's brown eyes opened wide. "Why should we?" she asked. "You know you are always first with me. I haven't any secrets from you."

Mary's face brightened. Perhaps she had been too hasty in her conclusions. "I wish you would tell me all about yourself and Constance," she said slowly. "You promised you would."

"Well, I will," began Marjorie. Then she paused and flushed slightly. It had suddenly come to her that perhaps Constance would not care to have Mary know of the clouds of suspicion that had hung so heavily over her freshman year. "I'd love to tell you about it now, Mary, but I think I had better ask Constance first if she is willing for me to do so. You see, it concerns her more than

me. I am almost sure she wouldn't mind, but I'd rather be perfectly fair and ask her first. You know Captain and General have always said to us, 'Never break a confidence.'"

A hurt look crept into Mary's face. "Oh, never mind," she managed to say with a brave assumption of indifference. "I don't wish to know about it if you don't care to tell me."

"But I *do* care to tell you, and I will if Connie says I may," assured Marjorie earnestly.

Mary had no time for further remark. They had reached the double entrance doors to the building and were hailed by a crowd of girls at the foot of the steps.

"Oh, Connie," Marjorie Dean cried out delightedly. She had spied her friend among them.

Constance ran forward to meet Marjorie and Mary. "I couldn't come before. I've been to the train. Father is here. He's going to be at home for two days. And what do you think he wishes me to do?"

"You are not going away with him?" asked Marjorie in sudden alarm.

"No, indeed. I couldn't give up my sophomore year here, even for him. It isn't anything so serious. He proposed that as long as he was here to play for us, it would be a good idea to –"

"Give a dance," ended Jerry Macy. "Hurrah for Mr. Stevens! Long may he wave!"

"Yes, you have guessed it, Jerry," laughed Constance. "I'm going to give a party in honor of Mary. I was so excited over it that I left him to go on to Gray Gables by himself, while I rushed over here as fast as I could come. I wanted to catch you girls together so I could invite you in a body. Jerry, do you suppose Hal would be willing to see Lawrie and the Crane and some of our boys? It will have to be a strictly informal hop, for I haven't time to send out invitations."

"Of course he'll round up the crowd," assured Jerry slangily. "If he doesn't, I will. I guess I won't go to Sargent's with you. What is mere ice cream when compared to a dance? Besides, it's fattening – the ice cream, I mean. I've lost five pounds this summer and I'm not going to find them again at Sargent's if I can help it. So long, I'll see you all to-night."

Jerry bustled off on her errand, leaving her friends engaged in an eager discussion of the coming festivity. A little later they trooped down the street to their favorite rendezvous, where most of their pocket money found a resting place.

"We won't have a single bit of appetite for luncheon," commented Marjorie to Mary, when, an hour later, they set out for home.

"I suppose not," assented Mary indifferently. Her thoughts were far from the subject of luncheon. Her jealousy of Constance Stevens was thoroughly aroused and flaming. She wished Marjorie had never seen nor heard of this hateful girl. And to think that Constance had announced that she was going to give a party in honor of *her*, the very person she had robbed of her best friend! It was insufferable. What could she do? If she refused to go, Marjorie and all those girls would wonder. She could give no reasonable excuse for declining to go at this late day. She told herself she would rather die than have Marjorie know how deeply she had hurt her. Oh, well, she was not the first martyr to the cause of friendship. She would try to bear it. Perhaps, some day, Marjorie, too, would know the bitterness of being supplanted.

It was an unusually quiet Mary who slipped into her place at luncheon that day.

"What is the matter, dear?" asked Mrs. Dean, noting the girl's silence. "Don't you feel well?"

"Oh, I am all right," she made reply, torturing her sober little face into a smile.

"Mary had troubles of her own this morning, Captain," explained Marjorie. Then she launched forth into an account of the morning's happenings.

Mrs. Dean looked her indignation as her daughter's recital progressed. She had met Miss Merton and disliked her on sight.

"I have no wish to interfere in your school life, Marjorie," she said with a touch of sternness, when Marjorie had finished, "but I will not hear of either of you being imposed upon. If Miss Merton continues her unjust treatment I shall insist that you tell me of it. I shall take measures to have it stopped."

"Captain won't stand having her army abused," laughed Marjorie.

"At least you must admit that I'm a conscientious officer," was her mother's reply. "To change the subject, would you like to go shopping with me this afternoon?"

"Oh, yes," chorused the two. Even Mary forgot her grievances for the moment. As little girls they had always hailed the idea of shopping with their beloved captain.

The shopping tour took up the greater part of the afternoon, and it was after five o'clock when the two started for home.

"No lingering at the dinner table to-night for this army," declared Marjorie, finishing her dessert in a hurry. "It's almost seven, Mary. We'll have to hurry upstairs to dress for the dance."

"You didn't apply to me for a leave of absence," reminded Mr. Dean. "You know the penalty for deserting."

"We've forgotten it, General. You can tell us what it is to-morrow," retorted Marjorie. "Come on, Mary. Salute your officers and away we go."

In the excitement of dressing for the dance Mary almost forgot that she was about to enter the house of the girl she now believed she disliked. Marjorie's praise of her pretty white chiffon evening frock almost restored her to good humor. Marjorie herself was radiant in a gown of apricot Georgette crepe and filmy lace.

Mrs. Dean had elected to drive them to their destination in the automobile, and when they alighted from the machine at the gate to Gray Gables, waving her a gay good night, Mary felt almost glad that she had come and that the dance was to be given in her honor.

"I've been watching for you." A slender figure in pale blue ran down the steps to meet them. Out of pure sentiment Constance Stevens had chosen to wear the blue chiffon dress – Marjorie's gracious gift to her. She had taken the utmost care of it, and it looked almost as fresh as on the night she had first worn it.

Mary Raymond stared at her in amazement. Could it be – yes, it was the very gown that Marjorie's aunt had given her a year ago as a commencement present. Had not Marjorie declared over and over again that she would never part with it? And now she had deliberately given it to Constance. This proved beyond a doubt where Marjorie's true affection lay. Mary was obsessed with a wild desire to turn and run down the drive and away from this hateful girl. This was, indeed, the last straw.

CHAPTER VII

THE PROMISE

Mary Raymond wondered, as she walked up the steps of Gray Gables, between Constance and Marjorie, and into the brightly lighted reception hall, how she could manage to endure the long evening ahead of her. She was seized with an insane desire to break from Marjorie's light hold on her arm and rush out of the house of this girl who had stolen her dearest possession, Marjorie's friendship. How well she remembered the day on which Marjorie had received the blue dress which Constance was wearing so unconcernedly. It had come by express in a huge white pasteboard box, while she and Marjorie were seated on the Deans' step engaged in one of their long confabs. How excited they had been over it! How they had exclaimed as Marjorie drew the blue wonder from its pasteboard nest. Then a great trying-on had followed. She recalled with jealous clearness how great Marjorie's disappointment had been when she found it too small for her. Then Marjorie had said as she lovingly patted its soft folds, "Never mind, I'll keep it always, just to look at. It was awfully dear in Aunt Louise to send it to me and I wouldn't let her know for worlds that it doesn't fit me." And now, after all she had said, she had lightly given it away – and to Constance Stevens.

Mary forced herself to smile and reply to the friendly greeting of Miss Allison, who stood in the big, old-fashioned hall helping to receive her niece's guests. A moment more and she was surrounded by Geraldine Macy, Irma Linton and Susan Atwell, who had come forth in a body from the long, palm-decorated parlor off the hall to welcome her, accompanied by a singularly handsome youth, a very tall, merry-faced young man and a black-haired, blue-eyed lad, with clean cut, sensitive features.

She was presented in turn to Harold Macy, Sherman Norwood, known as the Crane to his intimate associates, and Lawrence Armitage.

"So, *you* are Marjorie's friend, Mary Raymond, of whom she has spoken to me so often," smiled Hal Macy. "We are very glad to welcome you to Sanford, Miss Raymond."

"Thank you," Mary returned, almost forgetting her first bitter moment. Hal Macy's direct hand-clasp and frank, bright smile of welcome stamped him with sincerity and truth. She liked equally well Lawrence Armitage's deferential greeting and she found the Crane's wide, boyish grin irresistible as he bowed low over her small hand. Yes, the Sanford boys were certainly nice. She was not so sure that she liked the girls. They made too much of Marjorie, and Marjorie had proved herself disloyal to her sworn comrade and playmate of years.

Once inside the drawing-room, which had been transformed into an impromptu ball-room by taking up the rugs and moving the piano to one end of it, introductions followed in rapid succession.

"Mary, you must meet my foster father." Constance slipped her arm through Mary's and conducted her to the piano where stood a man with an immense shock of snow-white hair, sorting high piles of music arranged on top. "Father."

The man at the piano wheeled at the sound of the soft voice. His stern, almost sad face broke into a radiant smile that completely transformed it.

"This is Mary Raymond. Mary, my father, Mr. Stevens," introduced Constance. "And this is my uncle, Mr. Roland."

Both men bowed and took Mary's hand in turn, expressing their pleasure at meeting her. Old John Roland's faded blue eyes contained a puzzled look. "You are very familiar," he said. "Where have I seen you before?"

"Look sharply, Uncle John," laughed Marjorie, who had joined them. "You have never seen Mary before. She is like someone you know."

"Someone you know," repeated the old man faithfully. He would never outgrow his quaint habit of repetition, although he had improved immensely in other ways since the change in Constance's fortune had released him from the clutch of poverty.

Mary eyed him curiously. Then her gaze rested on Mr. Stevens. What peculiar persons they were. And Marjorie had never written her of them. They must have a strange history. She made up her mind that she would never ask her fickle chum about them. She would find out whatever she wished to know from others. Now that she was a pupil of Sanford High she would soon become acquainted with girls of her class other than those she had already met. Perhaps she might learn to like some one better than – Her sober reflections stopped there. She could not bring herself to the point of breaking her long comradeship with the girl who had failed her.

Uncle John Roland was still staring at her and smilingly shaking his gray head. "I don't know. I can't think, and yet – "

Suddenly a jubilant little shout rent the air, causing the group about the piano to smile. In the same instant Mary felt a small hand slip into hers. "I knew you comed to see Charlie again. Charlie wouldn't go to bed because Connie said you'd surely come. Charlie loves you a whole lot. You look like Connie."

"Look like Connie," muttered Uncle John. Then his faded eyes flashed sudden intelligence. "I know. Of course she's like Connie. I guessed it, didn't I?" He glanced triumphantly at Marjorie.

"So you did, Uncle John," nodded Marjorie brightly.

Mr. Stevens gazed searchingly at the young girl so like his foster daughter. Mary felt her color rising under that penetrating gaze. It was as though this dreamy-eyed man with the dark, sad face had read her very soul. For a brief instant she sensed dimly the ignobleness of her jealousy of his daughter. She felt that she would rather die than have him know it. Perhaps, after all, she was in the wrong. She would try to dismiss it and do her best to enter into the spirit of the merry-making. An impatient tug at her hand caused her to remember Charlie's presence.

"Talk to me," demanded the child. "Connie says I have to go to bed in a minute, so hurry up."

Mary stooped and wound her arms about the tiny, insistent youngster. She clasped Charlie tightly to her and kissed his eager face. And that embrace sealed the beginning of an affection between them, the very purity of which was one day to lead her from the terrible Valley of Doubt into the sunlight of belief.

"Now you've done it," was Marjorie's merry accusation. "You've stolen my cavalier. Oh, Charlie, I thought I was your very best girl." She made reproachful eyes at Charlie, who, delighted at receiving so much attention, sidled over to her with a ridiculous air of importance and took her hand.

"Everybody likes Charlie," he observed complacently. "Now he can stay up all night and listen to the band."

"You'd go to sleep and never hear the band at all," laughed Constance. "No, Charlie must go to bed and sleep and sleep, or he will never grow big enough and strong enough to play in the band."

The half pout on Charlie's babyish mouth, born of Constance's dread edict, died suddenly. Even the joys of staying up all night were not to be compared with the glories of that far-off future.

"All right, I'll go," he sighed. "But you and Marjorie must come again soon in the daytime when I don't have to go to bed. I'll play a new piece for you on my fiddle. Uncle John says it's a marv'lus compysishun."

A burst of laughter rose from the group around him at this calm statement. After kissing everyone in his immediate vicinity, Charlie made a quaint little bow and marched off beside Constance, well pleased with himself.

"Isn't he a perfect darling?" was Mary's involuntary tribute.

"Yes, I adore Charlie," returned Marjorie. "I used to feel so dreadfully for him when he was crippled. Isn't it splendid, Mr. Stevens, to see him so well and lively?" She turned radiantly to the

white-haired musician. His face lighted again in that wonderful smile. He was about to answer Marjorie, when Constance, who had seen Charlie to the door where he had been taken in charge by a white-capped nurse, returned to them, saying:

"What shall we have first, girls, a one step?"

"Oh, yes, do!" exclaimed Jerry Macy, who had come up in time to hear Constance's question, in company with a mischievous-eyed, freckled-faced youth who rejoiced in the dignified cognomen of Daniel Webster Seabrooke, but who was most appropriately nicknamed the Gadfly.

"Mr. Seabrooke, Miss Raymond," introduced Jerry.

The freckled-faced boy put on a preternaturally solemn expression and begged the pleasure of the first dance with Mary. Mr. Stevens had already handed the old violinist the music for the dance and placed his own score in position upon the piano. The slow, fascinating strains of the one step rang out and a great scurrying for partners began.

Marjorie found herself dancing off with Hal Macy, while Lawrence Armitage swung Constance into the rapidly growing circle of dancers. Irma Linton and the Crane danced together, while Jerry Macy, who danced extremely well for a stout girl, was claimed by Arthur Standish, one of her brother's classmates.

Once the hop had fairly begun, dance followed dance in rapid succession. Much to Mary's secret satisfaction there were no gaps in her programme. As it was, there were no wall flowers. An even number of boys and girls had been invited and every one had put in an appearance. At eleven o'clock a dainty repast, best calculated to suit the appetites of hungry school girls and boys, was served at small tables on the side veranda, which extended almost the length of the house.

It was not until after supper, when the dancing was again at its height, that Marjorie and Constance found time for a few words together.

The two girls had slipped away to Constance's pretty blue and white bedroom to repair a torn frill of Marjorie's gown.

"Isn't it splendid that we can have a minute to ourselves?" laughed Constance. "I'm glad you happened to need repairing. I hope Mary is having a good time. As long as it's her party I'm anxious that she should enjoy herself."

"Of course she's having a good time. How could she help it?" returned Marjorie staunchly. "All the boys have been perfectly lovely to her and so have the girls. I knew everyone would like her. You and Mary and I will have lots of fun going about together this winter."

Constance smiled an answer to Marjorie's joyous prediction. Then her pretty face sobered. "Marjorie," she said, then paused.

Marjorie glanced up from the flounce she was setting to rights. Something in Constance's tone commanded her attention. "What is it, Connie?"

"Have you ever said anything to Mary about you – and me – and things last year?"

"Why, no. I wouldn't think of doing so unless I asked you if I might. I – "

"Please don't, then," interrupted Constance. "I had rather she didn't know. It is all past, and, as long as so few persons know about it, don't you think it would be better to let it rest?"

Marjorie bent her head over her work to conceal the sudden disturbing flush that rose to her face. She had intended telling Constance that very night of the remark that Miss Archer had made in Mary's presence about their freshman year. She had felt dimly that, perhaps, Mary ought to be put in possession of the story, although she had not the remotest suspicion of the jealousy that was already warping her chum's thoughts. Her one idea had been to answer all her questions as freely as she had done in the past. She intended to put the matter to Constance in this light. But now Constance had forestalled her and was asking her to be silent on the very matters she wished to impart to Mary.

"It isn't as though it is something which Mary ought to know," continued Constance, quite unaware of Marjorie's inward agitation. "It wouldn't make her happier to learn it and – and – she

might not think so well of me. I wish her to like me, Marjorie, just because she is your dearest friend. Don't you think I am right about it? You wouldn't care to have even the friend of your best friend know all the little intimate details of your life. Now, would you?" Constance slipped to her knees beside Marjorie, one arm across her shoulder, and regarded her with pleading eyes.

Marjorie stared thoughtfully into the earnest face of the girl at her side. What should she say? If she told Constance that Mary had twice asked questions regarding her affairs, Constance might think Mary unduly curious. Perhaps, after all, silence was wisest. Mary might forget all about it, and, in any case, she was far too sensible to feel hurt or indignant because she, Marjorie, was not free to tell her of the private affairs of another.

"Promise me, Marjorie, that you won't say anything," urged Constance. Her natural reticence made her dread taking even Mary into confidence regarding herself.

"I promise, Connie," said Marjorie with a half sigh. "There, I guess that flounce will stay in place. I've sewed it over and over."

The two girls returned to the dance floor arm in arm. Mary Raymond's blue eyes were turned on them resentfully as they entered the room. They had been having a talk together, and hadn't asked her to join them. Then her face cleared. She thought she knew what that talk was about. Marjorie had been asking Constance's permission to tell her everything. She would hear the great secret on the way home, no doubt. Her spirits rose at the prospect of the comfy chat they would have in the automobile and for the rest of the evening she put aside all doubts and fears, and danced as only sweet and seventeen can.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LATEST SOPHOMORE ARRIVAL

Though the evening of the dance had been deceitfully clear and balmy, dark clouds banked the autumn sky before morning and the day broke in a downpour of rain. It was a doubly dreary morning to poor little Mary Raymond and over and over again Longfellow's plaintive lines,

"Into each life some rain must fall,
Some days must be dark and dreary,"

repeated themselves in her brain. Yes, rain had indeed fallen into her life. The bitter rain of false friendship. All the days must from now on be dark and dreary. Last night she had danced the hours away, secure in the thought that Marjorie would not fail her. And Marjorie had spoken no word of explanation. During the drive home she had talked gaily of the dance and of the boys and girls who had attended it. She had related bright bits of freshman history concerning them, but on the subject of Constance Stevens and her affairs she had been mute. Mary fancied she had purposely avoided the subject. In this respect she was quite correct. Marjorie, still a little disturbed over her promise to Constance, had tried to direct Mary's mind to other matters. Deeply hurt, rather than jealous, Mary had listened to Marjorie in silence. She managed to make a few comments on the dance, and pleading that she was too sleepy for a night-owl talk, had kissed Marjorie good night rather coldly and hurried to her room. Stopping only to lock the door, she had thrown herself on her bed in her pretty evening frock and given vent to long, tearless sobs that left her wide awake and mourning, far into the night. It was, therefore, not strange that lack of sleep, coupled with her supposed dire wrongs, had caused her to awaken that morning in a mood quite suited to the gloom of the day.

A vigorous rattling of the door knob caused her to spring from her bed with a half petulant exclamation.

"Let me in, Mary," called Marjorie's fresh young voice from the hall. "Whatever made you lock your door? I guess you were so sleepy you didn't know what you were about."

Mary turned the key and opened the door with a jerk. Marjorie pounced upon her like a frolicsome puppy. Wrapping her arms around her chum, she whirled her about and half the length of the room in a wild dance.

"Let me alone, please." Mary pulled herself pettishly from Marjorie's clinging arms.

"Why, Lieutenant, what's the matter? You aren't sick, are you? If you are, I'm sorry I was so rough. If you're just sleepy, then I'm not. You needed waking up. It's a quarter to eight now and we'll have to hustle. Captain let us sleep until the last minute. Now, which are you, sick or sleepy?"

"Both," returned Mary laconically. "I – that is – my head aches."

"Poor darling. Was Marjorie a naughty girl to tease her when her was so sick?" Marjorie sought to comfort her chum, but Mary eluded her sympathetic caress and said almost crossly, "Don't baby me. I – I hate being babied and you know it."

Marjorie's arms dropped to her sides. "I didn't mean to tease you. I'm sorry. I'll go down and ask Captain to give you something to cure your headache." She turned abruptly and left the room, deeply puzzled and slightly hurt. What on earth ailed Mary?

The moment the door closed Mary pattered into the bathroom and banged the door. She hurried through her bath and was partly dressed when Marjorie returned with a little bottle of aspirin tablets. "One of these will fix up your head," she declared cheerily.

"I don't want it," muttered Mary. "My head is all right now."

"That is what I would call a marvelous recovery," laughed Marjorie. "I wish Captain's headaches would take wing so easily. You know what dreadful sick headaches she sometimes has. She had one on the first day I went to Sanford High, and I had to go alone."

"I remember," nodded Mary carelessly. "That was one of the things you *did* write me."

"I wrote you lots of things," retorted Marjorie lightly, failing to catch the significance of Mary's words. "But now you are here, I don't have to write them. I can *say* them."

"Then, why don't you?" was on Mary's tongue, but she did not say it. Instead, she maintained a half sulky silence, as she walked to the wardrobe and began fingering the gowns hung there. Selecting a blue serge dress, made sailor fashion, she slipped into it and began fastening it as she walked to the mirror. Marjorie stood watching her, with a half frown. She did not understand this new mood of Mary's. The Mary she had formerly known had been sunny and light-hearted. The girl who stood before the mirror, grave and unsmiling, was a stranger.

"I'm ready to go downstairs." Mary turned slowly from the mirror and walked toward the door. Beneath her quiet exterior, a silent struggle was going on. Should she speak her mind once and for all to Marjorie, or should she go on enduring in silence? Perhaps it would be best to speak and have things out. Then, at least, they would understand each other. Then her pride whispered to her that it was Marjorie's and not her place to speak. Marjorie must know something of her state of mind. At heart she must be just the least bit ashamed of herself for shutting her out of her personal affairs. Had they not sworn long ago to tell each other their secrets. *She* had always kept her word. It was Marjorie who had failed to do so. No, she would not humble herself. Marjorie might keep her secrets, for all *she* cared. She was sorry that she had ever come to Sanford. Now that she was here she would have to stay. If she wrote her father to take her away, her mother would have to be told. Mary was resolved that no matter what happened to her, her mother must be spared all anxiety. She would try to bear it. Marjorie should never know how deeply she was wounded. She would pretend that all was as it had been before.

Mrs. Dean looked up from her letters, as the two girls entered the dining room.

"Hurry, children," she admonished. "You haven't much time to spare. These social affairs completely break up army discipline. Look out you don't go to sleep at your post this morning."

"Who's sleepy? Not I," boasted Marjorie. "I feel as though I'd slept for hours and hours. Your army is ready for duty, Captain. Lieutenant Mary's headache has been put to rout and everything is lovely."

"Are you sure you feel quite well, dear?" questioned Mrs. Dean anxiously. She noted that Mary was very pale and that her eyes looked strained and tired.

"I'm quite well now, thank you." The ghost of a smile flickered on her pale face.

"Did you enjoy the dance? It was nice in Connie to give it in your honor. We are all very fond of her and of little Charlie."

Mary's wan face brightened at the mention of the child's name. "Isn't he dear?" she asked impulsively.

"Mary has stolen Charlie from me," put in Marjorie. "He adores her already. I don't blame him. So do I, and so does Connie, too. We three are going to have splendid times together this winter."

During the rest of the breakfast Marjorie regaled her mother with an account of the dance. Mary said little or nothing, but amid her friend's merry chatter her silence passed unnoticed.

"Wear your raincoats," called Mrs. Dean after them, as, their breakfast finished, they ran upstairs for their wraps.

Fifteen minutes later they had joined the bobbing umbrella procession that wended its way into the high school building.

"You'll have to go to Miss Merton, Mary, and be assigned to a seat. She didn't give you one yesterday, did she?" asked Marjorie. "You can put your wraps in our locker. We are to have the

same lockers we had last year. Connie and I have a locker together. There is lots of room in it for your things, too. I'll task Marcia Arnold to let you in with us. She has charge of the lockers."

Mary's first impulse was to decline this friendly offer. On second thought she closed her lips tightly, resolved to make no protest. Later – well, there was no telling what might happen.

"Don't be afraid of Miss Merton," was Marjorie's whispered counsel, as they crossed the threshold of the study hall. "She can't eat you."

"I'm not afraid." Mary's lip curled a trifle scornfully. Marjorie treated her as though she were a baby.

"I have come to you for my seat," was her terse statement, as she paused squarely before Miss Merton's desk.

Miss Merton glanced up to meet the unflinching gaze of two purposely cold blue eyes. Something in their direct gaze made her answer with undue civility, "Very well. I will assign you to one. Come with me."

She stalked down the aisle, Mary following, to the last seat in one of the two sophomore rows, and paused before it. "This will be your seat for the year," she said.

"Thank you." Mary sat down and took account of her surroundings. Across the aisle on one side, Susan Atwell's dimpled face flashed her a welcome. On the other side sat a tall, severe junior who wore eye-glasses. The seat in front of her was vacant. Marjorie sat far down the same row. Mary could just see the top of her curly head. It still lacked five minutes of opening time and the students were, for the most part, conversing in low tones. Now and then an accidentally loud note caused Miss Merton to raise her head from her writing and glare severely at the offender.

Susan Atwell leaned across the aisle and patted Mary's hand in friendly fashion. "I'm so glad you are going to sit here," she said in an undertone. "I was afraid Miss Merton would put some old slow-poke there who wouldn't say 'boo' or pass notes or do anything to help the sophomore cause along."

"I'm glad she put me near you," returned Mary affably. She had made up her mind to win friends. They would be indispensable to her now that all was over between her and Marjorie. "I don't imagine that tall girl is very sociable."

"She's a dig and a prig," giggled Susan. "You'd get no recreation from labor from that quarter."

Mary echoed Susan's infectious giggle. "Who sits in front of me?" she asked.

"No one, yet. Who knows what manner of girl is in store for us? That's the only vacant seat in the section. The first late arrival into our midst will get it. I don't believe we'll have any more girls, though, unless someone comes into school late as Marjorie came last year. It's too bad. It makes an awkward stretch if one wants to pass a note. I always am caught if I throw one. Last year I threw one and hit Miss Merton in the back. She was standing quite a little way down the aisle. I thought it was a splendid opportunity. I'd been waiting to send one to Irma Linton, who sat two seats in front of me. The girl between us wouldn't pass it. So I threw it, and it went further than I thought." Susan's fascinating giggle burst forth anew. She rocked to and fro in merriment at the recollection.

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