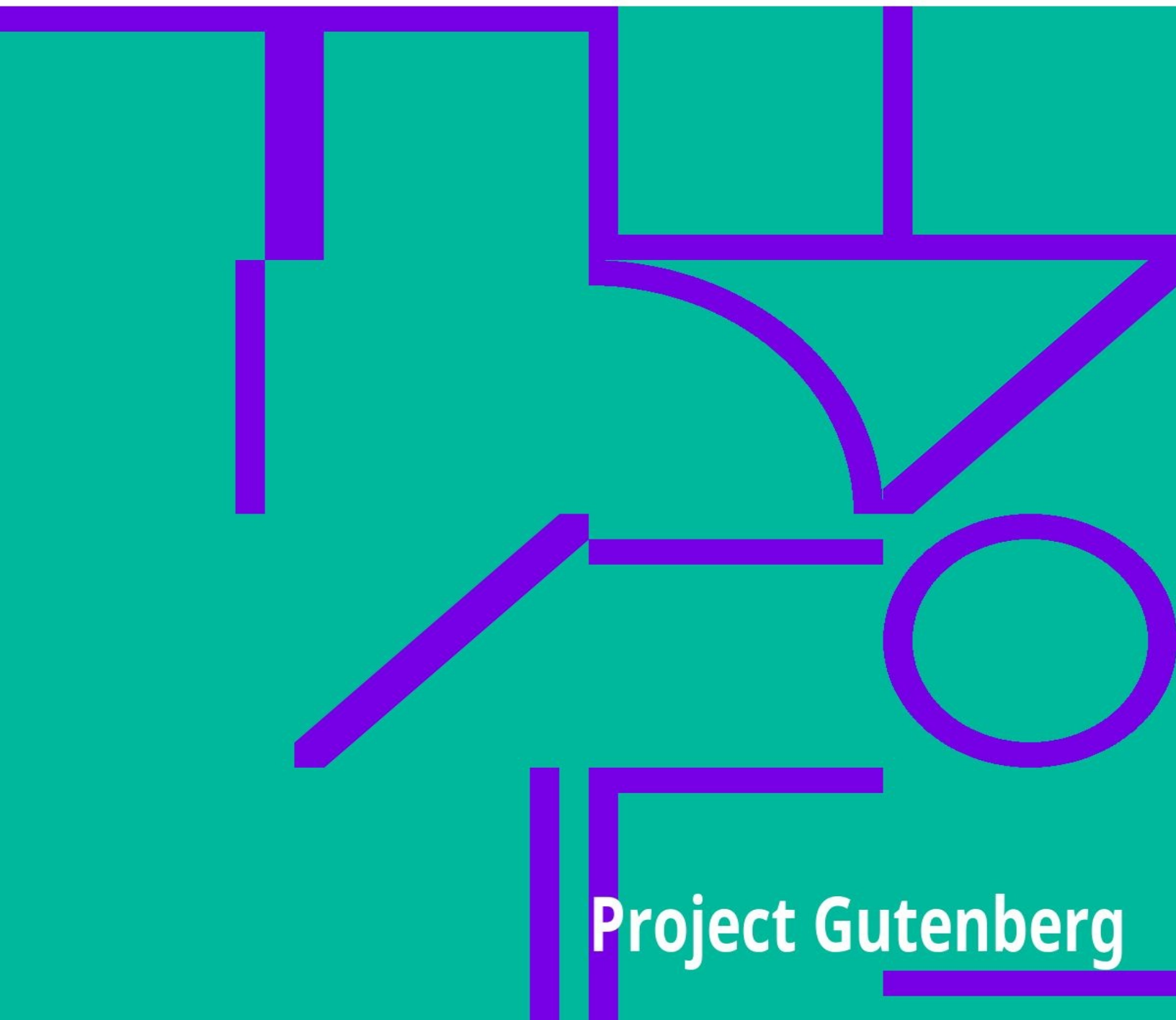


Polly in New York

Lillian Elizabeth Roy

An abstract geometric design featuring a teal background with thick purple lines and shapes. The design includes a horizontal line at the top, a vertical line on the left, a diagonal line, a curved line, and a circle. The text "Project Gutenberg" is written in white at the bottom right.

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ELEANOR HELD OUT THE SEAL, BUT JIM LOOKED FORLORN. (Page 77)

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POLLY IN NEW YORK

BY
LILLIAN ELIZABETH ROY

Author of

POLLY OF PEBBLY PIT, POLLY IN NEW YORK,
POLLY AND HER FRIENDS ABROAD, POLLY'S
BUSINESS VENTURE.

ILLUSTRATED BY
H. S. BARBOUR

NEW YORK
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POLLY IN NEW YORK

CHAPTER I—IN THE BIG CITY

The long Pullman train, that left Denver behind and carried Polly Brewster away on her first venture from the ranch-home, was fitted up as luxuriously as capital could do it. Eleanor Maynard, Polly's bosom friend, enjoyed her companion's awe and wonderment—that a mere *car* should be so furnished.

"Nolla," whispered Polly, furtively glancing about, "how different are these cars from the ones that come in and go out at Oak Creek!"

Eleanor, whose pet name was Nolla, laughed. "I should think they would be, Polly. Why, those 'ancients' that rock back and forth between Denver and Oak Creek, are the 'only originals' now in existence. They'll be in Barnum's Show next Season as curios."

Polly seemed to fully appreciate the comfort of her traveling carriage, and remarked, "One would hardly believe these cars are going at all! They run so smoothly and without any awful screeching of the joints."

Anne Stewart, the teacher to whose charge these two girls had been committed, had been studying the time-table, but she smiled at Polly's words. Then she turned to her mother, a sweet-faced woman who was enjoying the trip almost as much as the young girls were, and said: "Mother, we'll have at least seven hours in Chicago before we have to take the New York train. We can visit Paul all that time."

"Goody! Then Poll can visit John and I can see Daddy," exclaimed Eleanor, eagerly. "But we must first charter the wash-room to turn ourselves from dusty travelers into respectable citizens."

"There isn't a fleck of dust to be seen, Anne," objected Polly, glancing around the tidy interior, then at herself and friends.

"Wait till after we have crossed the plains and passed through all kinds of towns—we won't look like the same people."

To Polly, that journey was a source of great interest and fun. The dining-car, the

folding tables for games or work, the sleeping arrangements—all were so strangely different from the vast open-air life of the ranch.

Then the express train reached Chicago and the recess hours were filled with greetings, visits and then good-bys, before the little party of four was on its last lap of the journey.

After leaving Chicago, Eleanor asked curiously: “What did you think of our city, Polly?”

“I never saw such crowds of troubled people! Everyone looked as if the worries of the universe rested upon his mind. And not one soul walked or acted as if there was a moment to spare before the end of the world would throw everything into chaos!”

Polly’s graphic description caused her companions to laugh, and Eleanor added: “If that is what you think of Chicago, just wait until you reach New York. The folks, there, are simply wild! Now Chicago is considered quite slow, in comparison.”

Polly stared unbelievably at Eleanor, and Anne Stewart laughed. But Mrs. Stewart placed a calm hand over the amazed girl’s throbbing wrist, and said sweetly: “Nolla is joking as usual.”

The four members which composed this little group of travelers arrived at Grand Central just before noon. Polly gazed in consternation at the vast station where the constant going and coming of trains and people made a most interesting sight for her.

“We’ll stop at the Commodore for a few days, girls, as it is so convenient for us,” remarked Anne, telling a porter to conduct them to the hotel mentioned.

Placed in a comfortable suite, Anne remarked: “I think we will call up the Evans or the Latimers, next. You remember, we were told to let them know the moment we arrived.”

The others agreed to this suggestion, so Anne telephoned the two families. Mrs. Latimer was out, but Mrs. Evans said she would come right down town to meet the new-comers.

“Well, we can unpack our bags while we are waiting for her,” suggested Anne. “But we must manage to get to a store this afternoon, and do some shopping for Polly.”

“Dear me! I was hoping you would show us all the sky-scrapers I’ve read

about,” said Polly, eagerly.

“I planned to let the sight-seeing wait for a few days, as we *must* secure a place to live in, first of all. Here it is the middle of September, and I have to start school work the first of October, you know. In a great city like New York, the desirable apartments are generally taken as early as July and August. So we are up against it, in beginning to seek so late in the season.”

“But we can’t hunt at night, Anne, and you might take us out to show us the Great White Way—as the boys call it,” urged Eleanor.

Mrs. Evans came down in time to have luncheon with the Westerners, and in the hour she visited with them, it was learned that Mrs. Latimer and she had scoured the uptown west-side for suitable apartments for Mrs. Stewart, but everything had been leased long before. She concluded with:

“So I really do not see what you are going to do, unless you just happen to stumble over a place which has recently been resigned. There is absolutely no use in doing any place above Ninety-sixth street, as we sought diligently from that street up as far as One Hundred and Sixty-eighth street, and not a decent thing to be seen or had!”

“But Ninety-sixth street is awfully far uptown, isn’t it?” asked Anne, to whom the city was as yet a small middle-west town.

“Oh, dear, no! It is about the center of the city, between North and South, these days.”

“I’m sure we will find just what we want, dear Mrs. Evans, but we are grateful to you for being so kind to us,” said Polly.

“My dear child, I feel that I have done *nothing* in comparison to all you have done for me and mine. To know that my dear brother had friends during the last days of his life, means so much to me. I always had a horrible feeling that he died in the Klondike without money or friends;” and Mrs. Evans hurriedly dried the tears welling up in her eyes.

Of course, that launched the conversation about Old Man Montresor, and so interested were all concerned, that Mrs. Evans started when she heard the mantel clock chime the hour.

“Merciful goodness! Here am I—my first call, and staying all day!” she laughed.

“It’s not late, Mrs. Evans. We were only going to look up a first-class shop where Polly can buy a few things,” replied Anne.

“Perhaps I can be of service in recommending a place?”

Several shops of quality were spoken of, and as these were located on Fifth avenue, not far from Forty-second street, everyone felt relieved. It would not take much time to do this necessary shopping, but Mrs. Stewart preferred to remain at the hotel.

Mrs. Evans said good-bye and the three young folks walked to Fifth avenue. It was about four o’clock and the avenue presented an endless stream of automobiles—one line going down, and the other line going uptown. The crowds of people hurrying to and fro made Polly tremble.

“For goodness’ sake, Anne, where *do* all these folks come from, and where are they rushing to?”

Anne and Eleanor laughed.

“Well! If this is your wonderful Fifth avenue, I don’t think much of it,” declared Polly, a few moments later.

“Why—it’s simply great!” exclaimed Eleanor, having a far different view-point of the city.

“Great! Why, just look how narrow the street is? Main street, in Oak Creek, is twice as wide. And Denver has nicer streets than this famous alley you hear so much about,” scorned Polly.

Again her companions laughed merrily. At this moment a traffic policeman sounded a shrill whistle. Instantly the mass of pedestrians, backed up on the curbs, started to cross. Or to use Polly’s own description in the letter she wrote home that night: “Really, dearies, they catapulted back and forth like rockets! We had to rush with them, or be trampled upon. It is just awful!

“And such freaks, mother! Nolla says it is style. Well, all I can say is, spare me from such outrageous styles! Most every woman and girl I met had faces covered thick with layers of white chalk, with a daub of red on each cheek, and lips as scarlet as a clown’s. In fact, I had to stand stock-still and look at one queer creature—she looked exactly as if she was made up for a circus. Anne and Nolla laugh at me, all the time. But I don’t care, so! These horrid painted things are not *nice*!

“If I hadn’t set my heart on being an interior decorator, I’d take up lecturing, and teach these crazy New Yorkers how to look and enjoy a simple life.”

From the above account you can see how one day’s experience in New York

impressed the girl of the Mountain Ranges in the West.

Polly, accustomed as she was to the overstocked store in Oak Creek, where shelves were stacked high with all sorts of merchandise, opened her eyes as Anne led her into a quiet parlor-like room that opened directly from Fifth avenue. She stared around for a glimpse of the gowns she expected to see; but nothing like one was to be seen. The dignified lady who met Anne, and a few other well-dressed women who conversed in low tones with each other, did not look like Polly's idea of shop-girls.

Anne's lady conducted them to a lift, and they shot up two stories. Again they came out into a lovely lounging-room, but still no sign of dresses. The lady pushed a button, and another woman hurried in.

"Measurements of this young lady. She will need several gowns for afternoon and street wear; possibly, an evening dress."

Then Polly was scientifically measured, and in a short time a number of models were brought for her inspection and approval. These were placed upon forms, and every desirable detail of the gowns was pointed out to Anne and the girls.

"Oh, I just love that one, Poll!" cried Eleanor, gazing with rapt eyes at an imported model.

"Isn't it clumsy at the back? And see how narrow the bottom of the skirt is. Maybe they didn't have enough goods to make it any wider?" commented Polly.

Eleanor giggled but Anne explained to Polly. The saleslady seemed not to have heard the western girl's objection to the gown.

Then it was tried on Polly, and she saw how very becoming it was. But when she endeavored to walk over to the full-length mirror, she almost fell down upon the rug.

"Mercy, Anne! I never can amble about in this binder! Get me something sensible," complained Polly.

But Eleanor liked the dress and as it fitted her, also, she said she would take it as long as Polly didn't.

"Take it and welcome, Nolla! but I pity *you* if you try to scoot over the crossings of Fifth avenue in *that* skirt," laughed Polly.

Other gowns were brought and Polly finally found several that she liked, with wide enough skirts to suit her comfort. Then Anne asked for the bills. The list was added up and when the total was mentioned Polly almost fainted. If she had

not been seated, she might have crumpled to the floor.

“We’ll take that gown with us, the others you may send,” said Anne, taking up the one to be wrapped. Then she gave the name and address where the other dresses were to be sent. A fat roll of yellow bills now came from Anne’s hand-bag, and she paid the enormous sum—or, at least, Polly thought it was enormous for so few dresses.

Safely out of hearing of the fashionable sales-ladies, Polly whispered: “Anne, you paid *hundreds* of dollars for those things!”

Anne nodded, smilingly. Eleanor said: “Why, that wasn’t much for what we got, Poll. The dress I bought is *imported*! And a model, at that. It was a bargain at that price.”

Polly sighed. Would she ever be able to accommodate herself to such a changed life as this one now seemed to be? Her friends laughed at the sigh and expression of doubt on her face.

As Anne led her protégées past the hotel desk, a very polite clerk said: “A ’phone call for you, Miss Stewart, at five-ten P. M.”

Anne was handed the slip and read: “Mr. Latimer called up. Said he would call again at six-thirty.”

“Maybe he wants us to go somewhere, to-night!” suggested Eleanor, eagerly.

“Well, you won’t go to-night, if he does ask you. It’s bed at nine, for everyone of us, because we have a hard day of house-hunting before us, to-morrow,” decreed Anne, courageously.

But Eleanor was given no cause to argue that evening, for Mr. Latimer called up to invite them all to go to the Mardi Gras at Coney Island the following evening. He said the Evans and Latimers would call at the hotel, in two cars, about six o’clock and take them to supper at the Island.

“Oh, goody! I never saw Coney Island but I’ve heard so much about it!” cried Eleanor, dancing about the room.

“I have read how dreadful a place it is,” ventured Polly.

“That’s another point of view, Polly. If you go down there to enjoy the fun and games, and see the ocean, then you will have nothing but frolic and sea. But if one is in quest of crime, then it can be found festering there, just as it is in every other section of a large city,” explained Anne.

“But we are only going for a frolic,” added Eleanor.

“I should hope so!” Polly said, so fervently, that Anne had to laugh heartily.

After dinner that night, Anne said: “I think Polly ought to see a sight that no other city can offer—that is the wondrous advertising signs on Broadway about Times Square, at night.”

“I am too weary to go out, daughter, but you take the girls,” Mrs. Stewart remarked, so they hurriedly donned their hats and gloves.

When they reached the famous corner of Forty-second street and Broadway, and stood at the uptown side of Times Square Triangle to look at the lights, Polly was speechless.

“Why, it’s as bright as day, everywhere,” whispered she.

“And just see the moving ads. up on the roofs!” cried Eleanor, delighting in the scene.

“I thought there were hordes of mad folks on the streets this afternoon, but this beats everything!” exclaimed Polly, watching both sides of Broadway from her vantage ground. “Honestly, Anne, do they not act obsessed, jostling and rushing as if Death drove them? They never seem to mind trolleys, autos, or policemen. They swirl and fly every which way, regardless of everyone and everything.”

“I just love this excitement!” sighed Eleanor, smiling.

“Well, I hope to goodness we will live far enough away from all this to let me forget it once in a while,” said Polly.

“Oh, you’ll love it, too, pretty soon,” Eleanor said, confidently.

“Never! This is Bedlam to me. When I write home about it, I shall tell father that it reminds me of the story of Sodom and Gomorrah when fire and brimstone fell and destroyed those cities. I bet the folks never acted any wilder, there, than these New Yorkers do, here.”

Anne laughed at Polly’s vivid disgust, and suggested that they return to the hotel.

“Oh, no, Anne! It is only eight-thirty. And for New York that only begins an evening, you know. Let’s get up on top of one of the buses on Fifth avenue and take the round trip. That ride will show Polly lots of sights: the Flat Iron Building, Riverside Drive and the Hudson, and heaps of things.”

Eleanor prevailed, and after a delightful drive of an hour, the little party was glad to get to the hotel and drop into bed.

CHAPTER II—HOUSE HUNTING IN NEW YORK

Before the westerners awake to the new day, let us renew our acquaintance with them.

Polly Brewster, of Pebbly Pit, born and reared on that wonderful ranch in Colorado where the lava-jewels were found, is for the first time in her fourteen years, away from home. As she is at the most impressionable age, her wise mother authorized Anne Stewart, the young teacher who had spent the summer with the Brewsters and who was engaged to John Brewster, to spare no money when fitting Polly out for her life in New York. Mrs. Brewster wished Polly to feel herself the equal of anyone she met, if it pertained to dress. And style was about the only thing that Polly lacked, having all fine qualities in her character.

Eleanor Maynard, of Chicago, now Polly's dearest friend, never had to count the cost of anything, as her father was the best known and richest banker of that great city. But because of her ill health, being a protégée of Anne Stewart for the past two years, this association had taught Eleanor to think twice before she wasted her allowance.

And Anne Stewart, just past twenty-one, was experienced for her age, because of her mother's dependence on her for most things, since the father died many years before this story opens. And Paul, her younger brother now at college in Chicago (where the other boys also studied), was there because his sister earned the money with which to pay his expenses. Now that Anne would participate in the shares of the gold mine that had been discovered the day of the escape on Grizzly Slide, the Stewarts had no need to practise such strict economy as hitherto.

In the morning Polly was awakened by a knock at her door. "Poll, someone wants to speak to you over the 'phone," said Anne.

"Me? Why, who can it be? I never talked into one of those funny little black horns in my life, Anne. Wait, and help me."

In another moment Polly, in a pretty negligée—one of the purchases of the

previous afternoon—ran out of her room. Anne sat her upon a stool before the small stand and showed her how to hold the instrument.

“Hello!” whispered Polly, half afraid that something would pop out at her.

Eleanor had crept out of her room by this time, and stood back of Polly, grinning at her friend’s nervousness.

“Speak louder,” admonished Anne in Polly’s ear.

“Hello!” shouted Polly, trying to adjust her senses to the unfamiliar method of conversing with an unseen individual.

Then a merry laugh and a familiar voice sounded in her ear. Her face expressed amazement, then pleased surprise, and then excitement. She glanced up at Eleanor as the voice continued speaking.

“Oh, we’re so glad to hear you are in the city. Now we shall have *lovely* times!” exclaimed Polly, finally.

A joyous boy’s voice continued talking but suddenly it ceased, and Polly looked at Anne for an explanation. The telephone receiver began clicking strangely in her ear, and she held it at arm’s length in fear of what might be going to explode inside that queer tube.

Eleanor laughed and said, “Let me do the talking—it sounds like Jim Latimer—is it?”

“Yes, Ken and he landed from the West at midnight, and they are going to the Mardi Gras with us to-night.”

Eleanor now took the telephone, and by the time the operator managed to connect the interrupted wires, she was ready to chat as if she had nothing else to do. After ten minutes of silly boy and girl talk, Anne whispered: “Oh, do stop, Nolla! It is eight o’clock and we want to fill a good day with work.”

“I’ve got to ring off, now, Jim, but we’ll see you to-night. Good-by!” Then Eleanor turned to her companions, and said:

“Well, that’s good news, Polly! To have the boys in the city to show us a good time before we start school.”

Without saying anything to cause the girls to object because this “good time” with the boys might be indefinitely postponed, Anne made up her mind that a home would and *must* be secured before anyone planned for pleasure or fun.

That day, they sought in buildings on every block uptown that had been left

uninspected by Mrs. Latimer and Mrs. Evans, but with no success. If an apartment of five to seven rooms was found, it would be found to be dark, dirty, or in an objectionable neighborhood. They were ready to pay a high rent for six or seven rooms, but nothing suitable could be found.

When they returned to the hotel, at five o'clock, to wash and dress for the outing that evening, everyone felt discouraged. "And these poor deluded New Yorkers call the band-boxes we saw to-day, apartment rooms?" said Polly, sneering at the homes but not at the poor inmates.

"Owners dare not build the rooms larger, Polly, because real estate in this city is so valuable and taxable. Every inch of property has to be made the most of. You know, that is why a builder, in large cities, runs his structures up in the sky—the sky doesn't charge taxes on so much per foot, but the ground the building stands on does."

"Oh, I never thought of that! So that is why New York houses go up twenty and thirty stories, eh? The owner has to get his rents out of the air and sky, and pay it over to the land-assessor," Polly exclaimed, in a tone of understanding.

Her friends laughed. "You are an apt pupil, Poll," said Anne.

When their hosts for the evening called for Anne and her party, they were all ready and eager to start. So they were soon seated in the two cars; Jim driving one, with Polly seated beside him, and Ken, Eleanor and Anne in the back seat. Mrs. Stewart was welcomed with the two ladies and the two men in the other car.

"Now, Jim," called Mr. Latimer, "you be sure and trail me. I'll go first, as I know every foot of the road to Coney Island."

Polly had never been in an automobile before, and at first she felt frightened; but Jim chatted as he drove, and seemed to take it all so naturally, that she soon overcame the desire to clutch hold on the side of the car.

There were hundreds of other automobiles all going in the same direction, and when our two cars reached the Boulevard, there was such a gay stream of machines and people as the girls never dreamed of before. Confetti, paper ribbons, horns and what-not, were used by the passengers on trolleys and in automobiles along the road until the lighted spires of The Park, and other pleasure-giving resorts of Coney Island were seen.

Polly looked so different in her smart clothes that Jim Latimer wondered what had happened to turn this pretty ranch girl into such a stunning city girl in so

short a time.

He kept glancing at her oval face, rounded with health and vigor; at her straight little nose, her wide-open, deep, soulful eyes that seemed to weigh all things wisely; the heavy wavy hair that was becomingly looped back from her face, and above all, the rich glow in her cheeks, and the creamy complexion and fine texture of her skin. “Nothing made-up there!” thought Jim.

But Polly was happily unaware of Jim’s wondering approval, for she was too completely absorbed in the sights about her. She could not have told anyone what Jim looked like in his city clothes. In fact, after the first hasty glance at Ken and him, and the realization that they had doffed their mountain outfits, she gave no second thought to their clothes.

At Coney Island, that night, the girls enjoyed one continual lark. Even Mrs. Stewart was urged to go with the elder Latimers and the Evans upon the chutes, the merry-go-rounds, the Twister, the Winsome Waves, and what-not. Such a reckless spirit of fun seemed to possess everyone in the place, that it was contagious.

When the evening was almost over, and Polly sighed with very surfeit of so much fun, the boys managed to “lose” the elders and took the two girls to the beach.

“Oh, how wonderful! I never thought of the ocean. There was so much to see and to do that I forgot Coney Island was right on the sea,” exclaimed Eleanor.

But Polly said not a word. She was suddenly confronted with the restless mighty ocean that she had always longed to see. The sense of frivolity that had filled her for the last few hours vanished, and she gave herself up to the power of that calm, never-ceasing roll of water. A few minutes before and she had been weary from so much laughter and sport, but now a wonderful peace and rest pervaded her being.

The boys understood this unusual effect of the ocean upon one who had never seen anything like it, and finally Polly heaved a sigh.

“Well, this is better than all else. It’s worth coming so far east to see. It’s the only decent thing of which New York can boast.”

Her companions laughed; after digging in the soft sand for a short time, and exchanging youthful view-points about everything in the universe, they all sauntered back to the place where the two cars had been parked.

A shout greeted them. “There, I *knew* you boys had dodged us on purpose. But

Miss Stewart thought you were lost in this crowd.”

As everyone felt tired before the cars reached New York City again, the conversation was intermittent. But just before Mr. Latimer drove his car up to the hotel, Mrs. Stewart learned how Dr. and Mrs. Evans, Mrs. Latimer, and the two boys, Jim and Ken, had spent that entire day home-hunting for the westerners with no success.

“It seems very strange that in such a vast city one is not able to find a decent apartment,” complained Mrs. Stewart.

“We are told ‘because of the war.’ The war is blamed for everything these days, but the real excuse for owners not building now is because of the high cost of material and labor. They are all waiting for better times; meantime people must take what can be had, or go without,” said Mr. Latimer.

“After hunting the way we have for more than a week, and not having found a suitable place, Mrs. Stewart, I would suggest your finding a nice boarding-house for the winter. If you put it off too long, even those places will be filled,” advised Mrs. Latimer.

“Dear me!” sighed Mrs. Stewart. “That was suggested this morning, but I said it seemed dreadful, when I came East just to make a home and keep house for the three girls.”

“Yes, it would be much pleasanter for everyone to have a home, but in cases like this Fall’s shortage of apartments, one must do what is most expedient,” returned Mrs. Latimer.

Mrs. Stewart told the girls, that night, what had been said, but they all felt sure something *must* turn up in the next day or two. So the next morning before starting out, they laid out a regular plan of work.

“Mother and Eleanor will start where we left off, yesterday, and weave a search back and forth downtown until they reach the hotel. I will take Polly and, beginning at Washington Square, work uptown until we finish. If either of us find anything at all decent, and in an agreeable neighborhood, pay down a deposit to hold it and be sure to get a receipt as a binder—Mr. Latimer told me that much. Then we will all go for the second inspection and decide. Dr. Evans said we’d better pay down several deposits rather than lose a place, as we can quickly sell out any option we have for more than we paid down.”

Having instructed her friends, Anne added one last bit of advice: “We will go as high as \$3,000 a year for seven rooms, or \$1,500 for four to five rooms—no

more, as that is all shelter is worth. If we can't find a place at that price, we'll stay in a hotel!"

So the second day of house-hunting went forward by two divisions instead of one, and all that day Mrs. Stewart and Eleanor experienced the same snubs, weariness, and failures, as thousands of other home-hunters in New York had. And at evening they returned wearily to the hotel to hear what Anne had accomplished.

"Polly and she have not yet arrived," announced Eleanor, as Mrs. Stewart and she entered their suite.

"I hope she has had better luck than we can brag about," added Mrs. Stewart, dropping into an easy chair.

A long time after the "first division" had returned, baffled, to the hotel, Anne and Polly burst into the room with happy faces.

"Oh, we just found the most wonderful place! Polly and I actually *discovered* it. We were giving up all hope of ever finding a decent apartment at any reasonable figure, and had started for the subway when we saw this one. The flower-boxes caught Polly's eye, so we are really indebted to her for having secured our home."

Anne's enthusiasm was contagious, and instantly Mrs. Stewart and Eleanor wanted to know where it was located.

Anne and Polly exchanged smiling glances, as if the secret was too precious to impart to others.

"I suppose you two did up the entire upper sections, to-day, eh?" asked Anne, countering their eager queries.

"Did we? I should say we did! I got a taxi for the day and we flew from one pile of stone and marble to the next, and so many rides up and down in gorgeous elevators all day has kept my head still spinning. But we had the same results as yesterday. When you inspect one of these modern honey-combs you see them all. The only difference being that a few owners manage to retain the elevator and telephone operators, while the majority of superintendents apologise by saying, 'My help went on a strike, to-day.'"

"It really looks, Anne, as if these poor New Yorkers will have to move out to the country if they want to live this year," remarked Mrs. Stewart, earnestly.

Her companions laughed and Anne said: "Mother, you are too precocious. But

now listen to our 'find'!

"As I planned, you two went uptown while Polly and I went downtown from here. We covered all the lower sections by criss-crossing back and forth, but we came away from the Gramercy Park section, late this afternoon, with an utter sense of failure. In fact, I was silently planning to inquire about good boarding-houses, when we hailed a Lexington avenue car, going north.

"Being woolly westerners, we failed to ascertain how far northwards the car went, and having paid our fares, sat down. I remember turning to Polly and saying, 'This is actually the first car in New York that I have been on that wasn't crowded to the platforms.'"

Polly laughed at the remembrance, and Anne smiled. "But it was our salvation, Anne," ventured the former.

Anne nodded and continued her story. "Then we soon learned why there were vacant seats on that car. A pleasant-faced, grey-haired man of about fifty, must have overheard my comment because he spoke to us after we were seated.

"'Perhaps you did not know that this car goes no farther north than the next block? It is switched back downtown, from that point. Did not the conductor mention it to you?'

"I was furious, and I replied: 'No! he never said a word when I paid the fares.'

"By this time the car stopped and the conductor called out: 'All out—dis car goes no fuder. We switch back next corner!'

"So Polly and I had to get off with the others. When we stepped down from the car, the nice man lifted his hat to us and said: 'I judge you are strangers in the city. Can I direct you anywhere?'

"I thanked him and told him we were only going as far as Forty-second street to the hotel. Then I added, sarcastically: 'But there may be no cars which run as far north as that street!'

"He laughed and said: 'You had better walk over to Fourth avenue and get the car there. It takes you through the tunnel much quicker than the Lexington avenue car runs to Forty-second street. But be careful and do not board a car that stops at the car-house on Thirty-second street.'

"We all laughed at that, as it would have been just like me to do so; then we thanked him and started along Thirty-first street to reach the car. And there we found our Haven of Hope!"

“Where? Not on Thirty-first street, I trust!” exclaimed Mrs. Stewart. “Isn’t that section of the city dreadful?”

“Not the block where we found a home,” explained Anne. “It has several remodeled houses and several other flat houses on it.”

“But just wait until you see our house—it’s fine!” said Polly, eagerly.

“Polly caught hold of my arm and exclaimed: ‘Oh, Anne! see the lovely flower-boxes in that cute little house!’

“I saw three narrow windows on the second floor with green flower-boxes on the outside sills, but then my eyes dropped lower and I spied a swinging sign at a side-door. It merely said: ‘To Let’ inquire, etc. Polly saw it at the same moment, so we stood and gazed at each other.

“‘Let’s try and peep in at this window,’ suggested Polly.

“I agreed, and we did our best to see what was within; but the long iron-lattice that covered the four slits in the wide front doors, were covered from the inside. So we went to hunt up the agent.

“His office was only a few blocks down Fourth avenue, so Polly and I hurried there before it should be closed for the day. A boy was told to accompany us and we were soon inspecting the premises. Our escort offered all the information he had heard in the real estate office.

“‘This hain’t been on our books more’n a day. I just hung out the sign this morning. The last man what lived here was an artist and he fixed up everything like you see it now. But he wanted the owner to take out the stable doors and put in a studio-winder, and when the owner wouldn’t spend a cent, the artist up and moved. My boss said the next tenant would insist on having the doors taken out, so you might as well kick about them being here, and see if you’s kin get the winder in.’”

Anne’s mimicry of the office-boy was perfect and her hearers laughed, but Mrs. Stewart had caught the significant words: “Stable doors,” and now she looked deeply concerned. Anne hastened to end her narrative when she saw her mother’s expression.

“So Polly and I went back to the agent’s, heard the price of the place, and paid down half a month’s rent to hold it until you all can go with us to-morrow morning to approve of our selection.”

“Oh, Anne! how much was it a month?” exclaimed Eleanor, eagerly, while Mrs.

Stewart looked dubious over such recklessness.

“One-fifty a month, and we can have a straight lease—no humbugging about clauses.”

“And how many rooms, did you say, dear?” gasped Mrs. Stewart.

“I didn’t say, mother, and I told Poll not to say more until after you see it in the morning.”

“But I like it, and it really does seem as if Providence sent us through that street,” added Polly, sighing with content.

“Eleanor, did you hear Anne say it had stable-doors?” now ventured Mrs. Stewart, fearfully.

“No! did you, Anne? Why would it have stable-doors?”

“Because in the days of horses and carriages, it was some rich man’s private stable,” laughed Anne, enjoying the horror on her mother’s face.

“A stable! Ha, ha, ha—for a Maynard of Chicago! Oh—ha, ha, ha!” laughed Eleanor, rocking back and forth.

Even Mrs. Stewart had to laugh at the picture Eleanor’s exclamation suggested—Mrs. Maynard and Barbara calling upon a member of their family who was living in an East Side stable!

Any doubt of this being just the place they wanted vanished in the morning when Anne and Polly proudly escorted Mrs. Stewart and Eleanor about their future domicile. True, it had all the ear-marks of a stable from the *outside*, but once you were within, there was only an artistic home to be seen. The ground-floor which had once held four stalls and a harness-room, with space for two carriages, was now partitioned off in a manner that made the most of the space. A large living-room across the front acted as entrance-hall and passageway to the rear rooms and second floor. In the corner of the living-room, where the small brick chimney had served as smoke-vent for the stove of former days, there now was a wide tiled fire-place which would hold great logs.

Double glass-paneled doors led from the front room to the dining-room with its two high-set square windows opening to the sunlight in the rear. Also a single door went to the kitchen, which also had two high windows like those in the adjoining room. From the kitchen, a back door opened upon a tiny grass-platted garden of about twenty feet square. A fine locust tree grew in one corner of the plot and gave shade in the afternoon.

Anne explained certain peculiar features regarding the windows of the back-rooms. "Don't you see why they are so high? It is because they were once the ventilators to the stalls. Each horse had his own window for air. But I think they now make the rooms look quaint, don't you?"

The others agreed with her, and Eleanor said: "If we had a shelf running along under the windows, it would look better."

"And we can use it for china," added Polly.

Anne now started to go upstairs, followed by the other three; they all examined the bedrooms and were delighted with them. There were two large front and two smaller rear rooms, with a fine tiled bathroom between the back rooms. Not one of the rooms was as small as the largest chambers seen in the modern apartments.

"And all for a hundred and fifty a month!" exclaimed Eleanor, joyously.

"I reckon we'd better take it at once, children," said Mrs. Stewart, approvingly.

"But remember," said Anne, on the way to the agent's office, "we have to make all inside repairs, or redecorate as we want. There is no steam heat or hot water supplied, either, like the swell apartment houses, uptown, offer us."

"I'd rather have it so, Anne dear," replied Mrs. Stewart. "I've always been used to a coal range and those fandangled gas ideas worried me, but I didn't say anything to you-all. I noticed what a fine little kitchen stove this one has, so you'll always have hot water—never fear. As for heat! Well, a great open fireplace in the front room will help heat upstairs, and there is a register in the bathroom that comes from the kitchen stove-pipe."

"We can use electric or gas radiators, Anne," added Eleanor, eagerly, "in very cold weather."

"I never knew what heated bedrooms were like, in Pebbly Pit, Anne," Polly said, anxious to have a word.

"Besides we may have a very mild winter," remarked Anne.

So the lease was signed and the first month's rent paid. "We'll give you any assistance you may need in getting the place in order, Mrs. Stewart," said the agent, as he handed the papers to his new tenant.

"That will be very nice, and we will take advantage of your offer, at once. I want the kitchen range and stove pipe put in perfect working order, and please see that the radiator in the bathroom is not obstructed in any way," said the lady.

Anne and the agent exchanged looks and laughed. "I can see where Mrs. Stewart expects to enjoy herself this winter. Well, I told my wife the other day, we were more comfortable when we had an old-fashioned flat with a kitchen range, than we now are with all the latest modern improvements," returned the agent.

"Anne, Polly and I want our rooms repapered and painted," whispered Eleanor, tugging at Anne's sleeve.

"I was about to suggest that you have all the woodwork given one coat of nice fresh paint, but the paper now on the walls is very expensive and artistic, so I wouldn't be in too great a hurry to have it done over. The last tenant imported his own paper at a great expense for that place," explained the agent.

"I think you are very kind and sensible to advise us in this way. So we'll have the men do the paint but not touch the paper until we have had time to look it over again," said Anne.

"When can we move in?" questioned Polly.

"Any time you like; but I would advise having the painters out first. I will send two men to begin work in there to-morrow."

Then the four delighted tenants left the office, and on the walk back to the corner where they wished to board the car they eagerly planned how they would furnish their home.

CHAPTER III—FURNISHING THE STABLE

“Anne, if we hurry and get the furniture, we can settle our home before school starts,” suggested Eleanor, eagerly.

“If you-all had only let me ship my stuff from Denver you wouldn’t have to buy a stick!” declared Mrs. Stewart.

They were standing on the corner waiting for an uptown car but not one was in sight. Anne showed signs of impatience but exclaimed at her mother’s remark:

“Mother, you know very well what the crating and freight would have cost, and you sold your stuff for more than it was worth. I think you are most fortunate to have that little roll of money on hand, when you consider the wear and tear your furniture has had in the last thirty years.”

“Anyway, Mrs. Stewart, I don’t want Victorian period in our house. Polly and I want to furnish and decorate our own rooms as we like. This is to be our first experiment in real artistic work,” said Eleanor, comfortingly.

Polly nodded her head at these words; but standing with her back to the curb, her face was opposite a large show-window in the corner building. Now, as if by some magnet, her eyes were attracted to what that window contained.

“Why, just see there! Right near our street is a furniture shop!” With this exclamation, Polly ran over to inspect the objects displayed in the window. A carved four-poster, and other rare antiques, drew the attention of the little group.

Polly glanced around to see what furniture shop it was that was so near their new home.

“Why! It’s an auction place. Surely, it cannot be that such wonderful things are sold in a junk room,” exclaimed Mrs. Stewart.

That made the other three look also, and Eleanor added: “It doesn’t follow that just because this is an auction house, that it must be a junk room.”

“Well, I never saw anything but awful junk in the second-hand place in Oak Creek,” explained Polly.

“Even the Denver dealers sell only junk, Nolla. But it may be different in New York. Everything seems to be different,” said Anne.

“Of course it is! Why wouldn’t it be when you stop to think of it. In the first place, no one in Oak Creek ever had anything but junk to sell. And in Denver, where everyone hangs on to every stick they have, simply because it is so difficult to get anything worth while, the poor second-hand dealer starves for want of trade. But here, as well as in Chicago, folks send stuff to places like this for sale, when they can’t find a place to move into. I just bet there will be thousands of families that will have to sell out this year just because there are not enough homes for all of them.” Eleanor’s logic was sound, and Polly ventured a suggestion.

“I’d love to go in there and see what they do with such pieces. There are lots of well-dressed people going in—come on.”

Nothing loath to see the interior of a New York second-hand shop, the westerners went to the front door. There a colored porter stood and bowed politely.

“Sale goin’ on in third room, right, ladies; have a catalogue?”

As the uniformed attendant offered Anne a pamphlet of about twenty pages, he waved them inside out of the doorway. Then he repeated his directions to the next couple who followed directly after Mrs. Stewart’s party.

To say the four friends were astonished at the size and quality of the auction-rooms is speaking mildly. Not a piece of furniture but looked rare and expensive. It seemed improbable that it all was for sale.

A second attendant now came up and said: “Sale now going on in south gallery, ladies.”

Then Anne took her courage in her hands. “We have never visited a sale before, so you will confer a favor by showing us where to go, or what to do. We are about to furnish a house.”

The man sensed a good customer, and gallantly showed them through several well-stocked rooms until they reached the last, where a smiling smooth-tongued individual sat behind a raised desk and spoke conversationally to the crowd which sat in rows before him.

“Jake, find me four chairs, in a hurry,” whispered the man who was conducting Anne’s party.

Without confusion and in a moment's time, Jake carried over four wonderful Jacobean chairs, two in each hand, their backs to each other, and handled as recklessly as if the fine carving was made of unbreakable metal.

"Now, ladies, enjoy yourselves," the smiling attendant said; then he stopped for a moment at the desk to say a word to the auctioneer who continued his selling as if no new victims had been introduced.

One marvelous article after another was brought forth and placed for exhibition upon the Persian rug that covered the platform in front of the audience. And one after another, the objects of art and beauty were sold to different buyers at a preposterously low figure.

But the wily auctioneer took notice that not a member of the newly arrived party was bidding on anything. He decided that this must not be, so he stood up to address the assembly.

"Friends, I know that you are here to buy and not to waste your time in mere curiosity. If there is any particular article you need, or have seen on the premises, speak out and I will oblige you by introducing it in this sale."

He glanced over the crowd and finally allowed his gaze to rest upon the four who sat in the front row. They all felt guilty of using his time and room when they had no idea of buying any particular thing. Mrs. Stewart was about to whisper to Anne that they had better go when Eleanor spoke up fearlessly.

"I saw a four-poster in the show-window before I came in. Is it for sale?"

Her three companions felt the shock that is experienced when one does an unusual or unexpected thing. But they each felt thrilled, too, at the courage of that one.

"I regret exceedingly, my dear young lady, that that particular set of antique mahogany cannot be sold until day after to-morrow. In fact, only the contents of *this* vast room is for sale to-day. We take them in turn, you see. To-morrow the adjoining room goes, and the day following that everything is sold and cleared out of the third room—where the bed is."

"But we have a four-poster in this sale, Mr. Winters," quickly said one of the floor-men.

"Ah, indeed! Perhaps the young lady will like it as well as the other one. Bring it forward, Joe."

Without the slightest delay, the floor-men then pulled and pushed a very

elaborately carved four-posted bed out upon the dais. It was similar to the one in the window but it was smaller, this one being four feet wide while the one on exhibition for Friday's sale was full sized.

The auctioneer spoke of all the points about this particular piece of furniture, and then began to offer it for sale. The four visitors in the front row sat as if hypnotized at his manner.

"What, no one here to appreciate this marvelous work of other days, now to be sold for three hundred dollars?"

Not a sound encouraged him, so he sighed and said: "Well, is there anyone who will give two hundred for it?"

Eleanor's heart thumped. She was willing to give it but she found her tongue cleave to the roof of her mouth at the very idea of securing the bed at such a price.

"Too bad! Then I shall have to ask if anyone will pay me one hundred dollars? Is this bed not worth that to you, young lady—or perhaps you need a full-sized bed?" The auctioneer looked at Eleanor but failed to see the dazzling glint that shot into her eyes when he offered the bed for one hundred. He really had no hope of starting it at that figure so he over-did it that time.

"All right, friends, I am perfectly willing to have you set your own price on this magnificent piece of carving that is no less than a hundred and fifty years old. Now what is your pleasure? Fifty, forty, thirty—what? did I hear a bargain-hunter say twenty-five? Oh, impossible?"

Eleanor almost fainted at such a dreadful sacrifice, and would have stood up to offer him the hundred, had not a man in the rear called out "Fifty."

"Ah, that is better—thank you. Now, fifty, fifty, fifty—who says seventy-five? I want seventy-five—fifty, fifty, fifty, fif—fif-tee, tee, t-e-e—what, no one here willing to pay more than fifty dollars for this bee-u—utiful bit of antique mahogany? Fif-fif-fif—Ah!"

Eleanor swallowed hard, half-stood up, and the auctioneer caught her eye at last. He smiled, acknowledged her expression, and now called:

"Seventy-five! I now have seventy-five, seven, seven, sev-sev-seventy—seventy-fi-ifvvve! I have seventy-five dollars for this wonderful mahogany bed that is really worth seven hundred dollars in any store to-day. And I only have seventy-five dollars bid. Seven-tee——"

Again Eleanor half-stood up and this time she managed to say “One hundred, please!”

“Thank you, young lady—you certainly understand fine furniture. I am now offered one hundred dollars by one who knows the value of this bed—one hundred, one hundred—hundred—one, h-u-ndred dollars offered—who will give a hundred and ten—only ten more gets it?”

Polly was so amazed when Eleanor said “One hundred dollars” that she giggled hysterically; but not wishing to have her friend brag how “she bid at this auction and her friends were too shy,” Polly looked anxiously at the auctioneer. He saw that look and understood.

“Don’t hesitate, young lady. You know ‘he who hesitates is lost’—in this case, loses a great bargain. If you wish to bid, never fear competing with a friend. In this business there are no friends—all men are strangers. Shall I say one hundred and ten for you?”

Polly nodded eagerly and smiled broadly at Eleanor. The two girls were so delighted with themselves at daring to speak out so bravely in a city like *New York* that they failed to realize the auctioneer had knocked down the bed to Polly.

“This young lady in front. I *must* say she appreciates fine furniture!” declared the suave auctioneer to everyone in general.

“W-h-y, Pol—le-ee! Is that your bed?” gasped Mrs. Stewart.

“I’m sure I don’t know. Is it, Nolla?” laughed Polly.

Just then a brusque voice said: “Name and address please—and twenty-five per cent deposit money.” The girls looked up in bewilderment. Who was the man?

He seemed to read their thoughts, for he smiled. “I am the cashier. Everyone has to pay down a cash deposit on their bids. Everything you buy has to be removed by Saturday, or we are not responsible for it after that.”

“Oh!” Polly and Eleanor looked at each other. They were trying to figure out how much money he wanted.

“Here—I’ll pay the deposit. About thirty dollars, isn’t it?” said Anne, in a business-like tone.

“Yes, thank you. Now name and address, please?”

“What’s the number of our stable, Anne?” laughed Eleanor.

When Anne gave the address the cashier looked surprised. “Oh, have you rented

the Studio down the street?”

The girls bowed wonderingly, and he added: “The artist who lived there for a number of years, used to drop in here every week just for the entertainment of picking up curios. In fact, I saw him here a few minutes ago. He told me he would give fifty percent advance to the tenant who leased that place. Here’s a chance for you to make money if you want to give up the Studio.”

“We want a home more than money, mister!” declared Polly.

“You’ve said it, Poll! If we give up this studio we may have to go back and live in our gold mine, because New York hasn’t any homes left, this year,” laughed Eleanor.

The cashier had not missed the mention of “our gold mine” and determined to do his utmost to please these ladies. Hence he whispered: “I’ll look after everything you buy here, and don’t worry about moving it away on Saturday. Next week will do, if you are not ready to get things out this week.”

“Polly, Polly! There goes a high-boy that matches the bed you got!” cried Eleanor, at this moment.

“They are pieces of the same set. Strange to say, they came from the very place you rented. The artist has to sell out because he cannot find an apartment, and there is no storage room for his furniture,” explained the cashier.

So Polly secured the high-boy for sixty dollars and felt very proud of her purchases. Eleanor bought a pair of brass fire-dogs and irons, and Anne bid on a large etching. When it was knocked down to her, she turned to her mother and said: “I really do not want it. What under the sun did I get it for?”

And Mrs. Stewart laughed. “It’s always the way at these vendues. One gets all kinds of things one never needs.”

“Then let’s get out. Girls, I’m going now,” whispered Anne, rising to leave.

The cashier hurried over when he saw the four new customers about to go, and said, “The artist would like very much to meet his successors to the Studio.”

At the same moment, a grey-haired gentleman bowed and smiled, and the group waited expectantly. Anne and Polly smiled also.

“You are the kind friend who advised us, yesterday, when we had to leave the car,” Anne said, pleasantly.

“Yes, but I never dreamed I was directing you right to my front door,” rejoined

the artist.

“Well, Mr. Fabian, as long as you’ve met before, I’ll go about my business,” and the cashier hurried away, leaving the five people in the adjoining room.

Anne proceeded to introduce her friends and then added: “It was providential that we went through that street. Now we have a home to our liking.”

“I am delighted that my successors will appreciate the place, but I am still seeking for quarters. Had I choked my anger and swallowed my pride, when the owner refused to keep his word about the stable-doors, I would still be enjoying my cozy Studio.”

Mr. Fabian then told the ladies how he had taken the stable in its raw state and turned it into the lovely dwelling it now was. He had paid for all the hardwood floors, for the partitions on the ground-floor, and for the kitchen plumbing.

“Why, it must have cost you a small fortune,” ventured Anne. “And now it seems too bad that you can’t enjoy it.”

“But I did enjoy it, my dear young lady—for five years. And I only paid sixty dollars a month, during that time, too. When the owner raised me, this year, to ninety I rebelled, because I had spent so much money on beautifying the rooms. I thought he would really relent and say I could have it for about seventy-five a month. I was mistaken.”

“We’re paying a hundred and fifty a month and make all repairs, ourselves,” Anne ventured.

“He took advantage of the unusual conditions. But you have a better bargain, even so, than if you had rented a seven-room apartment, uptown, for two or three thousand a year.”

By this time they were standing on the corner once more, and Mr. Fabian seemed ready to leave them. Then Polly remembered that the cashier had said the bed and high-boy she just bought had come from the Studio.

“Oh, Mr. Fabian, excuse me for speaking of it, but did you really own the four-poster I got at the sale just now?”

“Yes, my dear. It was in the room my little daughter occupied when she was home. She is now in Paris taking an art course.” The girls were deeply interested in this intimate information. “That box-spring with the mattress on the bed was made to order of the best material I could buy. You’ll find the silk-floss in that mattress is so soft you’ll never care to get up, once you rest upon it.”

“But I didn’t know the spring and mattress went with the bed,” Polly said, amazed.

“Oh, yes. That is the way they generally sell other folks’ goods. But I wish to say, that Nancy only used the bed a few weeks, as she had a splendid opportunity to enter a class in a friend’s school in Paris, so we started her across without delay. My wife went, too, to look after her; that is one reason I refused to pay the increased rent; I thought it was too much for one lone man to pay.”

“It almost makes me feel as if we ought to take you in to live with us,” said Mrs. Stewart, sympathetically. “If there only was one extra bedroom, now, we could make you a member of our family just as well as not.”

“But we haven’t that extra room!” laughed Anne, wondering what this stranger would think of her mother’s free western hospitality.

What he thought was soon expressed. “I certainly appreciate such unusual kindness and I see it is genuine. So I will dare to do this: I shall love to drop in, now and then, and see how you all are doing. Perhaps I can be of some assistance to you, in various ways.”

“I know you can!” declared Eleanor, eagerly. “Polly and I are taking up art and interior decorating and we need lots of ideas from grown-ups who have had experience. You can advise us that way.”

“Begin your regular home visits a week from Sunday, Mr. Fabian. We will be settled then and ready to welcome you to our house,” added Anne.

Then they parted and Mr. Fabian went downtown, while the four companions walked northwards to the hotel. As they walked, Anne said: “It certainly was queer how that gentleman sent us past his own home and we saw it. Now, he turns out to be just the kind of a friend Polly and Eleanor will need to advise them about art school.”

“Anne, what shall we do with the rest of the afternoon? We still have two hours before dinner-time,” said Eleanor, glancing at her wristwatch.

“We can go over to the nearest shop and get Polly an everyday hat. I can’t bear to see this lovely one hacked out at auction rooms. She needs complete outfits of underwear, too, but we may be too late at the shops, for that.”

“Anne, I saw in the paper this morning, when you were looking for apartments, that a fine Fifth avenue shop is having a sale of early fall models. Let’s go up and get Polly’s hat there,” advised Eleanor, eagerly.

Anne laughed. "You are willing to get one for yourself, too, eh?"

So both girls were supplied with chic hats before they returned to the hotel. There they found an invitation from the Latimers to come, informally, and dine with them that night. Dr. and Mrs. Evans would try to come in later.

"It's now five-thirty. Can we get dressed and make it, in time?" asked Eleanor, anxiously.

"Oh, yes; we haven't far to go, you know. A taxi will take us there in ten minutes," replied Anne.

All was hurry and bustle, then, and when the two girls emerged from their rooms dressed in their new gowns, Anne felt that they did her credit. She could not but remark at the great improvement that clothes, well-fitting and of fine material, made in Polly's appearance. Now the girl looked positively beautiful.

A pleasant evening ensued, Jim and Ken insisting upon the right to escort the ladies home after everyone had said good-night.

"You know, girls, Ken and I are going to Yale next week?" said Jim, as they started down Broadway.

"So your father said, to-night. We will miss you, Jim," returned Anne.

"But we'll be home every chance we get—Thanksgiving, Christmas and other times," Kenneth said, hopefully.

"Nolla and I will be awfully busy in school, and in trying to get started in the art classes," added Polly.

"I hope you have the stable settled before we leave the city. We want to give you-all a house-warming," said Kenneth.

"That will be great! Let's have it, anyway, even if everything is not in apple-pie order in the house," exclaimed Polly.

So before they parted, that night, it was all arranged that the house-warming should take place the next Tuesday evening. The boys were leaving for college on Thursday, and the last few days before starting in the new school, would be busy ones for the girls.

"All right, we'll tell the folks the fun is on for next Tuesday, then," said Jim, as they shook hands.

"And it must be a regular surprise, you know—we bring our own refreshments and everything," laughed Kenneth.

“Oh, no! That is the least we can do in return for all you folks have done for us. We will furnish your refreshments!” declared Eleanor, positively.

“As long as you furnish plenty, all right. But remember, girls, that Ken and I still have our Rocky Mountain appetites!”

CHAPTER IV—BARGAINS, BARGAINS EVERYWHERE!

With the worry of house-hunting gone, the young friends felt at liberty to be deliberate while apportioning their time. Anne took Polly and Eleanor to the West End School, the morning following their meeting with Mr. Fabian, and introduced them to the proprietress as the two young ladies she had written about.

Polly thought the elegant mansion that looked more like a prince's residence than a school, would keep her from concentrating upon her lessons. While Anne and the principal of the select school talked business, Polly glanced about the reception room.

The rugs were beautiful, most of them having the faded soft colors of the antique Persian and Turkish. But the furniture was too gorgeous in upholstering for the type of room. Then there were heavy boxed oil paintings in rich gilt frames, hanging on the walls; and teakwood pedestals holding statuettes and busts; and onyx stands with palms. The mantel was loaded with bric-a-brac of all sorts. Many other minor items showed bad taste in whoever furnished the room.

Polly felt all this, but could not explain just why she resented such a conglomeration of color and furnishings. But Eleanor, having had the results of a decorator's judgment displayed in her home, in Chicago, felt inclined to smile at what she saw about her. It was sure evidence of Polly's improvement in artistic interiors since the day she thought the green window-shades quite the thing, to this time when the indiscriminate mixing of colors offended her eyes.

"I really am relieved to hear that you will not be resident here, Miss Stewart, as I need your room for two boarders. I had planned to enlarge the dormitory this year, but everything costs so much that I postponed it. Now this extra room will come in very nicely for me," Mrs. Wellington was saying when Polly and Eleanor had finished a survey of the room, and rejoined Anne.

"Girls, Mrs. Wellington says we may have a look at the class-rooms. Would you like to go with me?" said Anne.

Without demur they followed the lady of the house. They passed through the formal parlor where guests of distinction were entertained. Here the two girls also saw the lack of taste in furnishing. Gilded furniture with delicate satin upholstery, fought with wallpaper of heavy Spanish-leather design. Curtains and portières were of velour, heavily edged with fringe. Valances of velour were over the windows, and on the mantel. Instead of having a delicate French carpet on the floor, there were thick napped dark-toned Beloochistan rugs.

The long library opened out from the parlor, and here there was an atmosphere of rest, because the entire wall spaces were lined with dark cabinets whose shelves were well filled with volumes in bindings made to harmonize with the rich paper that showed above the book-cases. The window-seats were built in and upholstered in tapestry to match the paper. The tables and leather armchairs were not so glaringly out of keeping with the room as the furniture in the first two rooms had been.

Mrs. Wellington waved her hand carelessly at this room: "When I bought this house, all the books went with it, just as you see them now. The window-seats are still covered as they were, but I hope soon to spend some money in making this library more cheerful for the girls. I like bright colors, but that dun wall paper and that dull tapestry on the window cushions gives me the blues. If the books had not been such a bargain—the executor of the estate was most anxious to dispose of them—I never would have taken them. Their dull green morocco bindings make the room seem heavy, don't you think?"

"Oh, no! I was just thinking how lovely the glint of the gold lettering on each dark book makes the room seem. If only there was a dark polished floor to reflect the chair and table legs, the room would be wonderful! But this large carpet spoils that effect!" Nolla exclaimed impetuously.

Mrs. Wellington straightened her spine and looked in hurt amazement at this inexperienced miss who babbled like an expert decorator. No one had ever criticised that carpet rug before!

Anne saw the look and comprehended at once, so she dropped oil on the troubled waters. "Oh, Nolla! you are so carried away with your hobby of studying decorating that you needs must practise it and criticise everywhere. Now, I'm sure, Mrs. Wellington never would have dreamed of your ambition had you not showed it so plainly in your words just now."

Eleanor understood Anne's motive in speaking thus, and smiled benignly. Polly was still trying to grasp the handle to Anne's remark when the lady of the house

led them forth again.

“Here are a number of smaller rooms where girls may sit and read or study in the evening. And now we will go up to the class rooms.”

If Eleanor and Polly had been able to find flaws with the lack of taste shown in the furnishings of the first-floor, they could not detect the slightest item missing in the equipment and furnishing of the different school rooms. Every known modern device and object for the comfort, health and help of scholars, were in evidence. Anne smiled with pleasure as she looked around.

“It will be a delight to teach in such a room as this, Mrs. Wellington; and I’m sure the scholars appreciate all you do for them.”

“No, that is the strange part of it, Miss Stewart. The girls who come here seldom think of all I do for them in providing these rooms. They take it as a matter of course that I should spend so much money in keeping everything as I do, while my competitors ask higher rates and spend less;” the lady looked troubled over it.

“Now I have a friend down on Seventy-second street, who has conducted a most exclusive school for years; but she will not spend a cent in these ideal accommodations yet she gets higher prices than I do. And her waiting list of well-known names is endless. I only have a list of about a dozen applicants and they are not daughters of millionaires, either.”

“Perhaps,” Anne remarked kindly, “the girls *you* graduate make something of themselves in life, whereas those other society girls merely skim over lessons and never know how to spell their own names.”

“Yes, that is true; I secure the very best teachers and try to instill knowledge wisely. And I am sure, my girls, upon leaving here, can compete with anyone.”

“I should say that was a great comfort. To look back some day and be able to say: ‘I taught that girl how to combat ignorance.’ And the girls who sincerely admit what you have done, will rise up and call you blessed—for giving them these expensive modern helps to acquire wisdom.”

Madam seemed pleased with this point of view, and said: “You will stop and have luncheon with me, won’t you, dears?”

“We really cannot, Mrs. Wellington. You see we have to furnish the home that we just leased, yesterday. We are most anxious to have everything in order before starting with our school work on the first,” Anne explained, politely.

“Oh, of course, that is wise. Then I will look for you Monday morning—the first of October. If there is anything you wish to know, you can call me up any time during the mornings. And if you are in this neighborhood before the first, do come in and have tea.”

After the girls had gone, Madam smiled and thought to herself: “I certainly made no mistake in engaging *that* young teacher. She seems to be the best one I have ever interviewed. And the girls will take to her, I’m sure.”

Anne led the way to a Broadway trolley, and soon they were at the hotel. Mrs. Stewart was impatiently awaiting them, so they had an early luncheon and then hurried downtown to the “Art Galleries” on Fourth avenue.

The sale had just opened, and they were able to secure front chairs. A list had been made of pieces of furniture they really needed to start house-keeping with, and now they hoped to be able to find just the things they had pictured for the Studio.

A solid mahogany gate-leg table was knocked down to Anne for fourteen dollars and a half. Then a wing-chair with quaint lines, upholstered in orchid blue velour, was sold to Eleanor for nineteen dollars.

“Dear me, that was a lovely chair, Nolla. I wish I had one like it,” sighed Polly.

“Isn’t my table a dear!” whispered Anne, eagerly.

“But it has as many legs as a centipede,” replied Polly.

The others laughed gaily at her criticism but at that moment, a comfortable Turkish arm-chair was placed upon the dais. It was upholstered in a rich tapestry, and looked oh! so luxurious.

Polly watched the bidders anxiously. She had a sudden desire for that chair, but she couldn’t manage to get in at the bidding, at all. But when she saw a woman opposite, hold up a hand above her head, and so learned that that was one way to catch the auctioneer’s attention, she, too, followed suit.

She instantly held up her hand, and just saved the chair from being sold to a man at the back. So it was knocked down to her at seventeen-fifty.

“There! That is Mrs. Stewart’s chair. I saw the look in her eye when it was placed upon the dais; and I know just how she will enjoy it when she has done preparing our dinners. That chair, out before the open fire-place giving rest to a tired house-keeper, will make one feel like new!” Polly said.

“But, Polly, child! you must not spend your money buying *me* such things!”

exclaimed Mrs. Stewart.

“I will if I want to! This is the first stick you’ve got for your room. And without you, I’d like to know what kind of a home we’d have. So don’t you say another word if I want to buy other things for you.”

Anne objected. “Maybe this one chair is all right, Polly, but no more, please.”

“Anne, just see all the money we’re saving on buying our furniture, this way. Why can’t I use the surplus as I want to? I say I *will*—if I see anything I want very much to give you or your mother.”

Anne knew when Polly was determined to have her way, and believed the best plan now would be to buy what was needed for herself and her mother, so as to forestall Polly or Eleanor.

So that afternoon Anne got two single brass beds with brand new springs and mattresses. The auctioneer explained that the bedding was sent in by the Manhattan Factory, because of an order that had been cancelled before delivery of goods. So Anne secured the bedding at half price.

Neither of the girls suspected Anne of any secret plot when she bought other articles at that sale for the two bedrooms she needed to furnish; but when Eleanor eagerly bid on a Priscilla work-table of mahogany and got it for Mrs. Stewart, Anne felt annoyed.

“My goodness, Anne, it was only five-fifty. Who ever saw a work-table as cheap as that, before? I know your mother will love to darn stockings for us all, now—with a nice place in which to keep her wools,” argued Eleanor, laughingly.

“Maybe mother would rather not darn stockings but let you keep the table, yourself,” suggested Anne.

Before they left the Art Gallery that day, they found they had really bought enough articles to start in with if they liked. They could add rugs, bric-a-brac, and different luxurious chairs, at any time.

“But we need dishes and utensils, girls,” said Mrs. Stewart.

“We’ll get them in a department store, and have them delivered at once,” replied Anne.

“Let’s run over and see if the painters have done anything,” suggested Polly.

“Might as well, Anne—we are right here, you see,” added Eleanor.

So they turned the corner and walked down the street to reach the Studio in time

to see the painters finish the work on the ground floor.

“How nice and fresh it looks. But the wallpaper looks dusty,” said Mrs. Stewart.

“It is dusty, madam. I was just sayin’ to my friend here you ought to have someone clean it all off with bread crumbs. It is a swell paper if it is clean,” remarked the painter.

“Bread-crumbs?” ejaculated Anne.

“Yes’m. Best thing known to clean fine paper. I’ll get a man to do it if you say so. He knows his job.”

“I wish you would. And ask him to supply the bread, too, as we are stopping at a hotel where it is hard to get such things.”

“An’ I was goin’ to mention—the porcelain tubs and basins oughta be cleaned fer you’s. When we finish painting I will scour and polish ’em, if you say so.”

“Yes, please do! And the floors ought to be polished, too.”

“We’ll take care of all that, if you just tell us to go ahead and clean up as we see fit,” said the painter.

“All right; but don’t make us wait too long before we can move in. We are going to have a house-warming, here, next week,” explained Eleanor, anxiously.

“I’ve got an extra man comin’ on to-morrow, and we’ll be out of here by Saturday. Especially if we work Sat’aday afternoon—but that means double pay, you know.”

“Never mind that; finish the job as soon as possible, for we will save that much extra money in hotel bills,” said Anne.

“All right! We’ll turn it over for you Sat’aday night!”

Everything seemed to be going so well, not only with their Studio-home, but with furnishings and decorators, that the girls felt elated.

The next day they again met Mr. Fabian at the Art Galleries, and he proved a very welcome member to their party, as he knew all about rugs, porcelains, and antiques. Having shown them and explained all about the few rare pieces still for sale in the auction rooms, he said:

“Some day you must go with me to some of the other places. There are dozens of these shops in New York, and each one seems to incline to some particular line of furnishing. Then, too, one can see more wonderful antiques in these shabby little shops along the avenue, than one would believe possible.

“I often pick up rare things in these places. They are run, mostly, by Hebrews who merely know when an object is antique, or in demand. But they seldom can tell you the period or name of many of their most valuable items. It was in this way that a friend of mine once discovered a treasure.

“His wife wanted a necklace for Christmas—something odd and different than any that her friends had. So he came to me and said: ‘Fabian, I can’t afford Tiffany prices, but I wish I could find something unusual. I want to please my wife, because she has been such a good sport during the time I was hanging over the edge of bankruptcy. Now what would you suggest?’

“I offered to go with him. So we sauntered out of the Studio and walked over here, to Fourth avenue. We stopped in every little collector’s shop along the street, but could not find just what appealed to him. Then we entered that shop across the street—the one near the corner.

“I knew the old Hebrew well, having often looked over his trays filled with every old thing conceivable. So I said upon entering: ‘Got any odd kind of necklace or chain, Moses? Something to go around a lady’s neck, you know?’ I had to demonstrate my words as I spoke.

“‘Ya, ya! Shure, I got a chain. I show him you?’

“It was a long antique-silver chain, the great flat links being beautifully filigreed. But it was not what my friend wanted, so I bought it for Nancy. Then the shop-keeper looked wistful.

“‘Ain’t I got it what you like? Tell me what for you want him?’

“My friend replied: ‘For my wife. She goes to balls and like pearls, or other stones, in a necklace.’

“‘Ah, ha! I got yust what you like. A pearl necklace vot come in las’ veek wid a lot of odder fine tings.’ Then the old man rooted around under the counter until he found the tray he wanted. It was coated with dust from the floor, but he blew this off and carelessly placed the heaped-up tray before us.

“Such a tangle of all kinds of jewelry I never *did* see! Finally I got the string of pearls free from the snarls of ordinary glass beads and other trash, and handed it over to my friend. He curled a lip in scorn at the soiled trinket.

“‘Avery, drive a bargain with him for this. I honestly think those pearls are quite good. Let me rub one up on my sleeve, while you draw the fellow’s attention from what I am doing,’ I whispered.

“While Avery tried to bargain, I cleaned up one of the gems and felt sure they were unusually good even for artificial pearls.

“We actually bought the string for twelve dollars, but my friend feared lest he had been taken in. So I smiled and said: ‘Leave them with me and I’ll see that they are polished up like new by to-morrow night. I’ll take them to an old jeweler down the street and have them washed and the gold links cleaned. Your wife won’t know but that they came from Tiffany’s.

“Avery laughed and left them with me. So I hurried down to Union Square and showed them to the old jeweler I knew, there.

“He puckered his brow at first, then ran for his magnifying glasses. After an unusually keen inspection he called to his associate. Both of them then examined the string most carefully, and the old man finally looked up.

“‘If I didn’t know you to be an honest man I should say: “Where did you steal them?”—but I will ask: “How came you by these?”’

“I was astonished, as you may know, but I tried to appear wise, so I laughingly replied: ‘They are not mine, my dear, sir. I only wish they were! I just got them from a friend to have someone, who is responsible, clean them nicely. I must hand them back as soon as you have finished.’

“‘Mr. Fabian, I can’t undertake such a job. I have no bonded man to do such work and I dare not send them out. They may be substituted, you know.’

“Then I couldn’t help saying: ‘My good man! You don’t value them so highly as that, do you? Why, I carried them downtown in my pocket!’

“‘Ha, ha!’ he laughed, ‘I never saw a better matched string of perfect pearls in my life and I am nigh onto sixty. If I had to handle that necklace, I should instantly insure it with a broker for a hundred thousand dollars.’

“Fancy, my friends, how I felt! My knees gave way and I had to sit down. I loosened my collar which seemed suddenly to grow too tight, but I couldn’t say a word.”

Polly and Eleanor stood listening with eyes bulging and mouths half-open. Anne and her mother were also deeply interested.

Mr. Fabian smiled to himself before he continued his tale, “Well, I took the pearls and hailed a taxi. I was taken to Tiffany’s, and asked for the manager, at once. Of course they wanted to know why I wished to see him, and I said, courageously: ‘To turn over a valuable pearl necklace and insure it for a hundred

thousand.'

"That brought the manager running. We went to a small private room and I placed the string of pearls before him. He took it carefully, examined it casually, then more minutely. He seemed perturbed and got up. 'Don't leave this room and do not allow anyone to come in and see it. I'll be back in a moment with our expert.'

"I felt sure, then, that Avery had actually found a *real* bargain. But I never dreamed of getting anything out of it for myself. The manager returned with, not only the gem expert, but also with the president of the company. He closed the door and locked it.

"The gem expert used all sorts of tests on the pearls and then said in a trembling tone: 'M'sieur, I see like I nevair saw in my life! A string of perfect match pearls, each one well worth a fortune. But I see more, M'sieu! I will bring my acid to clean the engraved clasp set with diamonds. Maybe we find interesting fack.'

"Everyone felt nervous during the intermission granted us, but we said not a word to each other. Then the Frenchman returned. He was so careful, almost reverent, I should say, in touching and cleaning the clasp, that I laughed to myself at the memory of Old Izaacs shelving the pearls with a heap of junk, on a tray that was shoved on the floor under a counter.

"After many minutes of impatient waiting on our side, and as long in a most delicate cleansing process of the pearls on the part of the expert, he said: 'Ah! Now vee zee.'

"He adjusted his eyeglass and studied the lettering on the clasp. Then he jerked forward and peered breathlessly at it again. Suddenly he dropped the necklace upon the pad and leaned back in the chair. 'Mon Dieu!' was all he could gasp.

"The president then caught up the pearls and adjusted the glass and studied the clasp. He also gasped and turned pale. The manager took the string from his superior and eagerly read the lettering aloud, 'To my queen from Bonaparte.' And then followed the date and year in tiny figures."

Mr. Fabian smiled as he saw the impression his story had made, and waited to be asked questions concerning the pearls.

"Oh, do finish the story!" cried Eleanor.

"Were they really that famous pearl necklace?" asked Anne.

But Polly was too amazed to ask anything.

“It was the famous necklace of purest pearls that had been lost for the past sixty years. It was worth about two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, at the time it disappeared. To-day it would be worth much more. But it belonged to the French Museum, and a reward of two hundred thousand francs had been offered for trace of it, or its return. So long ago had that reward been recorded in every civilized land, that the present generation had never heard of it—except in history.

“Well, I took a receipt from Tiffany for its safe-keeping, and they assured me that they would communicate with the French Ambassador, without delay. Meanwhile I was to communicate with my friend Avery. Naturally I withheld all information as to the manner in which the necklace had been discovered.

“I went to Avery’s office, immediately, and acted very sorry as I said: ‘Avery, if I were to tell you that I lost that necklace, what would you do to me?’

“He only laughed and said: ‘I’d make you buy my wife one as good, or one she *might* prefer to that greasy one!’

“Then I said: ‘Avery, I never had, nor do I expect to have as much money as that necklace is worth! Man alive, it is now in Tiffany’s safe, insured for two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, against fire or theft!’

“I thought Avery would faint, but when he had managed to collect his wits, he whispered hoarsely, ‘I don’t understand—were they *genuine* pearls?’

“So I told him the story and we both rushed away to hire a taxi and then we drove madly to Tiffany’s, again. I introduced Avery as the owner of the pearls, and he was treated to a sight of his little twelve-dollar bargain.

“Well, the upshot of it was, Avery received a ‘present’ of a hundred thousand dollars from the French Government, and in return he signed a release for himself, his wife, his heirs, friends, acquaintances, and, in fact, every American citizen in the census. He was told that he would be held responsible, thereafter, for all claims or lawsuits instituted against France to recover the necklace. And he accepted the burden, considering he had such a price paid for the job.

“One day Izaacs got a present through the mail, of a draft for a thousand dollars and to this day he doesn’t know who the signer ‘William Avery,’ can be.

“My old jeweler on Union Square got another thousand, and I—well, I refused everything, and Avery called me a numb-skull and an easy mark! So he invested half of all he received in my wife and Nancy’s name, and that is how they went to Europe.” Mr. Fabian smiled reminiscently at the end of the story.

CHAPTER V—FIRST DAYS AT SCHOOL

Polly and her friends had moved into the Studio and were recovering from the orgy of the house-warming given them by the Evans and Latimers the previous evening, when the two boys came to say good-by.

“Ah, come on, Nolla—bring Polly and see us to the train,” coaxed Jim, watching the clock on the mantel.

“But, Jim, we honestly haven’t the time! If you *knew* all we had to do this week!” sighed Eleanor.

“Why, we could have *been* there in the time you have taken to explain how busy you are,” grumbled Jim.

“Then get out! If I have wasted so much precious time it is because you stand there and make me. Good-by, old pal, now scat!” Eleanor held out her hand and laughed. But Jim was not so easily daunted.

“Where’s Ken all this time? Oh, I say, Ken! Come on!”

“I think Ken and Polly went down the street while you two were out in the garden hunting for the grass,” said Mrs. Stewart, without a smile.

Jim laughed. And Eleanor caught up her hat from the divan and ran to the door. “If they go away like that, then you and I will, too.”

Having reached the corner, however, Jim and Eleanor saw Ken and Polly intently studying something held in the latter’s palm.

“Come on—we will see what it is they caught?” said Eleanor.

“Oh, Nolla, see what Ken gave me for a keep-sake. We found it over at Old Izaak’s,” exclaimed Polly, holding out the strange trinket for her friend to admire.

“Why, it’s a real scarab. Isn’t it a beauty,” said Eleanor, then suddenly wishing Jim had thought of giving her a keep-sake.

“That’s why I wanted you to come out with me. I told Ken you girls’d forget

about us the minute we were out of sight, unless you had something to remind you of us,” explained Jim.

“Come on, then, and let Nolla pick out what she wants,” added Ken, laughingly.

“I’ll take the queen’s pearl necklace!” and young hearts made merry of the pearls that had cost so many lives and so much misery.

Eleanor selected a peculiar seal set in a strange stone. “There, I will use it on the first letter I write you,” she said.

“Now that you are here, you may as well jump on the car and take us to the train,” begged Jim.

And this time he had his way. But they did not catch the four o’clock express to New Haven, as it was four-ten when they reached the gates and found them closed.

“Now we’ll have to sit and talk until five,” laughed Jim, exultantly.

“We’ll do nothing of the sort! I told you we had no time to waste on you boys, and we only came thus far to be polite in exchange for the keep-sakes. But you can have them back if you think it gives you the right to order me around.”

Eleanor held out the seal, but Jim looked forlorn. Then she laughed because he felt bad at her teasing.

“Come now, Jimmy, say good-by like an old dear, and tell Polly and me to run home.”

“I wish you were my sister!” sighed Jim.

“Your sister? What good would that do you?” asked Eleanor.

“Because you’d let me kiss you good-by!” retorted he.

They all laughed merrily, and Polly said: “You’d never want to kiss her if she was a sister. You wouldn’t even have asked her to come to the station with you.”

“You’re right, Poll! Now I’m going—good-by, boys!” and Eleanor held forth both hands—one to each boy.

After many repeated good-bys, the girls left and slowly walked down the avenue. When they had reached the parkway that runs over the car-tunnel, and is known by the name of Madison avenue, Polly said: “Why wouldn’t you wait for the train, Nolla?”

“Because, Polly, I like both those boys and I don’t want to lose them so soon. If

a male thinks we females will run at beck and call for them, they quickly weary of such a game. It is the one who refuses to be wound about a finger, that always keeps the beaux on a string.”

Polly laughed. “You are too worldly-wise for me. Now I never should have dreamed of such a thing.”

“Well, I’m right! One reason Bob never has a beau is just because she shows how anxious she is for one.”

“Oh, no, Nolla! The reason Bob hasn’t any beaux is on account of her disposition—you know that!”

“That, too, Polly. But mostly, because she throws herself at the head of any eligible man. I tell you, a man won’t have it so!”

“Never mind, Nolla. You and I are never going to have beaux, so we should worry! We will marry our profession!” said Polly.

The following Monday, Anne escorted her two charges to the school on West End avenue. It was a wonderful Autumn day and the girls pictured how beautiful the mountains about Pebbly Pit must look on such a clear day.

As the Fifth avenue bus was most convenient for Polly and her companions, boarding it at Thirtieth street and leaving it at the corner of Seventy-second street where West End avenue started northward, they had but a short walk to reach the school.

Eleanor had been most particular with Polly’s, and her own appearance, that morning. “For,” said she, “first impressions are lasting. We must be sure and make a favorable dent in these girls.”

“But we don’t know one of them, Nolla,” argued Polly.

“All the more reason why we should take the head of the line!” retorted Eleanor, tossing her head.

Anne laughed, and thought to herself, “They will surely take the head in everything, for I never saw two such live girls.”

But to Eleanor’s chagrin the examinations classed Polly with girls of fifteen to sixteen, while she was placed with girls of fourteen years. This caused the temperamental girl to feel discouraged and she began to blame her ill-health for her backwardness.

In every other way, Polly and she ranked equal; and not a girl in the whole

exclusive school could boast of better or more fashionable dresses than these two western scholars. Eleanor was most talkative, describing her home in Chicago and the people the Maynards knew. Then she whispered, covertly, how rich Polly Brewster was—she owned a great gold mine all in her own rights. She spoke thrillingly of Rainbow Cliffs and the tons upon tons of rare stones to be found there, until every girl sighed in envy. But Eleanor failed to mention that the stones would have to be cut and polished before they would be of any use to anyone.

A few stray sentences of these conversations reached Anne's ears, and she felt puzzled to know what was best to do. Eleanor was not bragging because she needed place or power in the group, but the teacher understood that she was exaggerating for Polly's sake. She wanted all the girls to look up to Polly as a subject would to a queen. She knew how Barbara had felt toward the simple ranch people, and these girls were of the same ilk—society's pets. And they could make life unhappy for Polly, or a dream of joy.

That afternoon, as school closed, Anne overheard one of the girls repeating Eleanor's words, but they had not lost in the repetition. In fact, Anne was sure Eleanor did not say quite all that she was credited with. On the way to the Studio, therefore, she determined to speak to Eleanor about the matter.

"Eleanor, you seemed to make a bushel of friends without any trouble," said Anne.

"I always do. It's best to have done with it, and then you can sift out those you don't like, afterward," laughed Eleanor.

"How about you, Polly?" questioned Anne.

"I was too busy with my lessons to bother about anyone, but I thought the girls acted rather queer this afternoon. I caught some of them whispering about me, and some were casting envious glances my way. I can't understand why they should?"

Eleanor gasped. Here was a danger she had not thought of. She wouldn't risk Polly's peace or popularity for anything in the world, but she may have unconsciously done just that very thing!

"I heard some of the girls talking of your gold mine and Rainbow Cliffs, and I wondered if you had made such close friends, so soon," ventured Anne, guilefully.

"Oh, *I* did that! Nothing like putting on a lot of 'dog' if you want to make a

splash in the puddle,” hastily explained Eleanor.

Anne felt like laughing but she hid her face, and Polly turned pale with annoyance.

“Why, Nolla! How could you? You know I’d rather be considered a nobody than stand in a false light. Now what can I do to clear this up?”

“It isn’t false light at all, Polly. You can’t do anything now without making me out a fibber,” retorted Eleanor.

“You are acting just like your sister Bob might have done! That’s the worst thing I can say to *you*,” scorned Polly.

“And I did it all for you, too!” whimpered Eleanor.

“Didn’t I tell you, back at Pebbly Pit, that I wanted to cut my own cloth? For goodness’ sake, don’t interfere in my private life again!”

“But you’ve got to let folks know you’re someone, or you will never climb to the top of the heap,” argued Eleanor, stubbornly.

“I have my own method of reaching the top, Eleanor, and it is not *that* way. I was Polly Brewster before you ever knew me and I am that same Polly Brewster even after having a gold mine and a mile of lava-jewels thrust down my throat. Don’t say another word!”

Polly turned her back and went to the end seat on the bus, leaving Anne to console poor Eleanor.

“Look’a here, Anne—did I do anything so awful?”

“You made a serious mistake, Nolla, when you talked to those strange girls about Polly. You tried to make her appear as if she approved of your method of bragging about the mine and money.”

“W-h-y, I never dreamed of such a thing! I only wanted these New York girls to get it straight from the start that our Polly of Pebbly Pit was ‘some punkins’;” Eleanor tried to laugh.

“And you succeeded in not only humiliating Polly, but me also, because I am responsible for both of you, to a certain degree.”

“Humiliate Polly and you!” gasped Eleanor.

“Exactly what you did. I have been placed in command of this little family, and the first day at school, you deliberately thrust yourself forward—take my place, so to speak—and tell all the strangers there who Polly is, and who you and I are.

In fact, you give out information that should come only from me.”

“I’m sorry, but for goodness’ sake let’s drop it, now.”

“We’d better settle the matter once for all, Nolla, before we drop it. If Polly and you are to continue the wonderful friendship begun this Summer at the ranch, you must never again say, or do anything, that trespasses on her rights. Remember that each one of us has an individual right to impart what we like about our private affairs—be it family or fortune. But the moment another speaks for us, then it becomes gossip and scandal on the part of that impertinent one.

“I do not propose having my time and thoughts disturbed by any inharmony rising between you two girls, and if another occasion comes up, when Polly and you disagree as you have to-day, I’ll wire to your father to come and take you home. If Polly is to blame, then I’ll send her home. But, thus far, it is you who trespassed on Polly’s rights.

“If you’ll think this over quietly, and without prejudice, I’m sure you’ll agree that I am just and right in my stand.”

That evening, Eleanor apologised to Anne and Polly for her thoughtless impulse that day, and fervently prayed that she never be tempted to open her lips again.

It was not Polly’s nature to sulk or remember unpleasant episodes, so everything went along smoothly after that first day at school.

Tuesday evening Mr. Fabian called, and was welcomed to his erstwhile fireside. During that visit, it developed that he had accepted an offer which several of his friends had urged upon him. He was to teach, three times a week, a class in art designing at Cooper Union Institute. And before he said good-night to the ladies, it had been suggested and settled, that Polly and Eleanor were to join the evening classes on the three nights a week that their friend taught at the school.

Mrs. Stewart worried lest the girls would be wearing themselves out with too much study. But it was found that the work in the art classes under Mr. Fabian’s watchful eye, was a pleasure rather than a study or work.

Thus they started to build on a firm foundation, and by degrees they mastered the rudiments of geometrical drawing, then went on to ornamental designing, next taking up the study of architecture in so far as it applied to interior decorating, and at the end of the year they were drawing free hand and perspective sketches. But that was not until the school term was almost over.

By the end of the first week at Mrs. Wellington’s school, the girls had chosen

their friends for the term. It was most interesting to Anne to note that a certain social element looked up to Eleanor as their natural leader, while the quiet persistent sort silently fell in line with Polly. Both girls were admired and heartily liked, by teachers as well as scholars, but there was one disturbing young lady who resented the usurping of her former undisputed sway in the school by the two new-comers.

Elizabeth Dalken was the pretty, but vain daughter of a superficial society woman who thought of nothing but self-indulgence, leaving the training of her child to Fate. Hence, Elizabeth was the usual product: selfish, proud, arrogant and hypocritical. She was but fifteen, yet she could slyly cheat at bridge, smoke her mother's cigarettes, and flirt with the men who frequented her home, as cleverly as her mother could.

For two previous years she had taken the reins of leadership at Wellington's school and she had returned the third Fall fully expecting to resume her authority.

To learn that a western ranch-girl without a record in "Who's Who," and a mere *Chicago* Miss, governed her former subjects, turned Elizabeth white with rage. She could say nothing about it, however, without starting her school friends' teasing and laughing at her downfall. And she could not leave the school, because her mother had deserted her husband. He was the cashier for all the luxuries Mrs. Dalken and her daughter indulged themselves in, and he had selected Wellington's school for the girl, and had paid the tuition fee in advance, so it stood to reason that he would not consent to a change, now, on account of her jealousy.

So on that first Friday evening, upon leaving school, Elizabeth promised herself that she would "get square" with those "two nobodys" in short order! She would show those other girls at Mrs. Wellington's just who *she* was, and why they should have kept her as their leader!

But the western girls were not shamming their lovable characters, and as time went on, their companions appreciated, more and more, the sterling qualities in their chosen leaders. Thus Elizabeth found it no easy task to influence the girls against them.

October passed and November began, with the girls at Mrs. Wellington's planning for a Thanksgiving entertainment to close their school for the holiday. Here Polly was discounted, as she had never taken part in amateur theatricals, and knew nothing about them. Had anyone asked her to differentiate between the

Tuscan, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian or Composite order of classic periods of architecture, she could have described either, or all of them, almost as well as Mr. Fabian himself could do. But the scholars at Mrs. Wellington's never dreamed of Polly's ambition and knowledge along such lines of study.

So Elizabeth found herself the one to whom everyone appealed about costumes, parts, and the general management of affairs. Eleanor resented the obvious fact that *she* was completely ignored when the various important parts were distributed, but Polly never gave it a thought.

"We couldn't accept a part, anyway, Nolla, with all the time we have planned to give to exhibitions and lectures, this month," Polly reminded her.

"And your Daddy will be visiting New York that last week, Nolla, and you must devote your spare time to his entertainment—not be fussing with a lot of girls over a silly poem," added Anne.

Thus the sharp sting was withdrawn and Eleanor forgot all about her injured feelings. But Elizabeth Dalken believed she was merely pretending that she felt no grudge against the Director of the Play. And it gave Elizabeth great satisfaction to believe she had actually offended the two popular western girls.

During November afternoons, and on several evenings, Mr. Fabian took the three friends to the Metropolitan Museum where wonderful exhibits of private collections were given. Here every New Yorker was admitted free to see genuine antiques of furniture, paintings, tapestries and rugs, plate and ornaments. And with such a marvelous judge to escort them about and explain details that might have escaped other than his knowing eye, Anne and her two charges felt well repaid for their time. It proved not only instructive but very absorbing—these personal talks with Mr. Fabian about the rare and ancient articles.

Valuable volumes treating on subjects which most aspirants of art are acquainted with, began to fill the shelves in the rooms on the first floor of the stable-studio; and quite often, Mr. Fabian brought in a "treasure" he had picked up at a second-hand book shop. He would read aloud in a cultivated voice, such bits as he thought would interest young and ambitious girls. Then, after he had bid his hostesses good-night, he generally left the volume behind.

Perhaps the very fact that Polly and Eleanor seemed to be apart from the other school-girls and their pastimes, made them all the more desirable to court. Not but that the two western girls liked fun and frolic as much as anyone, but they seemed always to have engagements with people the school-girls had never met, nor heard of.

Now and then, Mrs. Wellington took her girls to a matinee, and then Polly and Eleanor laughed and enjoyed the play as heartily as the others. But while other school-girls were foolishly mincing up and down the Peacock Allies of the large hotels, and sipping tea in company with young men, the two girl chums were eagerly listening to a lecture given at one of the art buildings, or admiring a private collection only open to the public for a few afternoons.

A few days before Thanksgiving, Mr. Maynard arrived and then the routine of the girls' daily life suddenly changed.

Eleanor insisted upon her father taking her room while she went to Polly's chamber to sleep upon the day-bed there. Mr. Maynard wanted to remain at the hotel to save the girls any inconvenience, but the girls would not hear of his being away from Eleanor.

The school play was scheduled for the Tuesday evening before Thanksgiving Day. But all the ball-rooms and other auditoriums, had been engaged weeks before November, so Mrs. Wellington had to take what she could get, or postpone the date of the play. Elizabeth Dalken was determined to have it on the evening set, and so the poor lady started again, to seek for some available hall, with Elizabeth accompanying her. Finally they secured a small assembly hall near Central Park West, but it was far from being desirable for the girls.

The dirty walls had to be hidden beneath flags and bunting, and the tarnished gas chandeliers had to be covered with crepe paper. The crude stage was decorated with pine branches and palms, and in places where the doors or windows were located, (minus the doors,) the girls grouped palms and evergreens, so that the hall looked quite inviting before evening.

A bevy of happy girls superintended the decorations while butlers, grooms, and even the chauffeurs, did the hard work. Polly and Eleanor joined the merry group and instantly offered to work, but Elizabeth Dalken scorned their assistance.

"People who live in a *stable* can know nothing about decorating!" she said, insultingly.

Polly sent her a glance of pity, but Eleanor retorted: "Stable! Well, the richest and most respected banker of Chicago is visiting us in that stable! And he is my very own father, too! If you were out there, now, I'd hate to think of what we'd do to *you*!"

Elizabeth sneered and was about to reply, but Polly dragged her friend away, forcibly, and they were soon leaving the room.

Mrs. Wellington had been thoroughly enjoying her conversation with the pleasant banker from Chicago, and now she smilingly said: "I can readily see where Eleanor gets her common sense and pleasing manners."

Mr. Maynard laughed and watched the two girls hurry over to join him. A glance at his daughter's face, however, told him that something had gone wrong, but Mrs. Wellington hoped to check the complaint at that moment. She suddenly turned her head, seemed to hear someone call, and then spoke to Polly.

"Come with me, dears, I believe we are wanted in the dressing rooms."

Once out of ear-shot of Mr. Maynard, she whispered: "Oh, do not allow Eleanor to say one word to her father that will spoil everything. I will look into this matter myself after to-night. But so much depends on this play going smoothly, and how can it if some one causes an explosion?"

Polly felt sorry for poor Mrs. Wellington, for she really did have a hard life of it, trying to keep peace continually where so many girls were concerned. And she promised to try and calm Eleanor's fury and determination to oust Elizabeth Dalken from the Wellington School for Young Ladies.

CHAPTER VI—THE NIGHT OF THE PLAY

Of the sixty odd pupils in Mrs. Wellington's school, at least fifteen of them were to participate in the play. There was to be a Chorus of six girls, and a Ballet, besides the principals who also acted the drama to follow. Consequently the representative scholars not appearing on the stage, had been asked to act as ushers, and general supervisors of harmony.

Mr. Fabian and Mr. Maynard conducted Anne and her mother to the seats reserved for them, and soon the friends and families of the scholars filed in and took their seats. As the hall was generally used for other purposes, the floor was not graded, and the seats were not attached to the floor. They were ordinary wooden folding chairs to be piled up at the end of the performance.

The pianist and other music teachers from school formed the orchestra, and their opening number was rendered so well that an encore followed.

POLLY STAGGERED OUT OF THE DOOR CARRYING ELIZABETH ON
HER SHOULDER.

POLLY STAGGERED OUT OF THE DOOR CARRYING ELIZABETH ON HER SHOULDER.

Eleanor whispered comically to Polly, as they stood in the entrance door: "Maybe the friends hope to postpone the acting a little longer."

When the curtain was drawn aside and the first act of the playlet began, individuals in the audience became interested in watching their own girls in the troupe. The Chorus did very well, and the Ballet danced as gracefully as well-taught girls should, but once the actual acting began, there was a slight disappointment felt by the spectators.

The leading lady (the programme said it was Miss Elizabeth Dalken) was the whole show. She managed to keep in the lime-light even when she was not speaking, or acting a part. And so much of one actress, whether good or bad, was bound to pall on the audience.

"Polly, she's spoiling the whole play! I wonder the other girls stood for it at the rehearsals," whispered Eleanor.

"She didn't act that way, before, I'm sure. Marion King told me all about it. She's doing it now just to show off!"

"Not to her family! because not one of her folks are here. I heard her tell Estelle that her mother was going to a fashionable ball, and, of course, her father wouldn't come because he had no invitation from Elizabeth."

"Well," persisted Polly, feeling sorry for the girl, "she must have uncles or aunts or cousins, here."

"She hasn't any in New York. Her father comes from upstate and his folks lived there. No one knows who her mother was, so she hasn't a soul, here, but the chauffeur. He's downstairs having refreshments."

The second act ended and everyone sighed in relief because the play was foolish and so poorly acted, even for amateurs. Mrs. Wellington felt deeply hurt when she found how Elizabeth had chosen chums rather than actors for the principal parts in the play.

The third act began, in which Elizabeth was dressed in a spangled green ball-gown. It was very tight about the ankles and very low about the neck. It was too daring, even for a young girl acting a part. The gown had a long swishing tail at

the back that could have been graceful on a vampire, but not on this posing girl.

Mrs. Wellington shook her head disapprovingly at sight of Elizabeth, and wished, more than once, that she had taken more time to review the actors and their costumes, before they appeared in public.

The Assembly Hall building where the play was given, had four stories. The first floor was used for refreshments, with a kitchen at the back. The second was a billiard parlor for the use of private clubs. The third floor was given over to the Hall, and the fourth floor was turned into dressing-rooms, card-rooms, smoking-room, et cetera.

As no late arrivals were expected after the third act had opened the ushers, placed at the doors, closed them to shut out the talking and laughing in the billiard rooms. Then they sat down at either side of the door, to watch the play.

The third act was progressing slowly, when the ushers heard sounds of confusion coming from downstairs. But they merely exchanged glances and thought some men were quarreling over a game of billiards.

Soon afterward, a faint odor and a haze of smoke penetrated through the chinks of the doors, and Polly jumped up quickly to investigate. The moment she opened a door, however, a thick cloud of smoke poured in. She had to cough, but she remembered to instantly slam the door again.

The other girls saw the smoke and a panic might have followed, had not Anne immediately jumped upon the stage and shouted:

“Remember—do not lose your heads! That is the only danger. We can all get out safely if everyone will be calm and orderly.”

Mr. Maynard took Mrs. Stewart with one arm, and caught Eleanor in his other, then called to Mr. Fabian to do the same with Anne and Polly. But there was such a dense mob at the only exit doors, that it was impossible to force a way through there, and the heavy smoke was now rapidly filling the hall.

To add to the scene of fear and confusion, the women in the assembly cried, some screamed, the girls ran back and forth, and the men were venting their fears in calling upon Deity,—some scarcely audible, and others in shrill screams of excitement.

Outside, one could hear the mingled calls and shouts of onlookers, the clanging of bells on the engines, and the yells of the people who had escaped and wanted to help their friends out. There were four front windows of the hall where the school entertainment was being given, but these were now jammed with women

who sought that way to gain a breath of air, but were too timid to jump out to the street; and there were no fire-escapes to be found. The hallways and several doors opening to them, were a pitiful sight. The men, women, and children were crying, jostling, and stampeding each other in their vain efforts to get out and find the stairway in the dense smoke that kept pouring up from below.

Mr. Fabian saw the panic and realized that his friends must seek a rear exit, or remain until the tardy firemen brought the ladders up to the building to help them out. So he hurried to the door back of the stage. It had escaped the frightened eyes of others. Having learned that this door opened upon an entry that ran to a rear window, he next discovered the usual fire-escape that ran down to the yard, and up to the roof. It took him but a moment to assure himself that the escape was safe, then he rushed back.

“This way! Follow me—everyone!” he shouted to his friends.

They all hurried to the window and Mr. Fabian went first, in order to assist the ladies out to the iron-slatted platform, and then to start them, sure-footed, on the upward climb of the narrow iron steps.

Mrs. Stewart went first, but she was so nervous that Mr. Fabian followed closely behind her to steady her trembling form. Anne followed after her mother in climbing through the window, and Mr. Maynard followed her. The two girls were about to climb out on the platform when they heard a moan, and then a shrill cry, from the small dressing-room back of the stage.

Anne ordered the girls to come out, but Polly turned and ran back. Eleanor followed, and Anne, distracted, climbed back, too.

“Nolla, tie something over your mouth and nose—use your chiffon scarf,” commanded Polly, winding a wide silk sash about her own head.

The girls groped along the entry but could not distinguish a thing in the thick, choking haze. Then Polly came to the dressing-room back of the stage. This was comparatively clear from smoke, and there the girls saw Elizabeth Dalken stretched upon the floor, a cut in her forehead attesting to the cause of her sharp scream.

“Great Scott, Polly! What can we do now?” cried Eleanor, as the idea of trying to carry the girl up the steep ladder-way flashed across her mind only to be spurned. She had no idea of leaving her there to her fate, however.

“If we only had a rope!” wailed Polly.

“But we haven’t! If I only knew this house better I might find a back-stairway.

Most city houses have them and I should think this place would have one.”

“Of course! Nolla, close this door to keep out smoke. I’ll look for the stairs.”

The few excited sentences were muttered through the mufflers tied over the girls’ mouths and noses. Then both girls began groping their way to the rear, hunting for the back-stairs.

The mass of people that had surged from the Hall had made for the wide front stairs, and but few remembered to seek for a back exit. And these had speedily found a way down. Polly and Eleanor also found the narrow back stairs, then Polly hastily commanded:

“Run and tell Anne—she can call to your Dad and explain. Then tell her to come this way, with us. I’ll lift Elizabeth over my shoulders and start down with her—Anne and you follow, at once!”

In another moment, Polly was back in the dressing-room while Eleanor was running for the rear window to advise Anne. But she found her already inside tying a veil over her mouth and nose.

“Nolla—where’s Polly?”

“All right—come on!”

“I told your father—they are safe on the roof—hurry now!”

Eleanor led Anne through the smoke, and just as they reached the entry, Polly staggered out of the stage-door with the unconscious girl hanging over her shoulder.

“Polly! Polly! You never can carry her!” cried Anne, in a smothered voice through the veiling.

But Polly kept her mouth closed and struggled on to the back stairs. Anne began to cough and choke as a reward for trying to speak, but she reached the stairs first and rushed on down to see if there was a safe passage below. Eleanor was close upon her heels, and Polly followed more circumspectly.

They reached the kitchen of the house without trouble but the heat as they passed by the second floor was terrific. Once down on the ground floor they found the rear of the place quite free from smoke, but it might only be because the fire overhead was blazing upward. At any moment the wall or upper floors might crash down and fall upon them.

“Nolla—how can we get out of this pen?” cried Anne.

“If the house is anything like Chicago’s, I’ll show you. There must be an area or cellar exit to the street.”

The kitchen light was still burning but it looked weird in the smoke-laden atmosphere. Eleanor tried different doors but found that they opened into passages leading to closets or to the front rooms. Finally she opened one and caught a whiff of fresh uncontaminated air.

“Thank heavens! Here it is, but I don’t know where it ends.”

Anne and she pushed out, with Polly behind them. They were in a dark alley, now, and had to trust to good fortune to come out somewhere, in safety. Down several stone steps, and along another dark, damp area they went, and then Eleanor stumbled against a closed door.

“Oh, mercy! Are we locked in here?” she yelled desperately, beating the door with her clenched fists.

“Nolla—let me feel for a handle—you are hysterical!” cried Anne, swiftly passing her hands over the rough wood.

“Hurry, hurry! I can’t carry this weight a minute longer!” breathed Polly, hoarsely.

Just at that moment, Anne’s hand struck an iron bolt. In a second she had shot it backwards, and the heavy door swung open to give them an exit to the side street.

All three girls ran frantically forward and Polly dropped her heavy burden upon a grass strip which edged the curb. Eleanor sobbed with relief and Anne fell upon her knees in silent thanksgiving.

“I’m off, girls, to see if I can help, in front. Have a care for Elizabeth,” cried Polly, and away she flew.

That silenced Eleanor’s hysteria quicker than anything else, and in another moment she was gone after her friend, leaving Anne to watch the still unconscious girl on the grass.

The scene in front of the building was one of spectacular interest. Seeing the crowds of fashionably-dressed people grouped opposite the flaring house, it would seem that everyone of the guests had escaped. But there was a deafening mixture of cries and shouts from every direction. Some were crying for lost friends, some wailed for help because of injuries inflicted by the stampede; firemen signaled their associates; the old proprietor of the Hall ran madly to and

fro shouting and gesticulating wildly to everyone; in fact, it was a scene that shocked Polly to witness because she thought city people had great presence of mind.

Streams of water were pouring upon the flames that shot from the second-story windows, but the scaling ladders had not yet arrived, and the firemen were striving to enter the front door in order to carry the hose nozzle to a more effectual spot.

The Chief had sent some men through adjacent houses to reach the roofs and work downwards from that vantage spot. But they had not yet appeared when Polly saw how she could assist.

Acting upon an impulse, and doing exactly as she would do if she was witnessing a fire at Oak Creek, where the ranchers turn out and try to subdue the flames, Polly hastily dropped the clinging skirt of her evening dress. Having already removed the silk sash while in the Hall, she now dipped it in the flood of water that poured from the hydrant on the curb and tied it over her mouth and nose. Then she made a dash across the street.

She caught a coil of rope from the hook where it hung on the back of the engine, and pushed a way through the staring men. Before anyone dreamed of her plan, or the firemen could restrain her she had reached the corner of the building and was agilely climbing the height by holding to the copper leader.

A chorus of breathless gasps and frightened screams came from the crowd but Polly heard them not. She was too intent on her work. Being nimble and so lightweight, and thoroughly accustomed to climb up almost perpendicular cliffs, or along dizzy peaks, this ascent seemed like play to the mountain girl. But the onlookers were thrilled to silence as they watched her climb to the roof, and then safely crawl over the ledge. Instantly there was such a wild cheer from the street, that Polly wondered if something dreadful had happened. She never thought that the acclamation was meant for her.

Without hesitation, she ran over to a nearby chimney and wound one end of the long rope about it, then lowered the other end to the street. The Chief saw the purpose, at once, and signaling back to the girl who was leaning over the edge of the roof, he had his men tie the rope ladder to the rope. Then Polly began hoisting it slowly, until its end came over the cornice.

Meantime, when Eleanor found her friend halfway up the building, clinging to the leader and finding foothold in the crevices between the bricks, or on the steel bands that held the metal pipe to its moorings, she also ran across the street, and

attempted to break through the cordon which had been formed to permit the men to hold out a life-net in case the daring climber should fall.

“I want to help Polly—she is my best friend!” cried Eleanor, when the fireman made her turn back.

Then she remembered the rear entrance from which they had escaped. She turned to the Chief and called hurriedly: “Send some men with me—I’ll show them the cellar entrance where they can reach the roof and different floors from the back!”

“Hallam! Colter! Take your equipment and follow this girl to a back door. You know what to do!”

The men detailed for this duty, beckoned a few others, and all ran after Eleanor who now made for the rear door. She flew past Anne who was holding Elizabeth’s head upon her lap, but forgot to glance that way. Having gained the cellar door, she was about to go in but Hallam stopped her.

“No, Miss—we dare not permit anyone to enter a burning building, you know.”

“Oh, but I want to join Polly on the roof! The only reason I showed you this way was to get through myself!”

“I’d lose my place in the contest for prize medals, Miss, if I broke rules. You wouldn’t want me to lose my promotion?”

Eleanor felt that he had the best of the argument, so she very reluctantly turned and went back to the front of the house. There she saw that the firemen had climbed the ladder and were stationed on the roof and on window ledges, holding the hose from which the water poured in torrents upon the fire inside.

Then the multitude now gathered on both streets and the corners of the Parkway, were treated to another thrill. The strand of rope Polly had taken with her, was now used by her for descent. Down the taut rope like a trained monkey, came she, and safely jumped to the street.

Before she reached the ground however, a chorus of wild yells and hurrahs went forth from everyone in the crowd. The Chief called imperative orders to his men waiting with him, and the moment he had caught Polly, he forced his way across the street, carrying her in his arms as if she were a babe.

His men began climbing the rope ladder taking a hose with them. From the vantage-points gained by Polly’s courage, the firemen now kept steady streams of water playing through the open windows upon the fire beneath, and thus

managed to subdue it before the hook-and-ladder truck wheeled up beside the building.

The men, led by Eleanor to the back-stairs, directed their efforts from that side, and soon the whole second and third floors became a bed of wet smoldering embers. The rest of the structure was saved.

It was learned, later, that the club members giving the “smoker” to friends, had been careless of butts and papers, and thus the fire must have originated.

The family living in the beautiful house opposite the fire, took Polly in charge, and kept away the mob of curious people who wished to see and talk with the heroine.

Polly was all right, and wondered why she should be kept indoors when others on the outside might need assistance. Suddenly she remembered her discarded skirt!

“Oh, mercy me! Did I climb up that pipe looking like this?” she cried, blushing furiously and burying her face in the cushions of the divan.

“My dear child! It was a wonderful sight! No one gave the slightest thought to your bloomers. But now you shall have one of Ruth’s skirts,” returned the lady of the house, fervently.

CHAPTER VII—MRS. WELLINGTON'S THANKSGIVING

The moment Polly was given a skirt, she donned it gratefully and said to Mrs. Ashby, her hostess: "Now I must find Elizabeth and have her cared for. I left her with Anne."

"Where—where is she? I'll send James for them. But I want you to keep quiet, or you'll be prostrated, dear child."

Polly smiled—she prostrated! But she explained: "Anne is sitting on the grass on the side street around the corner, taking care of the girl who fainted in the back-room of the theatre."

James was summoned from the front window where he had been watching the fight against the fire, and now took his orders eagerly. Polly pointed out the corner where she had left her friends and, in another moment, the butler was gone.

"I s'pose I ought to go and hunt up my friends who escaped over the roofs," ventured Polly.

"You'll rest here upon this divan, or your parents will sue me!" retorted Mrs. Ashby, trying to compel, with gentle hands, obedience to her command.

Polly laughed softly. "My parents would sue you if you prevented me from doing my duty to others. Why, you-all make such a fuss over that pipe-climbing, and it is next to nothing for a Rocky Mountain girl. A day in a blizzard on the cliffs is ten times more hazardous."

Mrs. Ashby was consumed with curiosity to ask this handsome girl who she was, and all about herself, but she controlled herself admirably, for she knew her guest ought to keep quiet.

The door-bell rang and its echo pealed through the house, but the servants were out watching the exciting events of the fire, and James had been sent for the other girls. So Mrs. Ashby opened the door.

"I just heard that Polly Brewster was here—oh! is she all right!" cried the

excited voice of Mrs. Wellington.

“Right as a trivet, dear Mrs. Wellington!” called Polly springing from the couch to greet the lady.

“Oh—oh! Thank God! I’ve worried and cried over you three precious girls until my eyes are blinded! They told me that everyone was out of the place but you three!”

“Did everyone manage to escape safely?” asked Polly, anxiously.

“Everyone got out, but oh! such a panic! Some are torn, and battered black and blue, from the stampede down through those front stairs and hall. I don’t believe a single soul got out with a whole gown! They tell me it was all the fault of that ‘Pool Club’ on the second floor; they gave a ‘smoker’ to-night, and when the fire was discovered on their floor, they caused the dreadful block in the front halls.”

“Gowns are of no account if everyone escaped with life,” said Mrs. Ashby.

“But it is most unfortunate for me, just now. The story getting into the newspapers, will ruin my reputation as a school principal. Folks will ask, ‘Why did she ever choose such a place for an entertainment;’ but they will never know that I tried everywhere else, first, and found everything engaged for this week. I begged the girl who started the idea to postpone the play until the week after Thanksgiving holiday, but she stubbornly refused. So I took what I could get. I dare not tell the reporters that it was merely to *please* Elizabeth Dalken, and because Elizabeth’s father pays strictly in advance and has his daughter take all ‘extras.’

“You have no idea what it means to me. I am paying off the mortgages on that house where the school is located, so that I might be able to take a deep breath before I am too old to work. But this unhappy accident will ruin my reputation as a careful superintendent.”

“Elizabeth Dalken! I know her father very well, and we think he is one of the finest of men. We seldom meet Mrs. Dalken or the daughter, as we do not belong to the same set. Since Mr. Dalken separated from his wife, we have not seen her at all, but he was here and dined with us, this very evening,” said Mrs. Ashby.

“If I could only explain to him just how this happened, he might not blame me for his daughter’s injury.”

“Was she hurt?” exclaimed Mrs. Ashby. Then James came in, followed by three girls, and the adults who had escaped over the roofs.

“Here we are, Polly—safe and sound,” Mr. Maynard’s cheery voice greeted the girl who jumped up at sight of them.

Excited cries, and hugs, and happy laughs now followed as each one found the others without a hurt, Elizabeth Dalken being the only one who had received an injury, and that was merely a flesh-wound cut by the edge of the door as her head struck it.

Mrs. Ashby took charge of Elizabeth, and washed her face; then placed a strip of court plaster over the cut to keep it clean.

The fire was out and the crowd had dispersed before the firemen finished their work in and about the house. The Chief came to Mrs. Ashby’s door and asked for the young lady who was such a marvellous climber. So he was invited in to see for himself.

“Young lady, I want to make a record of this deed, as I have to report everything to the police department, you know. And I am proud to say, our records are never kept in the dark when visitors come in to see our engine house. It’s seldom we can talk about, or show a page, with such a brave act as yours, written upon it.”

Polly smiled. “But it really wasn’t anything to fuss over. It wasn’t dangerous, you know, and for anyone who can climb as well as I can, it would have been cowardly to stand by and *not* act. You needed a light, agile climber whose weight would not break that leader away from the wall; and I happened to be that one.”

The Chief and Mrs. Ashby exchanged glances, then laughed. “I guess it’s no use trying to make a heroine of her—she won’t have it so!” said he.

Then Eleanor spoke up. “That’s because she’s accustomed to doing such great deeds out in the mountains where she comes from—walking on the heads of rattle-snakes, killing grizzlies and lions as if they were rabbits, saving a lot of tenderfeet from blizzards and landslides—these are but a few of the *little* things she does out there!”

The New Yorkers gasped in astonishment; even James, the butler, stood gaping with open mouth at a real live heroine—never seen before by him except on the movie screen. So intensely interested was he, that he failed to hear his master enter by the front door, followed by a gentleman. They both burst into the room and stood amazed.

Then Mr. Ashby apologised for the abrupt entrance: “Dalken and I were at the Club when we heard of the fire so near my place. And when Dalken heard that it was Mrs. Wellington’s school-girls who were entertaining on the third floor, he

came with me to see if his daughter is safe. Does anyone know where Elizabeth is?"

"Here—right here, Mr. Dalken," Mrs. Ashby quickly assured the father. And she beckoned Mrs. Wellington to bring the girl from the alcove where she had been resting.

"My poor little girl!" quavered the father, taking the meek and broken-spirited Elizabeth in his arms. "Are you badly hurt?"

She began to cry softly against his coat collar but Mrs. Ashby reassured Mr. Dalken. "Only a scratch. Her forehead may swell a bit and be discolored for a few days, but that is all. Elizabeth owes her life to these two girls here, Mr. Dalken. One carried her out of the building after she had fainted, and the other went first and found a way down the back stairs."

"Not really!" the amazed man gasped. "Tell me about it."

But Polly was a poor narrator, so Anne decided to speak. She was bound that Polly should not belittle this deed as she had the climbing to the fourth floor of the burning building.

That Mr. Dalken was deeply moved, everyone could see, and when he shook hands with the two girls he said gravely, "I shall never forget how you kept me from being childless. My baby boy died three years ago to-night, and I could not have stood losing my little girl, too, on the anniversary of that sad experience."

Elizabeth then remembered the date and hiding her face, ran back to the alcove to cry softly to herself. Mrs. Ashby and Mrs. Wellington knew the sad story, so they allowed her to weep alone. But Mr. Dalken, tender-hearted, would have gone to comfort the girl, had not Mrs. Ashby placed a detaining hand upon his arm and said: "No, dear friend—better leave her to remember and realize everything."

Polly and Eleanor saw and heard and could not understand, but they thought it was no concern of theirs, so they forgot it.

Everyone had been introduced informally to everyone else, and at last Mrs. Ashby said: "I have had a bit of refreshment served for you, in the dining room, before you go home. After such exposures and excitement, I think we all will need something."

Mr. Fabian wished to excuse himself, but his friends would not hear of it. Then Mr. Dalken came over and spoke to him. "Are you Mr. Fabian, the artist?"

“They say I am an artist, but I doubt it, myself,” replied Mr. Fabian, humbly, but smiling at the questioner.

“Then I am delighted to have met you, for I have a niece studying in Paris, and she writes me pages upon pages about Mrs. Fabian and the daughter Nancy, and how lovely they have been to take her about with them.”

His wife and daughter were Mr. Fabian’s pet subject so now he seemed to expand marvellously, and smiled benignly upon everyone present. On the way to the dining-room, Mr. Dalken and the artist exchanged heart-to-heart ideas and were soon fast friends.

But scarcely had they seated themselves ere another mad peal of the door-bell took James from the pleasant task of serving an impromptu supper. He was heard arguing with someone in the hall, then Mrs. Ashby turned to her husband and said: “You go and see what is the matter.”

After a short time, three re-entered the room—James, Mr. Ashby, and an ambitious-looking young man with alert bright eyes.

“Representative from the Press wants us to give him all the inside news about the fire,” explained Mr. Ashby, looking at the circle about the table.

Mrs. Wellington turned pale and gazed beseechingly at Mr. Maynard, hoping he could help her out in the inevitable story that would be written up about her school. But Mr. Dalken saw the look and comprehended immediately.

“Hello, Dunlap! How’d you get this assignment from the night-editor?”

“Oh—it’s Mr. Dalken. I’m delighted to see you, sir,” returned the reporter, very respectfully.

“Yes, these are friends of mine. Some of them are the dearest friends I have, so I do not wish them to be annoyed by finding a garbled story in the papers tomorrow morning. Consequently, I will, with the assistance of these friends, give you the facts, simple and straightforward, but see that you add nothing to them nor delete a line. Tell your boss that I said so!”

“I sure will, Mr. Dalken, and maybe I won’t be the thankful guy if you tell me the story! Can I say it came from you?” was the eager reply of the man Dunlap.

“No, sir! I am not in this at all, except as one who rushed here to help friends. Now this is the story for your paper.”

Mrs. Wellington had been anxiously whispering to Mr. Fabian, and the latter now secured Mr. Dalken’s attention. “May I have a word with you, in private,

before the reporter takes down any notes?”

Out of hearing of the others, Mr. Fabian then explained that Elizabeth had stubbornly refused to postpone the entertainment, and because of her insistence, Mrs. Wellington had taken whatever hall she could find. But she did not want Elizabeth to be made to bear any of the blame, so she wants you to touch wisely on anything that has to do with the theatricals.

“I certainly appreciate Mrs. Wellington’s thoughtfulness and I will remember this. I’ll see what can be done with Dunlap.”

“Mr. Dalken is a born story-teller, Dunlap, and that is why he is so popular, I think,” remarked Mr. Ashby, just then.

“Sit down there by Fabian, Dunlap, and join our circle,” cordially invited the story-teller, after he had frowned threateningly at his host.

“Give Dunlap some coffee and don’t let him jot down a word until I’ve done talking. Then we will pick out the notes he is to have,” added Mr. Dalken.

“Oh, you can tell it so well, do let me write as you narrate?” begged the reporter.

“No, sir! I can’t read short-hand and you may get in a word I don’t want you to take. Here, James, remove the pencil and pad from that young man.”

Everyone laughed, and Dunlap meekly surrendered the articles mentioned. Directly Mr. Dalken began his story, the wily reporter had another pencil and pad before him. But Fabian stealthily took possession of these also, and the laugh went against the young man that time.

While Mr. Dalken wove a veritable thriller out of the material provided by the fire, Mrs. Wellington wondered how it was possible to present the facts so well and at the same time prove, beyond doubt, that the young ladies of Mrs. Wellington’s school were so perfectly trained and educated that they were a great factor in saving lives and property that night. At the end of the story, Mr. Dalken said that some bright investor might find a handsome revenue in building a fire-proof Hall where just such entertainments could be given—high-school girls who loved to give parties but could not lease one of the hotel ball-rooms, weeks in advance and pay exorbitant prices, and then possibly change their plans before the event.

“You can make a separate paragraph of what I said, if you like, and preface it with the remark: ‘When asked what he thought about the fire, Mr. Dalken, who viewed the blaze from a house opposite the scene, said’: you know the rest,” the famous financier saw that the reporter comprehended, and then he turned to the

others seated about the table.

“Anything to add to my story?”

“It was very fine, especially about our dear Principal, but you didn’t say enough about Polly carrying Elizabeth safely out,” Eleanor said, eagerly.

“I followed a lead given me by Mr. Fabian. We all think it best not to mention names, but to make the incident impersonal,” explained Mr. Dalken.

Eleanor pouted, for she wanted to have Polly given all the credit for what she did. But a sly look from the reporter gave her an idea, and she smiled back understandingly.

Then the story was pieced out for Dunlap and when he had taken down all his notes, he jumped up and said: “I know you will excuse me for rushing away, but I want to get this in type at once. In case you have forgotten something, or wish to send me a photograph of anyone, call 10000 Greeley and I’ll see to it, without fail.”

“That’s all you’ll get on this occasion,” laughed Mr. Dalken as James started to show the young man to the door. But in passing Eleanor, Dunlap sent her a mental telegram, and she closed one eye significantly.

“Oh—he left his pencils and paper!” exclaimed Eleanor, jumping up instantly and running with them to the front door.

“Mr. Dunlap—here is your private property that Mr. Fabian had charge of,” was what the guests in the dining-room heard. But to Dunlap she hurriedly whispered: “I’ll ’phone you after I leave here.”

Before the party broke up that night, Mrs. Ashby learned that Mrs. Maynard was an old schoolmate of hers, and expressed a wish that Polly and Eleanor would visit her again and meet Ruth who was then visiting friends for Thanksgiving week.

“I really cannot voice my gratitude to all these kind friends,” said Mrs. Wellington, as they stood in the reception hall saying good-night. “Not only has dear Mr. Dalken turned harsh public condemnation from my doors, but the story as he told it, actually brings glory to the school.”

“And why should it not, my dear Madam? Have you not fought and struggled with every girl in your charge, to perfect and express just the qualities I have given you credit for?” said Mr. Dalken.

“Oh, yes, *I* have tried so hard, but how many people, or even parents, would

credit me with such endeavors? Once they read it in the papers they will accept the statement, but it is so hard to impress folks by actual demonstration,” sighed the thankful lady.

“Thank heavens, Mrs. Wellington, that you have a whole day of peace before you, in which to remember that you have found a group of people, here, who not only appreciate your efforts but have tried to make others approve them,” said Mrs. Ashby, earnestly.

“Indeed I have! I expect to have the very best of Thanksgivings, due to all of you dear people. Some day I will be able to show my gratitude for this.” And the lady’s voice quavered with emotion.

“And you’ll find the story in the papers will not only spare you any criticism, but actually praise your school,” added Mr. Ashby.

“You may be overwhelmed with new scholars,” suggested Polly, innocently.

“That’s so! I’ve always heard that discreet publicity is the finest kind of advertising,” Eleanor declared. “This fine tale about your scholars ought to bring back fifty percent returns.”

Everyone laughed heartily at hearing so young a girl talk so business-like, and Mr. Dalken said: “I am interested to know just where you got that information?”

“Isn’t it true?” demanded Eleanor, turning her bright eyes on him. “You see, Polly and I are going into business together, pretty soon, and I have to take notice of all approved methods of winning success. I am to be the business manager while Polly is the decorator.”

The new acquaintances were highly amused at such talk, and Mr. Ashby laughingly inquired: “What profession have you chosen?”

“Interior decorators. We have started, already; we go to Cooper Union three nights a week and Mr. Fabian takes us to all the lectures and exhibitions on any subject that will give us ideas and help.”

“Well!” exclaimed Mr. Dalken, finding the girls were really serious. Mrs. Ashby was deeply interested, but her husband took each of the prospective decorators by the hand and shaking them cordially, said: “Let us congratulate each other, for I am already established as a decorator. I want to help you onward in every possible way, my dear girls, so call on me whenever you want help. Just as Fabian takes you to these valuable exhibitions and lectures, so the four of us pulling together ought to arrive somewhere.”

Mr. Fabian was as pleased at the news as either of his protégées, and they left the Ashbys feeling very much at peace with the world and everything in it.

As Eleanor ran down the shallow brown-stone steps to the sidewalk, she turned back and called to Mr. Ashby: “Who knows! We may end by going into partnership with you, some day!”

He laughed, and said: “Who knows?”

CHAPTER VIII—A WEEK OF PLEASURE

As Mr. Maynard occupied Eleanor's room at the Studio, and she used the couch moved into Polly's room for the time being, it seemed difficult for Eleanor to follow her desire to communicate with Dunlap, the reporter, as soon as she got home.

Everyone was dog-tired from the excitement and the visit at the Ashbys afterward, so there was no time lost before tumbling into bed. Eleanor found it very hard to keep her eyes open until she could hear Polly sleeping heavily. Then she crept from the bed.

Downstairs was the print of a photograph taken a few weeks before, of a group of Mrs. Wellington's scholars. Polly and herself were in this group, and Eleanor planned to get it into the reporter's hands for reproduction to print a picture of Polly in the morning's paper.

She found the photograph without noise or trouble and then sat down before the telephone stand in the corner of the living room. "I hope to goodness no one upstairs will hear me talk," thought Eleanor to herself, as she gave the number to Central.

"Hello—is this 10000 Greeley?"

"Give me Mr. Dunlap, please.

"The lady who said she would call him about the fire.

"No, you won't do! I want Dunlap!

"He isn't in? I don't believe you! Get off the wire!

"Hello—hello! H-e-l-lo! I want editor's desk—10000 Greeley, and be quick about it!" snapped Eleanor, feeling quite irritable because of the loss of sleep, and the strange reporter's laugh at her.

"Is this the night-editor?" now asked Eleanor, eagerly.

"U—um! May I speak to Mr. Dunlap—the reporter you assigned on the fire

story uptown, to-night?

“Oh—he isn’t in? Well, but he said he would wait to take some important notes from me. I can’t believe he is out.

“Well, then, you may be the night-editor, but you sound exactly like that fresh reporter who spoke to me a moment ago. I cannot understand why you employ such rude youths as he is.”

Eleanor grinned to herself for she was quite sure she was speaking to the same reporter who answered the call, at first. An answering laugh convinced her she was right, and she hissed through the telephone: “If you knew who I was, you wouldn’t keep me sitting in the cold like this. Now you can either call Dunlap or I’ll give my story to your enemy downtown. The reporters of that paper are just dying to get my story.”

That proved miraculous. To prevent the downtown competitor from getting the story, the unknown was willing to turn it over to his opponent, Dunlap.

Eleanor recognised Dunlap’s voice the moment he took the ’phone, and she gave him some interesting personal facts about Polly and herself, and why they were now studying in New York. She talked for half-an-hour, praising Polly and her wonderful character, and finally began telling about the escape from Grizzly Peak at the time of the landslide. But Dunlap interrupted her with:

“I can’t get all of that in—we go to press very shortly.”

“Oh, dear! Can’t you run over here and get this photo of Polly, that I have ready for you?”

“For the morning edition?” gasped Dunlap.

“Yes, to accompany the story of the fire.”

“My dear young lady—do you know how long it takes to make a plate for the paper?”

“A plate? I said ‘a photograph,’ Mr. Dunlap.”

“But we have to make a reproduction of yours, then print it on a plate, then give it an acid bath, then etch and rout, and mount—and it all takes time before the plate is ready to be stereotyped for the printing in the paper.”

“Oh! I thought you just took the picture and copied it in the paper. Of course, I never stopped to inquire into what process it went through. But if you say you can’t use it, I’m sorry.”

“So’m I. But you might bring it in early in the morning and I’ll see if there is enough interest in the story to rake up an evening’s yarn.”

“Very well. I’ll do that.”

“Come in, anyway, and bring your friends. I’ll show you through the engraving plant of the paper. You’ll be interested.”

“Thank you—good-by.”

Eleanor hung up the receiver and listened intently to hear if anyone was stirring upstairs. All was quiet, so she placed the photograph back on the shelf and crept upstairs again. She jumped into bed shivering, after being exposed so long to the cold, downstairs. But utter weariness soon brought her sleep and all was forgotten until breakfast time.

Mr. Maynard, speaking, woke Eleanor. She sat up and rubbed her eyes sleepily. “Thank goodness, we do not have to go to school for a whole week!” declared she, throwing a shoe at Polly’s half-buried head.

“Polly! Pol-le—ee! Wake up!”

“Wha-foh?” grunted Polly, half-dazed.

Then both girls heard Mr. Maynard call: “I’ll be right back to breakfast, Mrs. Stewart—I’m going to the corner for the papers.”

Eleanor suddenly remembered her share in the telling of the story about the fire, and she jumped out of bed. “I’m going to hurry down and read what the paper says about the fire,” said she.

Polly turned over and stretched lazily. “I don’t care what they say. I’m going to sleep all day.”

Eleanor was annoyed. “No, you won’t! We’ve got to keep a date with Mr. Fabian this noon, and you’ve *got to* get up!”

“Oh, that’s so! Mr. Fabian is going to take us to Grand Central Palace to show us how carpets are made. I forgot that exhibition was to-day.” And Polly jumped up at that remembrance when other things had failed to move her.

The girls were downstairs in time to open the front door for Mr. Maynard. He was grinning teasingly, as he tried to keep a great mass of morning papers from slipping out from under his arm. He held out an opened sheet for the girls to see.

“Oh, what a horrid face! Who is it?” exclaimed Eleanor.

“The paper states it is you, my dear,” laughed her father.

“What—never! Oh, what awful people these newspaper men are! Dad, can’t you go down there and horse-whip them? I never looked like that in all my life!” and Eleanor stamped her foot in a fury.

Polly had been gazing at the two faces printed on the front sheet of the morning paper, but now she laughed. “Oh, if I looked like that picture, I could have put out the fire by merely turning my face to it!”

Anne and her mother came in when they heard Mr. Maynard’s loud laughter. They, too, stared at the oval-framed pictures said to be “The two heroines of the dreadful fire at Assembly Hall.”

“Anne, where under the sun did the newspapers get those two pictures?” asked Polly, tittering every time she saw the ovals.

“Every newspaper has a department known as the ‘morgue,’ or some such name. They keep, filed away, pictures of every well-known person in the world. In the package indexed under the proper name, are one or two ‘cuts’ ready to use in case of a hurry. Then when a person dies, or is married, or something or other happens, the newspaper rushes to its files and gets out the picture, or cut, needed.

“It is the same with famous buildings, or ships, or objects of any kind. If something comes up that brings the thing to the public attention, there the papers have the pictures all ready to print.

“Now they keep lots of photographs, just like these two, which they buy from cheap photographers. They buy a hundred in a job lot, and if they want a picture and can’t secure a legitimate one, or a snap-shot from the reporter’s kodak, they use what they have on hand.

“It would be extremely amusing to be present when these girls see their faces in the paper. It will prove almost as funny as seeing you two girls scorning these strange faces.”

But Mr. Maynard had been reading the article while Anne had explained the methods of many newspapers, and now he exclaimed: “By jove! Dalken never said a word about all this life-history!”

“What’s that, Daddy? Read it to us,” begged Eleanor, eagerly.

“Why—wh-y-y—the young rascal hit it right on the head, all right! But where did he get it?” continued Mr. Maynard.

“For pity’s sake—read it aloud!” commanded Eleanor, hardly able to hold her tongue about the story.

Then Mr. Maynard read it, and it lost none of its vivid coloring by his reading, either. When he had almost concluded, Polly began to grow angry. When he finished, she was furious.

“I’m going up to that office and I’ll fight that reporter. He had no more right to print that than those other men had to use someone else’s photographs and call them ours. So there!”

Mr. Maynard had been thinking seriously, and now he nailed Eleanor with a penetrating look. “Nolla, did you tell that young rascal this story when you ran to the door with his pencil and paper last night?”

“No, indeed! I did not, Daddy! You can ask the butler if I ever did! He stood right there when I handed Dunlap the pencil!”

Eleanor’s denial was so emphatic that everyone believed she was innocent of any such plot; so they never found out who was the guilty one.

While at breakfast, the telephone rang. “This is Mr. Latimer, Anne. We have just read the papers and were so surprised! When we saw the pictures of the two heroines, we feared some dreadful thing had happened to distort their faces so that we failed to recognise them, and I hastened to inquire. Do you need Dr. Evans’ services to straighten out those faces?”

An amused laugh could be heard over the wire, and Anne laughed back. “No, thanks; a good night’s rest has brought back their natural looks. The faces in the paper must have been taken by the flickering flame of the burning dwelling.”

“Jim and Ken came home late last night for the Holiday. We wanted to congratulate you girls on trying so hard for the Carnegie Medal, but now Jim wants to say ‘good-morning.’”

In another moment, Jim’s voice was heard speaking. “Oh, good-morning, Anne. Have you used Pears Soap?” Then a gay laugh.

“We have, but you haven’t! Your father just told me you got in at midnight, and if you’re up as early as this, I’m sure the sleep hasn’t been washed from your eyes,” retorted Anne.

Polly and Eleanor crowded close and hung over the ’phone so they could hear what Jim had to say.

“I only wanted to say, I’ve got tickets for the show, to-night, and the girls are not to go anywhere else.”

“Oh, tell him we’re out of town on a week-end party,” Eleanor whispered,

hurriedly to Anne.

“Are the tickets good for Eleanor’s father and my mother, in case the girls go out of town?” teased Anne.

“Say—you really don’t mean that?” Jim’s voice sounded very sad.

“I cannot tell a lie—I am like George, you see, and I’ll let the girls fib for themselves,” laughed Anne, getting up from the stool and handing the instrument to Polly.

“Oh, here, Nolla! You do it! You know I don’t like this jiggery quivery thing!” cried Polly, quickly placing the telephone apparatus on the table and making room for Eleanor on the chair.

Eleanor was delighted to talk with Jim, and she kept at it until a clicking in her ear notified her that someone wanted to get them on the wire, so she hurriedly rang Jim off.

“Hello!” called Eleanor to the next inquirer.

“Hello—1234 Madison Square?”

“Yes.”

“This is Mr. Ashby speaking. Is this one of the heroines?”

“Oh, Mr. Ashby! Yes, it is Nolla. What do you think of the story in the paper—and the funny photographs?” laughed Eleanor.

“I laughed myself sick over it at breakfast. My wife and I wondered how that young rascal got them, and James explained.”

Here Eleanor turned white, for she wondered if the butler really had seen her wink at Dunlap. “My, but I’m thankful I got at this wire instead of Anne,” said she to herself.

“Two of our maids had their postal-card pictures taken the other day, and upon rushing out of the front door to watch the fire last night, they laid them upon the hall table. James saw them there, later, but thinking the girls would soon be coming in to take them upstairs, he did nothing about it.

“Then in the excitement of watching Miss Polly climb the front of the house, and have the Chief carry her over to our house, the pictures were completely forgotten. As the young reporter went out, James saw Miss Eleanor take his hat from the stand and hand it to him. But nothing was thought about the cards. Later, however, they were gone.

“This morning the papers have the photographs of Mary, the waitress, and Gladys, the upstairs girl, as heroines of the fire. Maybe our maids are not tickled to pieces to find themselves so famous.”

Eleanor heard both Mr. and Mrs. Ashby laughing merrily over the mistake, and then she said: “Do you suppose I handed the cards to Dunlap when I picked up his papers and hat?”

“Undoubtedly. But the joke is, he thinks you meant to do it very secretly, you see, so he never mentioned it but hurried the work on the pictures so as to have them in the morning’s paper. He most likely believes that that was why you ran after him—to manage to give him those two photographs to use. I think the laugh is entirely on him, don’t you, Eleanor?”

But Eleanor did not say. She sat and studied the pattern in the rug for a time, refusing to answer all the questions asked. Then she decided that Mr. Ashby must have heard from Dunlap that morning, and was told how she had added many facts to Mr. Dalke’s story. But this funny error of using the maid’s photographs, was retribution on her head.

The young people, with Anne to chaperone them, enjoyed the play that night, and then the boys outlined the programme they had made for the week.

The next day, being Thanksgiving, the entire party was to dine at the Latimers’. Then they would go for an automobile drive, and in the evening all would enjoy an impromptu supper and dance at the Evans’.

Friday morning the boys would take the girls skating at St. Nicholas Rink. They begged to attend Mr. Fabian and the girls in the afternoon at the Textile Exhibition, then dinner at the Studio, and another play at night.

Saturday morning the girls were going to visit Mr. Ashby’s famous decorating establishment, and get a glimpse first-hand of what a modern decorator must do and know to succeed. In the afternoon the boys wanted to take in a matinee, but the girls were invited to dinner at the Ashbys, and to spend the evening with their daughter Ruth. So Jim said nothing, but he instantly planned how to meet the Ashbys.

“Now don’t go and make any more dates for next week, without asking us, understand!” declared Jim, when he heard that Saturday was engaged and Sunday, partly so.

“How can we help it if our parents and chaperones do it without our knowledge,” queried Eleanor, innocently.

“Well, I’ll speak to them, then. Ken and I will have to be off again next week; so for the few days we have at home we want you girls to pass up all other fun. You’ve got all the year for other beaux, you know,” grumbled Jim.

Polly and Eleanor laughed. “Oh, yes,” said the latter, “we just keep on the go continually, every afternoon and evening, with a devoted swain each day to replace the ones of the day before.”

“Where do you meet them?” demanded Jim, jealously.

“We-ll—the first one Polly and I snared, we ‘picked up’ at an art sale. But we have many opportunities to meet others, you know.”

“Yes,” added Polly, entering the joke, “at night school, you know, there are loads of young men; and at lectures and exhibitions—and everywhere.”

“Is that why you both are so crazy to go to these dry lecture affairs?” jeered Kenneth, thinking himself very clever, indeed.

But they failed to get the girls to break the engagement with the Ashbys, and Jim barely managed, through his father’s kind auspices, to meet Mr. Dalken Saturday morning, and thus open the way to call on the Ashbys that evening.

Mr. Dalken was young in spirit if not in years, and he enjoyed helping the two boys work out the little plot so as to be present with Polly and Eleanor at the Ashbys, that evening. But the boys never knew that their benefactor passed up an exciting game of chess at his club, that Saturday night, in order to introduce them to his friends.

There were so many wonderful things to do during that Holiday Week, that the girls could not attend them all. Many of their school-friends were eager to have them at teas and parties and matinees, but all these had to be refused with regrets. Eleanor remarked: “Wait for school to open. We’ll be the most popular girls there. In fact, every last girl will want to fag for us!”

“Why?” asked Polly, wonderingly.

“Because they think we are in such demand, everywhere, that we can’t accept any invitations of theirs. Don’t you suppose they have told each other? Lots of those girls travel around together, and they talk everything over. But I guess they are wondering who takes us out so much, and what society we travel in.” Eleanor laughed.

Polly looked at her with pity. “Nolla, sometimes I feel so sorry for you! All your joy and pleasure in having others act nice or kind to you, is lost because of the

education you've had in Bob's school. Now I don't believe those girls ask us just to cater to us because we are popular. I think they really like us and would love to have us with them. If I wasn't so frightfully busy with school at night, and other worth-while occupations, I'd jaunt about with them."

Eleanor said nothing more, but she did a lot of thinking.

CHAPTER IX—POLLY’S MUSCLE

Mr. Maynard was delighted with Eleanor’s evident improvement in health, and all fears of the New York climate vanished entirely, before he finished his visit in New York. He remained a week and then said good-by, reminding Mrs. Stewart that she had invited him for the Christmas Holidays. They all laughed because he was welcome, at all times, to remain as long as he could.

Regular studies began again after the Thanksgiving Holiday and, with the reopening of the classes, the girls started in on a new line of art at Cooper Union. Anne Stewart used to escort the girls to and from the school on class-nights, but it was such a tiresome trip for her to make, after a hard day at school, and with lessons to go over at home, that the girls insisted upon her staying home.

Mr. Fabian generally conducted them home after class, and then went on to his own rooms. As it was hardly dark by seven-thirty, in October and early November, it was no more hazardous for the two girls to walk or ride down to the Square than it would be in the daytime.

But the days were becoming so much shorter after Thanksgiving, that it was quite dark by six o’clock. Hence Anne worried about their going downtown, alone, even though it was but a few blocks.

The second week of class in December, found Mr. Fabian absent. He had taken a severe cold and thought better of risking his health in the bitter wind and Scotch mist that night.

Polly and Eleanor did not speak of it to Anne, as she, too, felt wretched that day; and they would rather have stayed at home than have had her accompany them to night school in her state of health.

“You’re not to worry about us, Anne, if we do not come in as early as usual,” said Eleanor, upon opening the door to go out.

“Why—where will you be?” asked Anne, instantly.

“Exams. Some of the teachers are testing us in all the work we did this last term,

and we have to write our answers. We may be a full hour later than usual; but we'll come uptown, together, so there's nothing to worry about," explained Polly.

Anne thought she meant Mr. Fabian by "we-all" but Polly meant several of the students who lived a few blocks north of the Square.

Both girls were well bundled up in heavy storm coats, mufflers, and close-fitting woollen caps pulled down over their ears. Besides their books and other materials, they had umbrellas to carry but it was too windy to open them.

The examination questions proved to be most interesting; and the answers required a great deal of careful thought, before describing the various types, methods and ideals of architecture and decoration.

Polly described at large such questions as: "Can you describe the different types that go to make up the Egyptian people?" or the question: "How does plant-life affect Egyptian ornament—sketch two such plants."

"What is a torus molding? Where is echinus molding used? Sketch the cyma recta."

When Polly found the questions: "Describe a scarabæus," and "Why did ancient Egyptians prepare their dead as they did, and describe a mummy and the methods used for its preservation," she was elated, for she had made a particular study of these subjects at the Metropolitan Museum where the collection of Egyptian antiques is unsurpassed.

There were many other interesting questions, all of which Polly was eager to answer, but time was too limited for her to say all she wished to. For instance, she wanted to describe, at length, Greek art and the Greek nation that was characteristic for its own type of art and ornament.

She was anxious to tell what she knew about color and its importance in art. Of polychromy and what it was. In fact, she needed hours in which to speak fully of the difference between Greek, Egyptian and Assyrian art and ornament.

Eleanor on her part, wrote graphically of the difference between the Arabs and Persians, and how their modes and habits had a corresponding effect on art. She liked to describe the style of Romanesque art and how it governed all Eastern Europe at one time.

Eleanor leaned to the Moorish classics and had a weakness for Turkish designs; she loved the warm coloring used by the Moors in their work, and the harsh bright colors employed by the Turks. She had no hesitation in selecting from

samples shown, the Mohammedan designs, the Chinese, the Byzantine, or Arabian patterns. She was expert in stating why the fall of Rome affected all art in Eastern and Western Europe, and what was its highest development and its period of all architecture.

It was more than an hour later than usual, when the two girls put away their work and started out for home. The scholars who lived on streets uptown, had gone long before, and Polly and Eleanor found that the high wind made it impossible for them to open their umbrellas.

“It’s so icy we will have to use them as props,” laughed Polly.

“My! But this sleet in one’s face is cold, isn’t it?” gasped Eleanor.

“Let’s take a short cut across the Plaza,” suggested Polly, breaking into a run across the diamond that separates the streets at Third and Fourth avenues, and Eighth street.

Having reached the small oasis about the subway station, Eleanor said: “Why not take the subway, here, to Twenty-eighth street, Poll?”

“Oh, I hate those subways! This wonderful sleet and the quiet hissing of the ice on the windows and walks makes me feel as if I were home. No clatter of wheels, no shouting of burly men, no *nothing* that makes a city so horrid. Let’s walk all the way home.”

“All right,” laughed Eleanor. “I’m game!”

So they started up Fourth avenue, past Wanamakers, and were soon lost to their surroundings in their discussion of the examinations.

“What answer did you give to the question ‘Tell the basis of religions existing with the Persians and the Arabs: describe the differences,’ Polly?”

“I was not quite sure of that, Nolla, but I did make a good thing of that question ‘Why did Egyptians use bright colors in art?’ And also that question that read: ‘When colors of the pattern contrast with the colors of the back-ground, what general rule must govern?’ You know, I just love to ferret out these ideas.”

“So do I. But I never dreamed there was so much wonderful knowledge to be obtained in a course of this kind,” said Eleanor, holding her arm before her face in order to speak distinctly.

They had now reached Eleventh street, and were passing a saloon still brightly lighted, in spite of Prohibition Laws. In the doorway lounged three tough-looking young men; but the red-cheeked girls scarcely saw them—they were too

interested in their conversation. An empty auto stood by the curb, but no other vehicle or person was in sight.

When the girls came under the arc of light that reflected from the globes in the saloon-window, one of the flippant young men said, quite loud enough for Polly and Eleanor to hear: "I say! Ain't them two goils peaches, though!"

His two companions laughed rudely, but the girls hastened on without a word or look. Another of the trio then said: "Betcha they'd be glad of comp'ny. I'll try it."

Eleanor whispered anxiously to Polly: "What time do you think it is?"

"It was almost eleven when we stopped writing. It must be nearly eleven-thirty now."

"Pretty late for such a bad night. We'll take the subway at Fourteenth street, Polly."

"Reckon we'd better. Are there no policemen about these corners?"

"Not when you need one. On fine summer nights you will see them strolling about, maybe."

The girls tittered, but instantly hushed when they heard voices directly behind them.

"Pretty evenin' fer a walk, goils."

No reply was vouchsafed to this remark but the girls kept right on with their customary swift gait.

"Ain't che hankerin' fer comp'ny?" chuckled another tough.

"Ah, come on back, fellers. What's th' use foolin' wid a coupla high-brows on such a nasty night!" argued one of the three.

Polly and Eleanor fervently hoped they would go back, but the other fellow replied: "G'wan back, if yeh wants. Bill and me er goin' to have some fun. Come on, Bill."

Polly now glanced at Eleanor and said in a low tone: "Get a good grip on your umbrella. Thank heavens we haven't any books or papers to carry, as we usually have."

Then the fellow called Bill, said: "You amble up to the peacherino on the outside, whiles I take to the inside one, Andy."

“There’s the boss’s car waiting fer nuttin. We kin give them a ride—a joy ride fer us,” harshly laughed Andy.

Bill joined in the suggestive laugh, and both girls unconsciously hastened their steps.

“No hurry, my pretties. There ain’t a cop twixt here an’ the saloon on Fourteenth street. Don’t we’s know this districk? Ha-ha!”

“Ready for a fight, Nolla!” hissed Polly, suddenly wheeling and facing the accosters.

Eleanor also turned, a second later, and both men were taken by surprise. Polly's eyes blazed and she gave the roughs such a scornful look that it should have withered them as they stood there.

"Now you two out-laws turn-about-face and march downtown as fast as you know how!" commanded she.

**"NOW YOU TWO OUT-LAWS TURN-ABOUT-FACE AND MARCH!"
COMMANDED POLLY.**

"NOW YOU TWO OUT-LAWS TURN-ABOUT-FACE AND MARCH!" COMMANDED POLLY.

"Ah, ha, Bill! I envy you your choice! She turns out to be a regerler sport. See them eyes shoot fire? Let me have a kiss, me pritty, afore Bill gits them all!" As the fellow Andy spoke insinuatingly, he stepped forward to take hold of Polly.

At the same moment her umbrella swung back over her head and the muscular young arm instantly brought down the heavy metal knob upon the soft cap that covered the head of the ruffian. The blow was so unexpected, and forceful as well, that it staggered Polly's assailant.

Both men cursed fluently, then, and Bill threatened: "Jus' fer dat, you'se is goin' to get what's comin' to yeh!"

Eleanor wanted to turn and run, but she would not have deserted Polly for all the world, so she screamed "Help! Help!" with all her lung-power—and she had plenty of it.

Bill hesitated to attack Eleanor as she yelled and screamed for help, but Andy was raging and tried to close in with Polly. The umbrella was flung aside, and in another minute Polly launched at his face with a closed fist. It struck him between the eyes and caused a howl of pain.

Before he could collect himself, the daring girl had struck him another fearful blow under the chin. This sent him back flat upon his back, and while he was trying to crawl up on his knees, the amateur pugilist turned and sent a blow at Bill. But he had stood gaping at the amazing encounter with his pal, and he now dodged his own undoing.

Eleanor saw her opportunity. She had no time to lift her umbrella for a blow, and it had no solid handle like Polly's, but she fiercely rammed the steel-capped end of the rod into the pit of the rascal's stomach, so that, instantly, he buckled up. He sank down groaning while he struggled to get his breath.

Andy was up on his feet again by this time, but Bill was out of the fight, so both girls gave full attention to the second villain. He fought now, as slum ruffians will, but he was no match for the hard knuckles, steel muscles and lithe movements, of the Rocky Mountain maid who had grappled with wild animals and had won out.

The groveling Bill now managed to reach out a hand, planning to catch Eleanor by the ankle and trip her. But at that moment a silent-running automobile slid up to the curb and, at the instant of its stopping, the door flew open and a gentleman leaped out. In his hand he pointed a revolver, and Andy immediately threw up both hands.

“W-h-y—Mr. Dalken. Oh, thank goodness you came!” cried Eleanor, trembling nervously.

The chauffeur was standing guard over Bill at the same time, so Mr. Dalken asked frowningly: “What are you girls doing down here at this hour?—all alone, too!”

By this time the truant officer ran over to the group and wanted to know what was wrong. Mr. Dalken turned on him in just anger. “Wrong—why, you were not on the beat! That’s what’s wrong.”

“But I was—I got a beat bigger than any Fift’ avenoo cop what only has to parade in front of a swell’s house.”

“You needn’t try to bull-doze me, my man. Evidently you fail to recognise me, but we will talk this over at the City Hall, in the morning. Now arrest these two foot-pads.” As the officer snapped hand-cuffs on his prisoners, Dalken added, “By the way, why is a saloon open at this hour—to sell soft drinks?”

The scorn in Mr. Dalken’s tone silenced the policeman. “Now, girls, jump into the car and I will take you home,” offered their rescuer. But the officer interfered when they would have stepped inside the car.

“Your names, please, and addresses. And how do I know that you will take these young ladies to their home?” The tone of the man was insulting.

“If it were not for the fact that I want to hurry these children to their family as quickly as possible, I’d take the keenest pleasure in answering you in a manner that you’d understand and respect. Now you go about your tardy business and I will see to mine. Here’s my card. The girls do not appear in this matter at all. I am the man who caused the ruffians’ arrest, and I will answer in Court.”

Mr. Dalken followed the girls into the car and the driver instantly shot away; in a

short time the car stopped in front of the Studio. As Polly and Eleanor gratefully took Mr. Dalken's hand, he advised them. "Better not speak of this affair to anyone—leave it to me to settle. But, hereafter, do not dream of going about so late at night, unattended. One never can tell!"

"But we can't expect Anne to trot about with us when she is tired out at night," explained Eleanor.

"Then use my car on the nights you have to go to school. I'll send down my Sedan, after this, because the butler understands its tricks thoroughly. He seldom has anything to do on those evenings you go to school, and he can oblige us by driving that car should I need Henri for this car."

The girls thanked him again, and then hurried indoors.

"Where *have* you been so late, dears?" cried Anne, anxiously, as they came in.

"We told you we would be late," began Polly.

"But it is past twelve, now; I was about to call up the police-station at Ninth street, and find out if anything had happened."

The two girls laughed and Eleanor pulled Anne's ear playfully, as she said: "Now, silly, what could happen to us!"

CHAPTER X—CHRISTMAS AND WHAT IT BROUGHT

Anne never suspected that Polly and Eleanor had had a “hold-up” at any time, but she wondered why Mr. Dalken should be so kind as to loan his car to the girls on school-nights. Polly explained simply. “Why, he never forgot what we did for Elizabeth, and when he learned we were trudging back and forth alone, he just wouldn’t have it.”

“He said he couldn’t bear the thought of our even having to travel in the subway, alone, late at night,” added Eleanor.

So Anne, although she read about the two ruffians who had tried to rob a wealthy broker, one night, never dreamed that *her* two girls were victimized before Mr. Dalken appeared to rescue them.

Madam Wellington’s school prospered splendidly from the publicity given it in the papers directly after the fire. And later, when it was learned that Mr. Ashby, Mr. Dalken, and two other wealthy men had purchased the corner which had always been disfigured by the old four-story amusement hall, and proposed erecting a twelve-story high-class apartment house on the land, the mention of the fire and the bravery of the Wellington School girls again appeared in the papers.

Letters between Pebbly Pit and New York passed twice a week, and the last news from home was: “How we should love to have you spend Christmas with us, Polly dearest. It will not seem like a real Christmas with both my children away from home.”

The letter made Polly feel home-sick and she wrote to her mother immediately, saying: “I feel that I shall have to come home even if it takes a month out of school and delays me in my art studies, unless you can plan some other way that we might see each other this Christmas.”

Polly had a very clever plan that suddenly came to her, as she read her mother’s words, and her reply was the first step in working out her plan successfully.

The second step was to go downtown and call upon Mr. Latimer at his office.

She was welcomed there and asked what good wind blew her downtown.

Polly laughed. "It's a blizzard from the Rockies—that is why I'm here." Then she told him about her mother's home-sick words. "And this is what we must do, Mr. Latimer, or I'll have to leave school and go back home."

"Dear me, I will do anything rather than lose you from New York, Polly," Mr. Latimer laughingly replied.

"You must find some excuse on the mining or jewel business, that needs Daddy's personal presence here in New York. Make it necessary for him to be here just before, or after Christmas. Then I will write and let them know that you told me about it, and insist upon having mother come East with father, for her Christmas. Why, even John and Paul might join us here without much expense or trouble."

Mr. Latimer smiled. "There is no harm in trying the plan, even if your father *won't* leave his ranch while it is under six feet of snow."

Polly laughed at that. "Exactly! Dad doesn't have to stick there in winter-time, any more than I do. Especially with Jeb on hand to take care of everything."

Then remembering a warning, she said: "But you've got to find a real worthy reason for his coming East, because I know my Dad!"

"I'll have you approve the reason before I send it West—how will that do?"

"I think you will do well. Because I may be able to make a suggestion—knowing my father as I do."

Mr. Latimer laughed and patted Polly on the head. "Well, now that that is settled, let us talk about Jim and Ken. You know, do you not, that we expect them home in a few days?"

"I didn't know, but I took for granted that they would soon be home for the Holidays. Although it seems like yesterday that they were home for Thanksgiving Week."

"Not to Jim's mother and me. We miss him very much, as he always was such a lively boy at home."

"I'm afraid we won't see much of him this time. He never even called us on the 'phone when he came from New Haven to see Ruth Ashby, two weeks ago Sunday," said Polly, never dreaming that his father was ignorant of the visit.

"He didn't! Then Ken should have called on you. He did not come to see a girl, too, did he?"

“Oh, Ken never knew Jim was coming—so Ruth told us. Jim telephoned her early Sunday morning and found she would be home, so he ran in Town on the noon train and stayed until the nine o’clock.”

“I’ll see that Jim does not go back on his first loves quite so suddenly,” laughed Mr. Latimer, thinking of the teasing he would give Jim.

“But we are not ‘loves’ at all—Nolla and I are only good pals for the boys,” corrected Polly, anxiously.

“Whatever you call it, Jim ought to be well advised on such matters, as long as legal advice costs him nothing.”

Polly failed to follow Mr. Latimer, and he immediately changed the subject. “Now that you are here and it is lunch-hour, why not come with me. I promised to take you to the Café Savarin or the Lawyer’s Club, some day, and this is the day.”

“Oh, it would be lovely, but I just couldn’t leave Nolla out of the treat, you know!” exclaimed Polly, eagerly.

“If Nolla is at home, we will have her down in twenty minutes. We’ll wait for her, and meanwhile I’ll dictate a letter to your father for you to O.K.”

Eleanor was moping around the house, wondering where Polly could be, when the telephone rang and she was invited to join her friends at luncheon. So in less than half-an-hour the trio were having a merry time in the sumptuous private restaurant on lower Broadway.

The letter that Polly approved, reached Sam Brewster, and he showed it to his wife. “Ah have been thinking, dear, that we-all might surprise Polly by dropping in on her just about Christmas time, eh?”

“Rather than let her come West and lose all that time from classes, I should say ‘yes,’ Sam.”

“We really have nothing to tie us down at the ranch for a few weeks, unless the snow buries us for the winter.”

“Sary would be in her glory could she keep house alone with Jeb for a time. Ever since they returned from their honeymoon in Denver, she has been sighing to run the house,” said Mrs. Brewster, “feeding the fire” carefully.

“Let’s go! By the Great Horned Spoon, I feel like taking a vacation to some other part of the world—so New York will do!”

Then it was quickly decided that they would start on Monday, and this being Friday, there was no time to lose.

Sary and Jeb accepted the amazing news with smiles and exchange of knowing looks. But they were relieved when Mrs. Brewster herself suggested to Sary: "Have all the good times you want, Sary, while we are gone. Invite your friends, and neighbors, if they can get through the drifts, and have apple-parties, corn-poppers, Virginia Reels, and anything on earth you like!"

"Would you-all keer if we-all ast as much as twenty to a time?" asked Sary, fearfully.

"Ask forty, if you like—and if you can find them," laughed Mrs. Brewster, recklessly.

"Only see to it that they leave the roof, Sary," ha-hawed Sam Brewster. "And that the sky-larkin' is all over when we return."

Sary nodded understandingly. She had instantly planned how to create envy in the souls of her old friends at Yellow Jacket Pass, by asking them all to her parties.

The Brewsters sent John a wire to say that they would spend a few hours in Chicago, and would like him to keep that time open. But when they reached Chicago, John was standing on the platform holding a suit-case in his hand. Tom Latimer and Paul Stewart stood beside him.

John explained: "Paul and Tom are going, too. Some good fairy sent us round-trip tickets, but we don't know who it was. Not a line came with the tickets. So here we are—ready to help in the surprise."

John then introduced Paul, and Mrs. Brewster took his hand as she looked into his face. "You are the image of our Anne, Paul; I would have known you anywhere."

"That he is," added Sam Brewster, shaking Paul's hand heartily. So the party of five continued on the journey, smiling as they pictured the glad surprise to be given the family at the Studio. Little did they dream that the Studio family were busy preparing for a gladsome Christmas for them all. For Mr. Latimer had told them about the telegram from Pebbly Pit, and that he had heard from Tom that he and John and Paul were going to join the party coming East. But he did not say that he, incognito, had mailed the tickets.

The Twentieth Century had a long line of Pullmans to take to New York that trip, and it was small wonder that passengers having berths in the last coach, should

fail to meet anyone traveling in the first one. So it was with speechless amazement, that the Brewsters met the Maynards at Grand Central Station when both parties were waiting to get taxi-cabs.

“Well, well, Ah believe it’s Mr. Maynard!” exclaimed Sam Brewster, in his deep western thunder.

“Brewster? so it is! Indeed I am glad to see you here. Come to cheer up the little girl, eh?” and Eleanor’s father grasped the ranchman’s big hands.

Mrs. Brewster and her two young male companions (Tom had gone to telephone) were now introduced to Barbara and Mrs. Maynard. The latter had never met the Brewster family, and Barbara, thinking it wiser to assume indifference, smiled coldly.

“We’re stopping at the Park Hotel, Brewster—what about you folks? Might as well go where we do,” suggested Mr. Maynard.

“I wired there for accommodations; Polly mentioned it in several of her letters as being quite near the Studio.”

“Fine! Then we will go right along. Here Taxi! eight of us and baggage.”

“You mean seven, Mr. Maynard?” ventured John, politely.

“No—didn’t you know Pete was here with us? He came on another coach with some chums who were coming East.”

“I haven’t seen much of Pete, this term. I’ve been cramming every moment, so as to finish and be ready to help in the mine, you see,” explained John, hesitatingly.

Mr. Maynard saw the expression and said nothing, but he determined to find out why Pete had not seen much of Paul and John and Tom, that term. Three young men who could be of great advantage to a wild young student should be cultivated, he thought.

When Sam Brewster did anything, he never did it by halves; consequently when he wired the Park Hotel for rooms, the day he left Denver, he engaged a whole suite. No better accommodations than he had, were to be found in the building, and the Maynards had to accept second-best.

When Mr. Maynard found the ranchman had the very finest the hotel afforded, he chuckled delightedly to himself, for he had silently watched the manner in which Barbara received the greetings of the people who were so kind to her that Summer.

Mrs. Maynard was furious with her husband. "My dear! what possessed you to come to this horrid place. Don't you know that Bob's position must be catered to? Even the best hotels here are rather too ordinary. She should be stopping at the newest and most exclusive one uptown."

"When she marries that little numb-skull you've tagged to her skirts, she can stop where she likes. But her Dad is running this show. I'm here to visit Nolla, and I stop where I can call and see her, or she can run in to see us, without wasting time traveling on the streets."

"You always did spoil Nolla—while poor Bob has to take third place in your affections," complained Mrs. Maynard.

"Bob's mother makes up for any lack in me. That's why I have to give double love to Nolla and Pete—Bob has *all* of yours."

The usual ending to similar scenes might have resulted, had not Mr. Maynard gone out to hurry over to the Studio. But his wife and Barbara sulkily unpacked their trunks and made very fine toilets before they thought of calling at the Studio.

Mr. Maynard rang at the front door of the Studio, but he had to wait a few moments before the door opened. From within, merry laughter and joyous shouting could be heard. Then in another moment, Eleanor was in her father's arms and was dragging him into the happy circle.

The Brewsters, and Paul and Pete were already there, so that the newcomer's appearance added another reason for Polly and Eleanor's happiness.

"I haven't enough china to go around for such a family!" Mrs. Stewart said plaintively; as she came into the room with her arms dusted with flour.

"And only half of us here, too!" laughed Mr. Maynard.

"What—more on the way?" exclaimed Anne.

"Nolla's mother and Bob will be, shortly."

"Mother—and Bob!" cried Eleanor, eagerly, happy that her mother and sister cared enough for her to come and visit her.

"Now that adds to all my troubles," Mrs. Stewart declared as she dropped into a nearby chair.

"But why—the more the merrier," laughed Mrs. Brewster.

"Why—because there are only seven straight chairs in this stable. All the others

are great cushiony things that won't do in a small dining-room such as ours."

"Motherkins!" said Paul, laughingly picking his mother up and seating her upon his strong knees, "Did her think we-all would permit her to cook a great supper for such a mob?"

"Of course—I like it, dear, but I am staggered at the limitations—china and chairs."

"Mrs. Stewart, we are not going to eat a crumb in this house during the Holidays, unless it be a theatre supper or afternoon tea! That is all settled beforehand. Run upstairs and put on your evening dress. We propose making a party of it this first night," called Mr. Maynard, trying to make himself heard above the general din.

"Is it your party, Dad?" asked Eleanor, gayly.

"Yes, and to please Bob it is to be at the Ritz. To-morrow it will be Brewster's turn, and that's up to him to say where we go."

"Oh, Daddy—I know a place!" exclaimed Polly, eagerly. "Eleanor and I have never been, but we've heard lots about it and this is the chance. We'll all go down to Chinatown, to-morrow!"

A wild chorus of laughter greeted this proposal, and Polly looked surprised. To make matters worse, she added explanatorily: "Why, the girls say chop-suey is great! And at Christmas time the Chinks' stores are beautiful! The lovely things one can buy then are the best that are imported from the Orient."

"We'll do Chinatown, thoroughly, Poll, but it may not be to-morrow night," promised John, who had hitherto been completely engaged with Anne's whispers and looks.

Thereafter followed delight upon delight, each day filled with new plans and exciting fulfillments. Ken and his parents, the four Latimers, the Ashbys, Mr. Fabian, and even Mr. Dalken, were included in the gay whirl of these pleasure-seekers. Mrs. Maynard and Barbara actually enjoyed the wholesome fun and almost forgot to be affected or snobbish. To associate intimately with Mr. Dalken, whose social standing was well-known in Chicago, as well as in other large cities, was excuse enough to accept all the other friends. But added to that pleasure, the friendship and evident intimacy the Ashbys and Latimers entertained for Polly and Eleanor, made Mrs. Maynard feel there might be hope for Nolla in the future.

Christmas fell on the Thursday after the Westerners had arrived in New York; and considering all the fun and gadding that had been indulged in, on the days

preceding the twenty-fifth, that day passed quietly for all. Each family enjoyed its own gathering and gifts, and all assembled at the Ashbys in the evening, to enjoy music and dancing, and everyone declared it had been a fine day!

Friday started anew the excitement of planning and enjoying whatever came in the way of the party. But Saturday night had been set aside for Mr. Dalken's Christmas party. Elizabeth was invited to bring her friends, and everyone in Polly's and Eleanor's friendship ring were included.

Mr. Dalken lived in modest but very large rooms of a bachelor apartment house, downtown, and here he had an enormous tree fixed in the center of the living-room. No one was allowed to see that room until all had assembled, but when the doors were opened, there were "ahs" and "ohs" from everyone.

The tree was so beautifully trimmed that it seemed a pity that it should ever be dismantled. But soon, the attractive white packages tied with red ribbons, filled the guests with curiosity; and once Eleanor had peeped at the name written on one box, there was no peace but her host must distribute the gifts.

Mr. Dalken never spared time or money when he did anything for his friends, and his Christmas Party was to be one all would remember. The gifts were carefully selected for each individual and those for the four girls—Elizabeth, Ruth Ashby, Polly and Eleanor, were exquisite and costly. Elizabeth had craved a ring. She had it. Ruth, Polly, and Eleanor each had a long barpin of platinum daintily jewelled.

With her usual impetuosity, Eleanor suddenly sprang up and hugged Mr. Dalken gratefully for her gift. Polly smiled and shyly shook hands, while Ruth said he must have read her thoughts, for she had asked Dad for a pin and had been refused. Now she had it, anyway, and from her second-best Dad. Elizabeth was pleased, too, but merely murmured "Thanks, Papa."

"How do you like the jewels in the pins, girls?" asked Mr. Latimer, quizzically, as no one had mentioned the gems.

Suddenly Polly looked up at him. She caught the twinkle in his eyes, and instantly wheeled to look at the other men. Each one was smiling as if there was a fine secret here.

"I just know these are Rainbow Cliff jewels!" exclaimed Polly, joyously.

"No—are they?" demanded Eleanor, holding the pin aloft to let the light flash over and through them.

"Now I am deeply offended! I want the girls to see that I got the very best and

finest stones in New York, and someone dares suggest that they may be lava!” grumbled Mr. Dalken, trying to be peevish.

“I can find out by taking mine to Tiffany’s, to-morrow,” said Ruth, wisely.

“No, you won’t—Tiffany says his store is to be closed all day to-morrow,” laughed Mr. Ashby.

“Why—some one in his family dead?” asked Elizabeth.

“No—but it is Sunday, and he is a church member.”

Every one laughed, as it had been forgotten the Sabbath was so near at hand. Then Eleanor had an idea.

“Why wait for Tiffany? Maybe the box will give us a clue.” So she found her box and examined it. Inside the silk-padded lid were the words in gold ink: “Rainbow Cliffs’ Jewel Company.”

“Oh, oh! It is our lava! Polly, now you can carry a little of Pebbly Pit about with you!” cried Eleanor, dancing about.

“Yes, it is a bit of Polly’s own dear heath. These are the very first jewels the company perfected. And as I am one of the corporation, I wheedled the cutter into giving me his first output. So, girls, you not only have pretty pins, but also you have what may be considered a curiosity,” explained Mr. Dalken.

“Are you one of our company?” Polly asked, eagerly.

“Yes, Mr. Ashby and I took stock soon after the fire, because we said this was going to be a big thing, some day.”

“I’m so *glad*, Mr. Dalken,” said Polly simply, and in a voice that only he could hear. “I like you so much, and I’m happy to know that you and I are members, together, in something.”

“Polly, dear, that is the very best Christmas gift I have had in years,” murmured Mr. Dalken, feelingly.

CHAPTER XI—THE VALENTINES

With the passing of this gay Holiday Season, the two girls began to feel that it would be a relief to sit down once more and spend a quiet evening at school. Two weeks of constant going and dissipation had become tiresome.

The Westerners had gone home again; John, Tom, Paul and Pete back to Chicago, and the two boys, Ken and Jim, back at Yale; and then Mrs. Wellington's school reopened. Lessons went on as if there never had been a vacation, and on Wednesday evening of that same week, the art school resumed classes.

This term was to be devoted to Applied Design and its uses in architecture and decorations of interiors. After having had such interesting work as Egyptian ornament, art, and symbols, it seemed rather dry to start out the New Year with drawing straight lines an inch long.

Then to draw a dozen of these lines—next to connect them and make a design of these dozen simple lines. But the next lesson was still more foolish. They were told to draw a square. Then this large square of twenty inches each side was divided into smaller squares. And in each of these squares the pupils were told to draw whatever they liked, but each square must repeat the first one figure designed.

Thus the scholars found that they had a pattern of the design. This began to look more promising, and Eleanor wished she had paid more attention to the squares so that the design would have been neater.

The next lesson was on grouping certain designs. The talk given by Mr. Fabian that evening was on eye-measurement and judgment in lines.

“Unless one has a good eye for lines in anything, it is a waste of time to study a profession that is based fundamentally on a true judgment of lines—whether of beauty, grace, or usefulness. Unless one has a true sense of ‘line’ one can never know where to build a window, a door, or a fire-place.

“Not only does ‘line’ govern the size of rooms and halls, but the entire building

is dependent upon true lines. Also, this basis line governs furniture and decorations in an interior.

“Can you picture a room where the portières are all of different lengths?—because the decorator had no sense of ‘line value?’ And what would one say if the chairs had legs of various lengths? Is not ‘line value’ to be used here, too? It is found necessary, everywhere.”

So the lessons and lectures continued until the girls took up the study of colors. This was very interesting, and soon, both Polly and Eleanor knew that yellow, blue and red were primary colors and they could glibly tell you what that meant, and how important a part the knowledge played, in the progressive art of decorating.

When the demonstration of these lessons began in the painting, the girls realized that they were actually going to be able to carry home samples of their work. From that time on, they showed more zeal in doing everything as correctly and perfectly as possible. And Mr. Fabian, at his next monthly report to Mr. Ashby (which were quite unknown to Polly and Eleanor) said: “They’re deeply interested in the actual art and not merely for the fun of some day going into business.”

“I am glad to hear it. There is so much of this idea of taking up interior decorating because it is comparatively a new field, but so few really ought to be in it. It should be made a matter of diplomas the same as other professions. Then the restriction would soon clear away all the quacks in the art. If these two girls but escape the snares of matrimony until they are finished artists, I shall be rejoiced to welcome them to our fold.”

Mr. Fabian nodded approvingly, and murmured: “I have faith in them. I’m sure that both these girls are sensible and not to be easily influenced by a good looking beau.”

Mr. Ashby smiled. “They’re much safer in New York than if they lived in smaller towns. Girls in this city haven’t time to find beaux or think of husbands.”

“Don’t be so sure, Mr. Ashby,” retorted Mr. Fabian. “If the girls are as pretty as my two are, and clever and rich as well, they’d find it hard to escape.”

“But you are speaking of society girls, while these two students seldom give that empty life a thought—I’m glad to say.”

Which conversation goes to show that more than one adult was watching the experiment these two girls were unconsciously making of their school days, with

intense interest and a desire to aid.

Polly and Eleanor were not aware of all that had been done to insure them perfect freedom and liberty to continue their art classes. Had they known the arguments Mr. Latimer had had with Jim and Ken to keep those boys from usurping so much of the time the girls had to devote to study! Then Jim had blustered and boasted of all he would do once he was at college: His father wouldn't know how many letters he would write, nor the visits to the girls, of an evening!

And one reason Tom Latimer and John seldom wrote to Polly and Eleanor, was because of Anne's suggestion—to leave the girls to plan their spare time for their very own work, and not be made to feel that they had letters to answer, all the time.

It was Tom who had begged Jim not to waste his own, or the girls' time, in writing silly letters or in traveling back and forth from college to New York. And Tom, wise big brother that he was, took Jim into his confidence and explained how anxious John and he were to have Polly climb to the top of the ladder in her art. That she had to make good in New York those first two years or go back home and starve her artistic soul on a lonesome ranch.

But Valentine's Day was coming, and Jim felt that on that day he would be privileged to not only write to the girls, but to send each one a fine valentine, describing his sentiments.

Polly and Eleanor could not forget Valentine's Day was at hand, for every shop-window they passed invited sentimental people to step in and see the love cards.

"I'd like to send a perfect dear to Mr. Dalken, Nolla," said Polly, reading the verse on a card.

"To Mr. Dalken! Why, Poll, he is an old married man!"

"But what of that! Can't I send him a card that states how much I like him?"

"Oh, ye-es—I suppose so; but valentines are really meant for lovers, you see."

"It's nothing of the kind, Nolla. Dear old St. Valentine never meant all his notes for lovers; but for everyone he *loved!* and that is very different, I think."

"Well, send yours to anyone you like, but I am going to buy one for Jim," said Eleanor, searching over the piles of cards on the tray, but not finding what she sought.

"Oh, Nolla," laughed Polly, teasingly. "Are you selecting Jim for your first

love?”

“First love! I should say double no! I am hunting for a *comic* one for him—just because he is so sentimental and sits with moony eyes when he is near any pretty girl. I thought I would die with laughter that night he sat and gazed with soulful eyes at Ruth.”

Finally the girls found several very funny cards which had sarcastic lines under the pictures. These they were going to mail to Jim and Ken. Then Eleanor had an idea.

“I just guess I’ll mail one each to John, Tom, Pete and Paul, too. If I dared, I’d get Pete to re-mail one to Bob so she wouldn’t know who sent it. Being postmarked ‘Chicago’ she’d break her head trying to think who sent it to her.”

“Oh, that will be fun, Nolla. Have them remailed so the boys won’t know we sent them. Let’s do that with all of ours.”

The need of secrecy, and the trouble of selecting appropriate lines for each of their friends, took time. But Eleanor wired her father to keep the secret and do the mailing for them, and he wired back his consent. So the valentines meant for the Chicago friends went to Mr. Maynard, and duly reached each one as had been intended.

And those for Jim and Ken were handed to a porter on the train that ran to New Haven, with a liberal tip if he would drop them in a letter-box when he jumped from the train. His wide grin showed he was ready to abet the pranks such generous pretty young misses planned to tease their beaux.

Elizabeth Dalken had taken a violent fancy to Jim Latimer when she met him at the different Christmas parties, and Valentine’s Day being an opportunity for love-lorn misses and youths, she bought a very expensive Valentine, with sentiment as soft as down, and suggestive of heart-aches and sighs and what-not.

But Elizabeth had no independence, whatever, and once she had the Valentine boxed and ready to post, she wished she knew someone who would address it. She feared to have her own cramped writing seen on it.

In Mrs. Wellington’s school was a clever girl who could imitate hand-writing to perfection, and Elizabeth presented her with a box of bon-bons a few days before Valentine’s Day. Then the following day she asked a favor. Would Myrtle address a box for her?

Myrtle comprehended, but the candies had been delicious so she laughed: “Got a valentine to send?”

“Yes, but it is a joke. I want the receiver to believe Eleanor Maynard sent it. Can you imitate her writing?”

“Easy as pie. Get me her exercise from this noon’s class.”

And in short order the box was addressed in Eleanor’s hand-writing. Elizabeth mailed it, and the day following the 14th, Jim mailed, what he considered, a lover’s work of art—such ardent lines and such sentiment seldom entered his thoughts, but the mushy words of the valentine excused his letter.

“W-e-ll—Jim’s gone clean mad!” gasped Eleanor.

“Is the thick letter from him?” asked Polly.

“Yes, but read it, Poll, and tell me what ails him.”

Polly read, but not without giggles and many a lifted eyebrow when she came to the extra fine phrases of love-making.

“Nolla, he sure is daffy. Can you see through it?”

“Not at all. I expected a comic from him—not this.”

“Nolla, do you think anyone we know would send him a soft valentine and pretend it came from you?”

“Maybe—for a joke! Now who would do it?”

They asked Anne, and showed her the letter. She laughed with them, but when they were not present, she sat down and wrote to Jim—a nice sisterly letter cuttngly blunt that told him that she had her hands full with school and girls, and house, so that any extra care would drive her insane. Letters such as the one that came to Nolla, were the worst danger she had to ward off from the girls.

By the last mail on the thirteenth and during the day of the fourteenth other valentines came for Polly and Eleanor; some of real merit as tokens of friendship; some of beauty; and many with a little line of love. But Polly received no vague or sentimental one during Valentine’s day.

That evening, however, the bell rang, and Mrs. Stewart asked who was there. The girls were already upstairs.

“Messenger with a box.”

“Mother—wait till I get there!” called Anne, anxiously.

In another moment, Anne, in a negligée, ran downstairs and opened the street-door which opened into a vestibule.

A large long box was handed in and Anne signed the book. It was addressed to "Miss Polly Brewster, Studio, 1003 East Thirtieth Street, New York."

"Polly, here's a great box of flowers from someone," Anne called, standing at the foot of the stairs.

"For me?"

"Your name is on the tag," said Anne.

Instantly, Polly and Eleanor scrambled downstairs and Polly tremblingly tried to untie the string about the box.

"Dear me—it won't even break!" said she, trying to tear the cord by pulling at it.

"Here—take the knife!" cried Eleanor, having dashed to the dining-room to catch up a silver knife, and returning with it.

The string was cut, the lid taken off, and several wrappers of oiled paper removed. Then, there, upon a bed of lace-paper rested a dozen of magnificent American Beauties, with stems more than a yard long. And to the cluster, about the middle of the stems, was attached a fine golden cord holding a papier maché heart. The heart had a golden arrow half-buried in its plump center.

"What wonderful roses!" breathed Polly.

"Isn't the heart cute!" giggled Eleanor.

"No card, or sign, to say where they came from?" asked Anne, picking the heart up carefully.

"Oh, there's another heart—see! On the point of the arrow at the back," cried Eleanor. And there was another heart fastened to the first one by means of the sharp arrow.

The girls sought carefully for some clue of the sender, but the sweet perfume wafted from the roses was all that rewarded their search.

"Whoever it was, he is a dear!" said Polly, fondly touching the waxen stems.

"And we'll try to keep them as long as possible so, whoever it was, will see that we appreciate the flowers," said Anne, going for water.

"At last I have found a use for that tall vase I bought that first week of auctions," laughed Eleanor, taking the glass from under the window-seat.

Scarcely were the roses arranged to satisfy the admiring group, when the bell rang again. Eleanor being nearest the door, ran out to the small vestibule and

peeped through the window in the street-door.

“Well, of all things! Another messenger. Maybe he has a valentine for me.”

The door was opened, Eleanor said “yes” to his query if Mrs. Stewart lived there, and having signed the book, hurried in with a tier of boxes. There were four in all.

“Miss Anne Stewart the first on top,” read Polly.

The second was for Mrs. Stewart, and the third for Polly, the last being Eleanor’s. Each box contained a beautiful spray of cut flowers but no card. Not even a suggestion of the sender.

“Well, it beats all. Why couldn’t our admirers have sent our flowers in the morning,” laughed Anne.

Again the bell pealed. “It surely can’t be more flowers!” laughed Polly, running to the door. But it was. A card on the outside read: “Say it with Flowers,” to Miss Anne Stewart.

By this time everyone was laughing and trying to guess who could have sent the blossoms. And had the bell sounded again, no one would have been surprised. But it didn’t, and after guessing of all impossible persons who might be the senders of the flower-valentines, Anne ventured: “Someone may have telegraphed to New York this morning, you know, to send us these flowers, at once. I’ve heard said, the florists were so rushed to-day with valentine orders that they couldn’t secure enough flowers from the wholesale shops.”

“That’s about it!” declared Eleanor. “John sent you this last box, and maybe Daddy sent us each the smaller boxes. But *who* could have sent Polly a hundred dollars’ worth of American Beauties?”

Finally they went to bed with the great question still unsolved; and Polly often wondered, thereafter, if Mr. Dalken could have sent her those roses? Had she guessed the truth, would she have been content to go on so serenely with her studies of interior decorating?

CHAPTER XII—MR. FABIAN PLOTS FOR FACTS

The roses kept for more than two weeks, filling the Studio rooms with fragrance, but keeping their secret as to who had sent them to Polly. She had gone to everyone she knew and tried to find out who had given them to her. Then she beguiled Mr. Ashby into finding out if Mr. Dalken was the guilty one. And when he was found innocent, she bribed Mr. Dalken to find out if the Latimers or the Evans sent them—but she could not see why anyone should spend so much money on her, and try to hide the fact.

When Mr. Fabian was satisfied that it was not one of their old friends who had sent the roses, he thought of a way to find out. The box had had the name on its cover, of one of Fifth avenue's most fashionable florists, so he went there and tried to learn what he wanted to know, by asking the proprietor.

But the man smiled and shook his head. "We are never allowed to divulge state secrets, Mr. Fabian."

"Not even when that secret concerns a protégée of mine? I do not wish to use the knowledge, but merely to relieve my mind."

"If I were to tell you, Mr. Fabian, I should have to also tell the six other individuals who begged me to tell them confidentially who ordered the roses."

"Six others! Have others been here to ask this same question?" asked Mr. Fabian, amazed.

The florist laughed. "Yes, that pretty miss seems to be very popular. Who is she, anyway?"

"A little girl that attends my art class, and I am bound to keep her mind free from nonsense until her education is finished."

"Can you keep a secret—on your oath?" asked the florist.

"Yes, yes!" eagerly agreed Mr. Fabian, thinking he was now going to hear who sent the roses.

"Well, then, this much I may tell you—just to ease your fears: the individual

who sent those roses is as anxious as you can be, to keep the girl's heart and mind free from nonsense and to allow her to complete her art education without thoughts of beaux."

"Is that all you've got to say?"

"My goodness, don't you appreciate that much! You only wanted to know something to ease your mind, and now I have told you."

"How do *you* know what the gentleman thinks or wants?"

"I was told so by the one who ordered the roses. But I did not tell you it was a gentleman."

This was still more disconcerting to Mr. Fabian, but he never told a soul that he had visited the florist. He did wonder, however, if the man had given the others the same confidence he had imparted confidentially to him.

Polly, the cause of all this secret concern of her friends, had forgotten all about the valentine, and was devoting her entire time and attention to the absorbing lessons at art school.

Easter Week came early, and the term beginning immediately after the Easter Holidays, would start a course on mural decorations, and the study of tapestries. So interesting had their night-classes become, that Polly and Eleanor neglected their studies at day-school. Anne noticed their daily marks and worried over it. At last she consulted with Mr. Fabian.

"You must realize, Mr. Fabian, that the girls are still young. Even if they were prepared to enter the profession they are proposing to follow they would be too young in years to make a success of it. People are not apt to turn over contracts for art or decorating, to girls under twenty. Therefore I advise you to make them drop their night school until after they have caught up in their day classes."

Mr. Fabian was secretly pleased at the news that his two pet scholars preferred *his* teachings to the dry high-school lessons. But he dared not express his satisfaction to Anne.

"All you say is true, but there is no need for my girls to give up their art class. The night school closes for a two weeks' holiday at Easter, and then, as warm weather comes on apace, I find my pupils begin to lose zeal in their constant attendance at class. You will see that Polly and Eleanor will turn more to their day studies, then. But I would not advise you to cut off their pursuit in art work, now. It will only create deeper zest for it, and turn their thoughts completely from day-studies."

Anne replied that this was logical, and so the girls never knew that they had been standing upon the danger-line of having to suspend their favorite studies.

Mr. Fabian was roused to a more temperate art “diet” for the two girls, thereafter. And Polly and Eleanor found, as Spring advanced, that lessons in night school were simpler and not quite so absorbing to their time, as those of the recent weeks had been.

In the mural decoration study that began with the new Spring term, the pupils found that, beginning with the order of antiquity, Egyptian first, and then Greek, Roman, Medieval, Moresque and Persian styles—much of their work done in the other classes now proved useful. In fact, the historical studies of these races of people and their periods of time, proved valuable in review, for the further perfection of mural art.

So when they were given a design to do in “wave ornament” it was at once recognised as Egyptian art. Or should a wall decoration be required where geometrical forms were the principle, the pupils remembered the religion of the Arabs and Moors which restricted them to the use of natural forms which would not conflict with their worship.

Thus Polly and Eleanor began to understand how important their previous lessons had been, and how necessary it was for every earnest student of art to be present at each class, that no connecting link in instruction might be dropped and lost.

As the weeks went by, and the end of the term drew near, the night classes thinned out perceptibly, many of the less enthusiastic pupils preferring outdoor sports to close application to art pursuits. But Polly and Eleanor found their pleasure in hearing all Mr. Fabian had to say to them on various subjects.

Perhaps the girls might not have been so keen for school during the warm evenings, had not Mr. Fabian’s knowledge and fascinating descriptions of anything pertaining to his profession, been so freely given them at all times. He continued to discover exhibits, lectures, and other educational pastimes, to which he conducted his favorite pupils, so that there was no dearth of material to aid and demonstrate his teachings.

As June came in, Polly found New York not nearly as cool and pleasant an abode as Pebbly Pit with its altitude upon the crests of the Rockies. And she longed for a breath of the mountain air that would renew jaded senses. Both Eleanor and Polly began to show the strain of the close application to study that they had had since October, so Anne was thankful that the schools would soon close for the

Summer.

Then the last class in Cooper Union ended, and Mr. Fabian escorted his girls to their home. Already, they were planning for the coming year of work, but their instructor smiled and interrupted.

“I have refused an offer to continue my classes in the school, so I will not be there next year.”

“What!” gasped Polly.

“Not teach us!” cried Eleanor.

“Not teach at Cooper—no. I feel that I am not strong enough to keep up such arduous labors; and so many there do not seem to appreciate what I am sacrificing for them. I find there are some people who think that, because a thing is free, it is not as valuable as if they had to pay for it. You can see, for yourselves, how many scholars dropped out of the classes when other diversions offered themselves. They join an art class and attend it when nothing else can be had. They take my thought and time, and when they weary of the routine, they fail to appear. It is very disheartening. But it is so every year, and I am tired of trying to keep up the interest of such lazy leeches.”

Polly and Eleanor heard their dear professor’s words in sorry silence. What would night school be without him?

“But I have planned a far different school beginning with next October. I have chosen the faithful few who really mean business, and to these I shall offer my services for a small return. I feel sure that this will mean greater benefit to individuals in a small class, as I can devote much more time to each student and give better advice wherever it is needed. I have thought of seven scholars for my little school.”

“Oh, Mr. Fabian—I do hope Polly and I are among them!” exclaimed Eleanor, anxiously.

Mr. Fabian smiled. “Perhaps it was because of Polly and you that I thought of this idea. You two girls really should have personal instruction, instead of having to waste hours in a general class waiting for delinquents to catch up with you.

“That has always been the weak spot in any large class; there are those who forge ahead eagerly, and the lazy ones who miss a class every few nights, causing the whole body to delay and wait while they work to catch up on what they have missed.

“When the few ambitious workers can be grouped together and not hampered by the leeches, one can readily see how much better it is for all concerned. This is what I propose doing.”

“Oh, it will be splendid! and I am glad, for one, to be able to look forward to such teachings. To know that we can ask all the questions freely, and not have to wait to have the easiest lesson explained to the thick-headed, will be a great relief,” said Polly, gratefully.

At the door of the Studio, Mr. Fabian said good-by. “I am planning to sail for Europe very soon, my dears, and I am looking forward to a good time with my little family. We intend visiting all the famous places of interest to an artist, and when I return in the Fall, I will be able to tell you about the great cathedrals, the wonderful collections of antiques, and other sights.”

“As for Polly and me—we won’t be able to give you any such tales, as we are going to spend our vacation at Pebbly Pit, again. But we will bring back plenty of health and renewed zeal,” laughed Eleanor.

“Ah! That is what I need of you now, children. See that you fill out the hollows in your cheeks, and gather ample strength and health for another strenuous year in New York. I plan to put both of you on the firing-line next school-year.”

“We’ll not fail you, Mr. Fabian,” promised Polly, taking his hand a second time and patting it fondly.

“Then I’ll not fail *you*, dear students!” responded Mr. Fabian, stooping and kissing each girl affectionately on the forehead, then taking his leave.

A few days after this the Studio was swathed in dust-covers, the windows locked and shuttered, the burglar alarm attached, and at last the front door was closed by a representative from the insurance company. The four tenants were on their way to Grand Central where Jim Latimer and Kenneth Evans were to meet them. They then were going to take the Twentieth Century Limited to Chicago.

Jim and Ken had been engaged by Carew, to join his camp of surveyors in the mountains for this second season’s work; and, as Polly and her friends were to spend the summer vacation at Pebbly Pit, it was quite natural that all six should journey westward, together.

Mr. Dalken and the Ashbys came to see the friends off, and as the parent Latimers and Evans were with their boys to the last, there was a large merry party to accompany the travelers to the Pullman.

“Don’t be surprised to see me bring the Ashbys to Pebbly Pit in my touring car,

some fine day, soon,” announced Mr. Dalken.

“Oh, that would be lovely!” cried Polly, eagerly.

“And leave Ruth with us for the Summer?” added Eleanor.

“Yes, yes, Daddy—I’d love to spend my vacation with Polly and Eleanor at the ranch!” exclaimed Ruth Ashby.

“Where would you put us all—even if we did come?” asked Mrs. Ashby, who had heard of the limitations of the ranch-house.

“Oh, you forget! John writes that we will be surprised to find the marvelous work that has gone on at the Cliffs. Not only is the great road down through the Devil’s Causeway completed for heavy traffic, but rows and rows of buildings back of the Imps are ready for occupancy, the moment the machinery is set up for work on the lava. If the miners have not yet taken possession of the barracks we could invite loads of people to visit the ranch.”

Polly spoke eagerly, and her eyes shone as she beheld her friends enjoying the Brewster hospitality.

Everyone laughed at her anxiety to have them visit her, and Mr. Dalken promised: “I’ll do my best to bring my friends, Polly.”

A quizzical look in his eyes suddenly caused Polly to remember the valentine she had sent him. She smiled back at him, but as suddenly another thought flashed into her mind.

“Oh, Mr. Dalken, I’ve wanted to ask you for the *longest* time! Now that it is ancient history, you won’t mind confessing, will you?”

Mr. Dalken shook his head as a concession to her eager look. And Polly continued: “*Did* you send me those American Beauties’ valentine?”

A roar greeted this question, as everyone of the grown-ups had asked the same question of Mr. Dalken months before. And Mr. Dalken not only repudiated any knowledge of the valentine but told how he had visited the florist and had not been able to ascertain who the Cupid really was.

“Polly, I will confess, as they say that open confession is good for the soul. I was guilty of sending four boxes of flowers to the Studio on Valentine Day, to four charming friends, but I showed no partiality, I think, in the bouquets. I would like to know, myself, who the Cupid was who sent such gorgeous roses as you received.”

“I wonder! I’m sure it wasn’t Jim,” here Polly looked searchingly at the young student, and he shook his head laughingly.

“I couldn’t have, had I wanted to. My pocket money went for that love-sonnet that was so harshly condemned,” said he.

“And I’m sure Ken never dreamed of doing it. Then there is Mr. Latimer and the doctor—they are both innocent, I know, as they never think of anything other than the old patented jewel cutter.”

As Polly explained thus in earnest tones, everyone laughed at the two men so calmly criticised for their absorption in patents.

“So I am inclined to believe it was my *own* Daddy. He always did send me the cutest valentines each year, and I received no card from him this year—so that is who it was!” declared Polly.

“And the only kind of a Cupid to have, these days, Polly,” approved Mr. Dalken. But the happy circle standing on the platform of the train-shed were now notified that the passengers must get on as the train would leave in a few moments.

Good-bys were said, hands shaken, kisses wafted from the girls to the group remaining in New York, and then the travelers were gone.

Scarcely had the train slowed up in the Chicago Terminal before John and Tom Latimer were on board, pushing a way through the Pullmans, in search of familiar faces.

“There they are—there comes John!” cried Polly, excitedly, jumping up and pointing to the other end of the coach.

“Oh—!” sighed Anne, flushing joyously as her glance rested upon her fiancé.

But John had no eyes for anyone but Anne. Polly was left standing with hands out-stretched, her whole soul quivering with anticipation of her beloved brother’s greeting, and now he forgot she was alive! Then Paul Stewart and Pete Maynard ran in.

Mrs. Stewart was embraced by Paul, and Pete hugged his sister Eleanor. Tom Latimer stood a pace apart, his features working desperately to control his feelings as he saw John joyously scanning Anne’s face, and Polly limply sitting down in the parlor chair. Then he quickly went over and greeted her.

“Polly, and you boys”—turning to Jim and Kenneth—“we sure are happy to see you-all again. My, what a change New York has made in you. I see quite a

wonderful young lady, where once I remember my little ranch pal with pigtails.” Tom tried to laugh merrily.

Kenneth suddenly launched into a silly conversation to cheer Polly. But Polly never could dissimulate, and she was too deeply hurt at her brother’s neglect to pretend to be merry. John, however, now turned to embrace and kiss his sister, and evidently had had no thought of neglecting her.

“Come, children, we must get out or we’ll be carried to the round-house,” suggested Jim Latimer, taking up certain bags.

Once on the platform where Mr. Maynard welcomed them, Tom said: “When do Ken and you go on to Denver?”

“On the next train, leaving here at two. That gives us an hour and a half with you.”

“Anyone want dinner, or did you eat on the train?” now asked Paul Stewart.

“All dined, but now waiting for someone to suggest a party for Ken and I, as we go on in a little while,” said Jim.

“Here!” offered Mr. Maynard. “Pile into taxis and we’ll be at the house in a jiffy. No place like home when there’s no other place to go to.”

So, laughing, the entire party bundled itself into cabs, John managing to get Anne and her luggage to himself. Immediately, he signalled the driver to start off.

Mr. Maynard, Paul and Mrs. Stewart got in another cab and Jim, Ken, and Eleanor in another. That left Polly and Tom Latimer, with the remaining bags, to get in the last taxi. It was all done in such noisy confusion, that no one dreamed how one clever manager had so manipulated matters as to have Polly alone in the last cab.

“Well, Polly, I hear you are soaring in your ambition. Mr. Fabian wrote me how interested he was in Nolla and you.”

“Oh, did the dear man write you? I didn’t know he and you corresponded.”

“I took a great fancy to the idealist, and having always loved art for itself, I told him I would consider it a great pleasure if he would exchange letters with me when he had the opportunity. He has done better for me than I had any right to expect. He writes the most interesting letters—just as clever as his talks on art.”

Having found a willing listener in Tom, Polly expanded on her private opinion of

such a wonderful teacher as Mr. Fabian was, and before the taxi drew up in front of the Maynard's brown-stone mansion, Tom had the comforting assurance that Polly had quite forgotten her brother John's unintentional neglect.

Jim and Ken enjoyed their hasty visit and then took their departure to catch their train going west. When Mrs. Maynard and Barbara dispensed tea, the three young men, John, Tom and Paul, had to enter into service for the hostess; but they would greatly have preferred to enjoy their time as each inclined—John alone with Anne in the conservatory, Tom and Polly talking art, and Paul making merry with Eleanor.

Barbara, who a year ago would have resented oblivion for herself, now smiled contentedly and gazed upon a huge solitaire.

"Bob, shall we announce it?" whispered her mother.

"No, they do not know Percival, and, moreover, not one of these people appreciate his social standing."

So the young people now gathered about Mrs. Maynard's tea-table were deprived (so Bob thought) of the greatest event of the past social season—her engagement to one of the most aristocratic and wealthiest eligibles on the market, Percival Weston.

Barbara twirled her solitaire smilingly, nor cared that her Percival was bald and diminutive, past the prime in life, and not over-brilliant. Had he not been the catch at Newport the previous Summer? And had he not attached himself to her as soon as she appeared in the Adirondack Camp presided over by the famous society leader of New York?

CHAPTER XIII—BACK AGAIN AT PEBBLY PIT

“Oh, Nolla! Isn’t this great after old New York?” cried Polly, as they were all jostled in the big ranch-wagon driven by Mr. Brewster, as it rumbled over the trail to Pebbly Pit.

“We-all think it’s great, Poll; but wait till you see what your going to New York did to the old Pit! No one to blame for it but yourself,” laughed her father.

“We heard there was a row of buildings down behind the Imps, and that a fine roadway was constructed through the Devil’s Causeway,” said Polly, eagerly.

“But no one told you how John and Tom came here as soon as college closed, and brought a railroad man with them to see about building a spur from Bear Forks to the valley at the foot of Grizzly Slide. It’s twenty miles nearer Denver than Oak Creek, so the company agreed to risk the work if Pebbly Pit would guarantee a certain amount of travel and freight over the road.”

“Well—did you, Daddy?” asked Polly, eagerly.

“Tom Latimer did. Agreed to put up bonds for same.”

“Tom? Why Tom Latimer?” asked Eleanor.

“Oh, Tom is mighty ambitious, you know, and seems as if he liked this section better than the East. However, it is Tom we-all can thank for that new railroad. When you-all come home next year, you-all will be riding over your own tracks.” Mr. Brewster chuckled.

“Is Tom going to join that crew of engineers that John and he were with last year?” now asked Eleanor.

“No, indeed! Tom and John will be right here with us this summer. We-all need their help in working out the problems of the mine and Rainbow Cliffs,” responded Sam Brewster.

“I don’t suppose we’ll see a bit of John as long as Anne and her mother remain in Denver, visiting their old friends,” pouted Polly, jealously.

Her father glanced slyly at her, and smiled. He felt sorry for his little girl who had always felt that her brother John was her own personal property. Now that someone claimed first love and attention from him it was mighty hard for her, as well as for Mrs. Brewster.

“Ah should wonder at John if he failed in gallantry to his sweetheart,” was all Sam Brewster said aloud.

“Oh! Everyone makes me tired! Anyone’d think Anne Stewart was a saint. She’s only a girl the same as Nolla, or me. And no one is found going mad over either one of *us*!” cried Polly, pettishly.

Eleanor laughed. “Give us a few years and then see!”

Polly curled her lip impatiently. “A few years from now and I’ll be in Europe with dear old Fabian, studying art. I won’t want attention from anyone, then.”

“Seems to me,” ventured Mr. Brewster, gently, “my little girl is hankering for homage or a beau—which is it?”

Polly stared aghast. “Neither one! How dare you say so.”

“You-all were speaking of attention.”

“But I was only thinking of *John*. He’ll have Anne for a wife all his life long—after next year. But he won’t have *me* after I finish school.”

In spite of the tearful tone, Mr. Brewster had to laugh. “Don’t waste your time on John, Polly girl. Let me make up for him and be your devoted attendant. Ah’ll always be at your beck and call!”

“Oh, Dad! That reminds me!” exclaimed Polly, turning square around to face her father, and forgetting her recent misery over John. “*How* did you ever manage about that rose valentine you sent me?”

Sam Brewster let the reins dangle recklessly as he, in turn, stared at his daughter. “What valentine?”

Polly winked roguishly and laughed. “You can’t pull the wool over my eyes, Daddy. I’ve spent a whole year in New York to some advantage, you see. I have seen lots of such feigned innocence as yours.”

“But honest, Poll, Ah don’t even know what you-all are talking about; Ah got your sweet valentine, and so did maw.”

Polly frowned at her father. “Didn’t you wire to a florist in New York and order a dozen great roses for my valentine? And tie the two hearts pierced by a golden

arrow, about the center of the flower-stems?”

“Positively, this is the first word Ah’ve heard of it!” declared Sam Brewster so emphatically, that the girls believed him.

“Now, Polly, the hunt is narrowing down,” laughed Eleanor. “We know it was no one in New York, and it wasn’t Jim or Ken. Your father says he didn’t do it, so it leaves only a few more to ask.”

Suddenly Polly clasped her hands. Her face was radiant. “Why, of course! How could I forget? It was dear old John! He, too, always remembered me on Valentine Day.” Then turning to her father, and shaking a finger at him, she added: “But you didn’t remember me, this year, bad man.”

“Tell truth, Polly, there was so much to think about and so much to do, over the buildings and mines, that Ah clean forgot there ever was such a day, until I got your card. Then I felt sorry.”

“Well, thank goodness, John remembered!” sighed Polly. And Eleanor noticed that she smiled again in forgiveness of her brother’s shortcomings.

When the wagon stopped at the porch of the ranch-house, Eleanor laughed: “Just as we drove up last year—but oh, how different this year!”

Mrs. Brewster hurried out to welcome her dear girls, and laughed at Eleanor’s remark. “Still making Irish bulls, Nolla!”

They all laughed merrily, and then Sary rushed from her kitchen, and clasped Polly to her ample bosom. Eleanor came in for her share of the maid’s embrace before she had to hurry back to the dinner.

“Ah’s e cookin’ cabbige soup, Miss Nolla,” she explained.

“Why, Sary, that first night we were here last summer, you had ‘cabbage’ soup, too!”

“We-all has to hev it once a week reg’ler now, ’cause Jeb loves it, an’ he is a foreman, you know.” Sary’s pride in her spouse’s promotion was most evident.

While Polly and her mother cozily sat together on the porch and smiled happily to be in each other’s company, once more, Eleanor walked to the barns with Mr. Brewster. She had an object in view, and she never delayed in finding out what she wanted to know, should the opportunity come and offer itself to her.

“Mr. Brewster, do tell me honestly—*did* you send the roses, or do you know who did send them to Polly?”

“Nolla, Ah never heard of them until to-day. Ah’m as curious as you, to know who sent them. What were they like, anyway?”

“Well, you must know, Mr. Brewster, that American Beauty roses like they were, cost a small fortune in New York, at that time of the year. Each one of those roses cost not less than five or six dollars. And the trinket that was bound to the stems was not a cheap thing, either. In fact, the chain was of fine, gold-plated links, and the arrows were gold-plated, too. It was an imported curio.”

“By the Great Horned Spoon! Roses that cost like that! Why, they wilted, didn’t they?” gasped Sam Brewster.

Eleanor laughed merrily. “Sure thing! But we kept them as long as possible. That is just where the joy comes in of getting costly roses—they wilt. And anyone, who will spend that much money on one, must think a heap of her first—see?”

Mr. Brewster stood stock-still. He caught at Eleanor’s arm. “Ah’ve got it!”

“What—who?” Eleanor was breathless in her eagerness.

“Find the silly swain that’s making eyes at my Polly, and you’ve caught the rascal who sent the roses.”

Eleanor screamed with laughter. “Oh, you’re funny! But isn’t that exactly what everyone’s been doing?”

“Oh—have they?”

“Sure! I learned that Mr. Fabian tried to find out who the fellow was. And then Mr. Dalken wanted to know. The Latimers and Evans put Jim and Ken through the third degree, but no one confessed to it. Now do *you* believe John sent them?”

“I do not!” was the positive reply.

“Neither do I! Because John sent Anne a bunch of roses for *her* valentine but they were only seven dollars. She got a dozen, the usual short-stemmed Bride Roses. He wouldn’t dare send his sister such gorgeous ones and only give his fiancée cheaper ones.”

Sam Brewster smiled at his companion. “Nolla, you’re a wise little owl.”

“Anyone would be, after having had the social training that was fed to me from the bottle up!”

Mr. Brewster laughed at this, and Eleanor then said: “Guess I’ll be going back, now, Mr. Brewster. I wanted to know your opinion about John and the roses.”

“Wait, Nolla. Have you any answer to it yourself?”

“U—m, yes—I have a sort of a suspicion. But it isn’t fair to anyone to even hint at it. So don’t ask me.”

“This much you might answer, however, seeing that Ah’m Polly’s father and the most concerned in the beaux she has. Do you fancy it might have been your brother Pete?”

“*Pete!*” The very tone made Mr. Brewster smile as he saw that Eleanor had never thought of him. “Anyway, Pete and Poll hardly know each other.”

“Ah wonder if it could have been Paul Stewart—he seemed dreadfully attentive to her that time when we-all were visiting you-all in New York.” Mr. Brewster watched Eleanor shrewdly.

“I just guess it *wasn’t* Paul! He sent me a lovely card for a valentine; and while we were home in Chicago, I asked him about flowers. He never thought to wire a florist about sending me any flowers, he said. So I know Paul hadn’t anything to do with it.”

“Ah! Well, Nolla, now we know who he was, eh?” laughed Sam Brewster, tweaking Eleanor’s ear and hastening away to the barns.

Eleanor stood watching him. Then she laughed softly: “He sure did put one over on me, that time!”

As she walked slowly back to the ranch-house she soliloquized to herself. “That’s just who it was. Gee! It’s almost as fine as having a romance of my very own. But Polly doesn’t want it so.

“All the same, when John and Tom come down here, I’m going to tease Tom about the wonderful roses Polly’s brother sent her. Then we’ll see what we’ll see!”

Eleanor could keep her own counsel as well as Sam Brewster, but the two exchanged wise looks, now and then, when no one was watching. Still, never a word was said again on the rose subject.

A week after the two girls got home, the others in the party came down from Denver. Mrs. Stewart was to be Mrs. Brewster’s guest that Summer, Eleanor was Polly’s, and Anne said she was John’s visitor. Then Tom Latimer laughed and said: “I’ll have to be Mr. Brewster’s pal.”

“I can promise you that you won’t have your head turned by any pretty school-girl, Tom, if you are *my* guest,” chuckled Sam Brewster.

Eleanor giggled, Tom blushed, but the others laughed at such a speech.

Plans had been made to take a three-day trip up over Top Notch Trail, and inspect the progress on the mine, but Mrs. Brewster and her guest would remain at home, by preference.

The merry cavalcade started out, Polly on her beloved Noddy as usual, and Eleanor on Choko. The others rode their horses, and Jeb led an extra horse with the packs.

There was no planned order in riding; first one girl would have one of the escort, and then another would ride up and “cut in” to urge the other onward. Thus everyone was laughing and teasing and talking merrily until they reached the falls on top of the mountains. Here, where Polly had caught the trout, the year before, they all had dinner.

“My goodness! Folks in New York never know what they miss by never coming to the Rockies,” declared Polly, her eyes wandering to the far-off line of mountain-ranges.

“And folks who live near these mountains are never happy until they get to New York,” remarked Mr. Brewster.

Polly laughed. “Oh, that is when one needs education. I have always had too *much* mountain and not enough of other good things. But now that I am tasting a little of everything, I like my mountains as well as anything I’ve seen.”

“D’ye think you-all will stay at home after this?” eagerly asked her father.

“Double no!” affirmed Polly, emphatically.

Everyone laughed at the expressive slang, and Polly added: “At least, not until I have seen Europe, year after next, and tried a hand in my profession. Maybe—if I fall in love, some day—I’ll come back to Pebbly Pit to raise my family.”

John Brewster thought this so funny that he ha-ha-haed loudly, but the others smiled doubtfully. Eleanor could not help sending a swift look at Tom Latimer to see how he received the information. But Tom was scrambling to his feet, so his face could not be observed. Eleanor glanced away from him to Sam Brewster, and saw the latter with a twinkle cornering his eyes as he noticed Tom’s awkward movement.

“U—m!” muttered Eleanor. “I’ve got your number, Tom Latimer!” But no one overheard her whispered thought.

As the riders proceeded on their way, Paul Stewart said: “I don’t see why you

folks should think this such a tough trail. I consider it rather broad and good.”

“Humph! It’s a highway these days, what with all the riding up and down. But last year you wouldn’t have been able to see any thing but trees and rocks,” Polly returned.

It was as Polly said: almost as clear a trail as any woodland road. At Four-Mile-Blaze where the girls were well-nigh lost on their first ride over the trail, there now was a good but narrow bridle-path. Thence it was easy going up the steep side to Grizzly Slide.

“W-ell! See the crowd of men working up there? And hear the sound of tools and machinery!” exclaimed Polly, as she rode out of the screening forest, and came to a man-made clearing.

“Of all things! Trees chopped down and turned into huts; an army of workmen living here as if they belonged,” added Eleanor.

“We are blasting and clearing away the rubble that hides your mine. We had both ends working a few weeks ago, but now we are trying to drop a shaft from the top,” said Mr. Brewster.

The visitors camped at the miners’ settlement, that night, and the next day the girls were taken about to see the great progress made according to the plans to mine the ore.

A cable-road was being built from Choko’s Cave down the steep mountain-side, to the valley, and this was to be used to carry the ore-cars up and down. As the girls stood on top of the ledge that overhung the cave, they could look straight down the awesome mountain-side, where the forest had been cleared for the cable-line.

“It looks as if it all cost a heap of money,” said Polly.

She had been so engaged in looking at the change wrought in her beloved mountain, that she failed to see that the others had wandered away. But someone stood behind her. She felt it. As no reply came to her statement, she turned and found Tom Latimer waiting for her.

“Oh, where are the others?”

“Gone over to the other side where the underground river comes out, you know.”

“I was saying, Tom, that this must have taken a lot of money.”

“More than we figured on, but once we begin to get out the ore, it will roll back

four-fold.”

Polly was impressed, but still wondered “Where did all the money come from, Tom?”

“Stocks. We wanted to keep most of the Capital for you and the first owners, you know; but investors wouldn’t put up so much money without a vote. So we had to sell out some of the voting shares. That’s where Mr. Dalken came in—he bought a big block of your stock, and it is his money that’s doing this.”

“I think he is the nicest man! I used to think he sent me a wonderful bunch of American Beauty roses for a valentine, but I only learned the other day that it was John! Wasn’t it funny?”

Tom laughed with Polly, and said: “What made you think Mr. Dalken sent them?”

“Oh, something happened once to Nolla and me, in New York that nobody knows—so don’t you go and tell on us, Tom!” Polly waited anxiously to get Tom’s promise, then she proceeded.

“And Mr. Dalken happened along in time to save us from the beasts. After that he made us use his small automobile when we went to night-school. We were awfully grateful to him for it.

“Then when Valentine Day came along, I suggested to Nolla that we send him a lovely card telling him how good he was to us. I sent it, and late that night the roses came. I felt sure, all the time, that he sent them; I thought he had forgotten it was Valentine Day until after my card reached him. I always wondered why he didn’t put Nolla’s name on the card, too, as well as mine. But now I know he never sent them.”

“Does John know you’ve found him out?” asked Tom.

“No, not yet; but some day I’ll tease him about it.”

“Don’t! let him think you are still trying to guess who sent the roses. It will tickle him to pieces to believe you think it is an ardent admirer of yours.” Tom laughed merrily with Polly at the very idea.

“That’s just what I will! And you and I will sometimes pretend *you* sent the roses to me, and then we will watch John’s face. Maybe he will up and tell the truth!” added Polly.

“No, I doubt it. You see, Polly, John is a wonderful actor, and one never knows just what he thinks. If he managed to keep a close mouth to me, his best friend,

all this time, it must be because he didn't want Anne to find out he sent you such roses."

Then the two conspirators walked back to join the others, but Polly and Tom felt that they had a good joke between them, thereafter.

CHAPTER XIV—ANOTHER YEAR AT SCHOOL

The summer vacation passed quickly for Polly and Eleanor, and September came in with wonderful Autumn weather, when riding and mountain-climbing were just the thing. However, all such outings ended to plan for the return to New York.

A letter had arrived from Mr. Fabian, in which he spoke of his delightful visit with his wife and daughter. They had gone to various places in Europe and England, inspecting and studying all the famous old works of art, and the ancient buildings that made fitting caskets for these rare curios.

“When I read this letter, of all Mr. Fabian has done with his Summer, I feel guilty,” said Polly to her friend, Nolla.

“Why should you? We had to rest and drop all idea of study so’s to be fresh for this year’s work. Didn’t we do it?”

“Yes, we rested, all right, Nolla; but it seems we might have done some of the work we planned to do, before we left New York. There is that chest with our colors, paper and other things—we never as much as unlocked it.”

“Polly, I can paint any sort of drapery you want, and in any light or shadow. I can paint a vase, a chair or a lamp; I can draw a hall, or a room, or a window. What more do you want? Why should we sit down and make loads of these things all summer, when we know how to do the work, already?”

“I don’t know, Nolla, except that we ought to practise!”

“Pooh! I’m ready for all the work they want to pile up on me, now and I’m glad I’ve been so lazy all summer.”

“To tell the truth, Nolla, *I* am more than ready to work with all my heart. I feel as if I would dry up if I played any more,” admitted Polly, laughingly.

With this desire to again take up their studies in New York, the girls left Pebbly Pit the second week in September. By the last of the month, they were eagerly planning with Mr. Fabian for the new year’s school work in art and decoration.

“I have a pleasant surprise for you, girls,” announced Mr. Fabian, after greetings were exchanged. They all sat under the locust tree in the little yard of the Studio.

““On with the dance,”” laughed Eleanor.

“As you know, I landed in New York the first week of September, and found most of my friends still away in the country. But Mr. Dalken was in evidence, as ever, eager to offer me his hospitality, until I located for the Winter.

“We sat in the medieval library of his apartment, and I remarked, casually, at the unusual size of his rooms.

““Yes,’ replied he. ‘That’s the advantage of leasing one of the old-fashioned apartments not so far uptown. One gets the benefit of being near the center of activities in the city, and at the same time one can have the great rooms once occupied by the old gentry of the town.’

““What a splendid room for gatherings,’ I said, never dreaming of his inspiration.

““Seeing that you are looking for a suitable room in which to conduct your little private class of art decorators, why not use this library? I have all kinds of reference books in the cases and I am so seldom at home in the early part of the evening that you will be undisturbed.’

“I was astonished, as you may imagine, and I said, ‘But, Mr. Dalken, we couldn’t think of using this room and the apartment, without some return for your kindness.’

“He laughed. ‘What do I want of rent or its equivalent? I am only too glad to do you and those charming students of yours a good turn. You see, I still owe Polly and Eleanor a great balance which can never be paid. Were it not for those two girls I would not have a child—even though I seldom see my little one.’

“I felt that he was so earnest about the offer that I said we would talk it over with Mr. Ashby and let him judge. Not that I did not see the advantage of using the rooms, but I wanted an impartial friend of Mr. Dalken’s to decide whether or no he might regret the generous offer, later; and then not care to tell us that we bothered him with our regular classes three nights a week.

“So we visited the Ashbys the following evening, and to my amazement, Mr. Ashby was enthusiastic over the plan. He said: ‘Now you’ve started out right, Dalk, and to prove how much I think of your offer, I am going to have Ruth join the class this year—if Mr. Fabian will take her. It might be rather nice to have Elizabeth join the class, also, even though she may not show any talent for the work.’

“‘Now, Ashby, you must pardon me if I speak frankly,’ Mr. Dalken then said. ‘One of the main reasons for Mr. Fabian’s resignation from Cooper, and giving all his valuable time to a small class, is to urge those talented ones forward. If my little girl, who detests application to study of any sort, were to join this class, the basic idea would be ruined. The class would be held back by one delinquent. But I appreciate your motive in suggesting a way that I might enjoy the companionship of Elizabeth so often, without the tyranny and incompatibility of her mother’s temper.’

“Mr. Ashby colored, as he thought he had been diplomatic in his hint,” concluded Mr. Fabian. “So now it is settled that Ruth Ashby joins our art class, this year, and we will meet at Mr. Dalken’s rooms for our work. That is nice for you girls, as it is only a short walk of a few blocks from the Studio.”

“Nice for us—why, it is just scrumptious!” exclaimed Eleanor.

“And such a wonderful environment as that library, will give us inspiration, too,” added Polly. “I never *did* see such a kind man as Mr. Dalken! If I had my way to accomplish it, I’d shower all the joys and successes in heaven or earth upon his generous heart.”

“He *is* great and good, and it seems as if justice must be sleeping, when such a man must suffer alone because of a silly moth of a wife. If he would only hearken to his friends and seek freedom from such galling bonds! but he doesn’t think divorce ever righted a wrong, and he still hopes he can bring Mrs. Dalken to a sense of her family-obligations and gratitude, for all she has been so unselfishly given. Poor fellow!” Mr. Fabian shook his head despondently over their benefactor’s future.

“Polly and I never knew what was the trouble in the Dalken family, Mr. Fabian, but what we have seen and known of our dear friend, I’m sure that *he* was never to blame for it,” said Eleanor, defensively.

“I never care to gossip or to repeat a story, children, but now I think you ought to know why Mr. Dalken lives alone so much as he does. If we are to use his rooms, you must know what a magnificent character he is, and then should you hear any disagreeable gossip that can be traced to his wife, you will understand the situation.”

“Whatever you say, Mr. Fabian, will never be repeated by either Nolla or me,” promised Polly, solemnly.

“I know it, that is why I feel I ought to tell you.

“Mr. Dalken, as you know, is a descendant of one of the oldest Dutch Settlers in America. His family, from olden times down to the present day, were patriotic and loyal Americans. He is as staunch an American as you will find, anywhere.

“Mrs. Dalken was a poor girl, and not over-brilliant. But Mr. Dalken admired her prettiness when she was a young miss, and when he was but a slip of a youth. They went to entertainments together in the small town where they both lived, and enjoyed each other’s company for two or three years.

“Then the young man went to college and saw the world. He realized how superficial Amy Lathrop was, and as time went by, he would have forgotten her completely, had she not kept up her side of the correspondence. And gradually a suggestive note crept into her letters.

“When his college days were over, young Dalken returned to his birth-place to settle the country estate that was his. Then he met Amy again, and she found him so chivalrous that it was an easy matter to give him to understand that she had waited for him these five years—that she had been the soul of faithfulness.

“Without consulting his friends, or mentioning the matter to others in the town, he became engaged to her on the claim from her, that it had so been understood before he went to college.

“Well, they were married, one day, and then our poor friend’s martyrdom began. Amy Dalken was of no use in anything or in any way. True, she had two children, but it may have been much better had she never become a mother. She had no affection for them or the father, and only thought of spending money and enjoying herself to the utmost.

“Dalken was wealthy before he married Amy, and his alert mind coupled with his unusual foresightedness in finance soon rolled up fortunes for him. His wife spent money like water, and was sought after by the vultures of society—those who fawn and fondle as long as they can get something out of the victim.

“Mrs. Dalken’s balls and bridge-parties were famous—I might say, notorious—for at the former the extravagance was a matter of newspaper comment, and at the latter, the stakes were so high that others lifted their eyebrows at the losses and gains.

“Little Billie Dalken was eighteen months old, and the joy of our good friend’s life, when a dreadful thing happened. Billie was a chubby, handsome little chap exactly like his father—the same intelligent brown eyes, the same fine features, and he was unusually clever and large for his age.

“Mr. Dalke had been called to Washington on business one day, and that same day his wife was about to give a grand dinner and bridge, later. There were plenty of servants in the household, but on such an occasion everyone was busy with the extra work. Billie’s own nurse gave him his supper and was about to put him to bed when she discovered a wheezing sound in his throat. She feared another attack of croup. She was about to apply the remedies she knew of, when Mrs. Dalke’s maid came to the nursery.

“‘The mistress says you are to go to her at once and I am to sit with the baby for a while. She wants her head massaged because it aches so!’

“And the nurse answered as she thought proper, ‘Go and tell your mistress that Billie has a bad cold and I must remain to take care of him.’

“The maid tossed her head and left the room. She hadn’t any desire to remain with a baby, especially if it was wheezing and beginning to cough. So she may have exaggerated the reply somewhat. However, that did not excuse Mrs. Dalke from her next act. She was furious and sent the butler to the nursery to pay off the nurse and see that she left the house at once!

“Then she sent the parlor-maid to sit in the nursery with the child. That dinner was a great success, but just before the card-party began, the maid sent down word that Mrs. Dalke was to come up to the nursery at once, and see what ailed the baby—he was so red in the face and had a fever, she said.

“Mrs. Dalke whispered a reply: ‘I’ll be up as soon as I can get the tables started.’ Then she never gave it another thought.

“Three times during that evening the frightened parlor-maid sent down for the mother to come up. And three times the hostess smiled and nodded and then forgot all about the call. Before midnight, the boy began choking and gagging and the hysterical maid ran back and forth hoping to find the butler, or someone, who would help in this extremity.

“Every servant in the house was busy serving drinks, cards, or cigarettes, and none had time to call up a doctor. Then the daring maid telephoned for a doctor she knew. But he lived so far uptown that it took half an hour to arrive at the house.

“Before he got there, little Billie Dalke was sleeping in the last long rest. No one was with him but the parlor-maid when he strangled to death; but the awful contortions of his face and body showed the suffering he endured during the convulsions.

“Mr. Dalken came home early in the morning, the Washington business having been successfully consummated without any loss of time. It was not yet seven o’clock, but everyone in the house seemed astir. The heavy fumes of smoke and the aftermath of a riotous night’s play were evident throughout the first floor rooms. He smiled sardonically at it all, then rushed upstairs two steps at a time to peep at his beloved children.

“Elizabeth was weeping fearfully in her little crib that stood in the room connecting with the nursery. The moment she saw her father she screamed with relief.

“‘Oh, Daddy! Billie’s so twisted and queer—and he won’t answer when I call him.’

“Poor Dalken had a sudden premonition of catastrophe and rushed into the nursery. He almost collapsed at what he saw there. A strange woman was about to take up the stiff little form and do for it what a loving mother should reverently insist upon doing.

“The father, with a broken heart, took his beloved boy and prepared him for his last resting-place. All through the three days elapsing after the night of Billie’s death, Mrs. Dalken remained locked in her boudoir, her maid seeing that the smelling salts were handy whenever her lady called for them. Between the visits of condolence from her intimates, and the fittings of the deep mourning, the mother was kept too busy to meet her husband, or watch with the remains of her baby.

“But after the funeral (that also buried most of Dalken’s joy in living) he insisted upon a serious talk with his butterfly wife. She promised everything, even to giving up her gambling games, if he would but refrain from the publicity of the cause of Billie’s death and the subsequent separation. She used her sharpest weapon to gain her point—Elizabeth.

“So several more months went by, but the poor man was a mere money-machine in his own home. Even his little daughter began to believe that society was everything, and love or home-ties only a necessity that interfered with one’s pet pleasures and freedom.

“Without consulting her husband, Mrs. Dalken planned to visit Europe with a party of friends. To keep her grasp on her money-supplier she took Elizabeth with her. A nurse looked after the girl. She remained abroad for more than a year, and when she returned she went directly to a fashionable hotel instead of seeing that her home was reopened in New York.

“She had ordered everything swathed and packed for the time she was abroad, and had left but two rooms livable for the owner and master of the magnificent dwelling.

“Dalken lived there in gloomy sorrow for a few months and finally his friends insisted upon his going to the Club where he could meet cheerful companions and stop brooding over his irreparable loss.

“Mrs. Dalken was in no hurry to reopen her home, and all that Winter she remained at the hotel, while her husband stopped at his club. She allowed him to call upon her two or three times a week, when others were present, and she not only accepted all the checks he offered her, but ran up fearful debts everywhere. He was permitted to take Elizabeth out at certain times, but Mrs. Dalken was clever enough to keep hold on the girl, as she knew it was her only hope of keeping her clutch on her provider.

“Just after the Holidays, that season, she went to Palm Beach, but she entered Elizabeth in a boarding school out of the city. Dalken tried, in many ways, to learn where his child was, but he had no success in his search.

“Then he wired his wife that she must turn over the girl to him while she was running around, or he would instantly stop her income and sue her for desertion. Then she came back to New York and took Elizabeth out of school again, but matters got worse and worse for poor Dalken. Finally his dear friends, who loved him for what he was and is, persuaded him to sue for a legal separation. They hoped Mrs. Dalken would turn over the girl whom she had no natural love for, to the father, as a hostage.

“But she was a wise woman, by this time. She accepted the separation without demur, but refused to give up Elizabeth. It was then agreed that the girl might choose which one of the parents she preferred to live with. Having had so many years of life with her mother, the girl became like her—selfish, vain, and arrogant. No love or gratitude was found in her character.

“Just at this time, Mr. Dalken was taken very ill, and his mother (who is a dear, you will find, when you meet her) came from England to nurse him. He was ill for more than a year, so Elizabeth chose to remain with her mother for the time being.

“Mrs. Dalken, Senior, took her only child back to England with her, as soon as he could travel, and there she kept him well-nursed and cared for, in her cousin’s English country-house, until he had regained his strength and fairly good health. Then mother and son went to the Continent to visit the scenes of the famous

battle-fields, and then on to the Riviera for a month.

“The wise mother knew that taking Mr. Dalken’s thoughts from his own miserable state, and making him think of other’s woes, would the sooner brace him up to face his life-problem. And so it was.

“Elizabeth elected to remain with her frivolous mother but Mr. Dalken supports her handsomely, and often bribes her to spend an afternoon or evening with him, by having a valuable gift awaiting her coming. Mr. Ashby, and other friends, have advised Dalken against this pernicious way of baiting the inclinations of the girl, but he says they do not know his heart-hunger, and so cannot judge his actions.”

“Oh, Mr. Fabian! Our poor, dear Mr. Dalken!” sobbed Polly, when the speaker had ended his story.

“If I ever meet that horrid woman I shall tear her hair out, I know I shall!” wept Eleanor, vehemently.

“If only we could do something, Nolla, to make up to our dear Dalk, for all his sorrow,” sighed Polly, drying her eyes.

“You can love him the more for this story, girls, but do not refer to it, as he is still tender over his loss.”

CHAPTER XV—THE FOUNDLING

The sad story told the girls, about their friend Mr. Dalken, filled them with love and compassion for the great-hearted man, and they wondered how they could do *something* for him that would not only show their appreciation of his kindness to them, but at the same time give him pleasure or happiness. But there seemed no material thing that he needed, and really, nothing that one could do for him.

“There must be times when he sits alone brooding over his boy and how different things might have been had he married a different type of woman,” remarked Eleanor, one evening, after leaving their new class-room.

“Yes; but it seems to me he should have been able to see through such a shallow thing as that woman must have been, when he returned from college and found her apparently waiting for him,” Polly replied.

“But he’s so tender-hearted, you see, he couldn’t bear to give her any pain or trouble. That must have been the only reason why he allowed her to get him.”

“I suppose so. Why, even now, he is an easy prey to the scheming people who know he has barrels of money, and who simply pretend to be friendly for what they can get out of him.”

“It’s too bad he can’t be satisfied with just Mr. Ashby and Mr. Fabian for man friends, and we few women for his women friends,” mused Eleanor. “We’d love him for himself.”

Polly smiled. “Wouldn’t you and I give him a gay time—with high-school keeping us employed every week-day, and art class every other night in the week, to say nothing of lectures, exhibitions, and other things that Mr. Fabian has us do, in line with our work.”

The two girls had crossed Madison and Fourth avenues by this time, and were slowly walking down the street towards the Studio. It was a beautiful Fall night, and the moon was almost full, hence they were in no hurry to reach home and go indoors.

“I hear Anne singing—she must have company,” said Polly as they neared the house.

HE WAS A CHUBBY LITTLE FELLOW.
HE WAS A CHUBBY LITTLE FELLOW.

“Yes; the windows are open in the living-room, and I can peep under the shades and see Anne at the piano,” whispered Eleanor.

Just then the breeze wafted one of the shades back from the window, and the girls recognised Mrs. Evans and Mrs. Latimer as the guests of Anne.

“Let’s hurry in!” exclaimed Eleanor, suddenly turning from the front window and darting into the vestibule.

The outside door was open wide, and as Eleanor ran up the one step that raised the tiled entrance from the sidewalk, she stumbled over a soft bundle that seemed pushed against the wall.

By this time, Polly also reached the vestibule, but the inside door being closed and locked for protection, it was too dark in the vestibule for either of the girls to see what the huge bundle contained.

“It feels like a bundle of old clothes. Maybe some servant hid it here for a time—she may be going to come back for it,” observed Eleanor, prodding the bundle with her foot.

But to the surprise of both girls, a little squeal issued from the roll. In the semi-darkness, they stood spell-bound and gazed at each other.

“It’s a baby—of all things!” cried Polly, hastily trying the handle of the door.

“Ring—ring the bell like mad. I’ll pick it up!” Eleanor exclaimed, excitably.

“Open the door—Anne—hurry up! We’ve found a baby!” called Polly, leaning over the iron rail that projected over the area door, in front of the windows.

Both girls forgot that they had latch keys, but Mrs. Evans sat nearest the window where Polly stood, and quickly answered her call. Eleanor, meanwhile, had carefully picked up the rolled-up baby and, the moment the door was flung open, carried it indoors.

“Where did you find it?” exclaimed four amazed women.

“Right at our door—in the vestibule,” said Eleanor, placing her bundle on the divan and proceeding to open it.

“Wasn’t anyone in sight?” asked Mrs. Latimer, cautiously.

“Not that we noticed; but, of course, we never thought to look, when we found what was in the bundle,” explained Polly, nervously eager to assist Eleanor in what she was doing.

Before the swaddling blankets were released from the baby, it began to utter baby-talk. The females, grouped closely in front of the divan, smiled appreciatively.

Finally the last wrapper, which was of mosquito netting, came off, and there lay a chubby little fellow of about fifteen months. He had a fist in his mouth, and with the other dimpled hand he clutched at Polly’s hair as she leaned over him.

“Oh! Isn’t he a darling! He must belong to a neighbor!” exclaimed Mrs. Stewart.

“He certainly is not starved or poorly cared for,” added Mrs. Evans, with experienced voice.

“But he only has on his nightie! Not another stitch to be found,” said Anne, carefully rolling the baby over to see if he had any clothes under him.

“There’s a note—pinned on the blanket!” cried Polly, anxiously removing the pin and taking the paper over to the light.

“It says—just one word—‘Billy.’ Did you ever!” exclaimed Polly, glancing from one to the other of the friends who were waiting expectantly to hear about the boy.

“Let’s see!” demanded Eleanor, frowning at such a short explanation.

Polly handed the slip of paper to her friend and joined Anne at the divan where she was divesting the boy of his nightie to see if further clues might be found. About his fat neck was a very fine gold chain, and suspended from that was a tiny flat heart-shaped locket. It did not open, but on the plain gold face was a monogram of three letters: B— D— W—.

“Now we’ve got something to work on! ‘B’ stands for Billy, of course, but what can ‘D’ and ‘W’ mean?” Eleanor said excitedly.

“No child is christened ‘Billy,’” Anne contradicted. “He would be ‘William’—and that is what the ‘W’ is for. Children are nicknamed ‘Billy’ or ‘Willy’ later. Now his middle and last name must begin with the ‘B’ and ‘D’—or vice versa.”

“Shake out the blankets carefully—perhaps another paper is pinned to one of them,” said Polly, eagerly.

But there was no other message in the blankets.

“Let’s take off his flannel shirt! There may be something there,” ventured Mrs. Stewart.

In less than a minute, the pins were out and the woven shirt of Merino was removed, but no further information rewarded the anxious seekers. So the shirt was carefully replaced and the boy’s nightie slipped over his head again.

“It’s all hand-made of fine linen,” remarked Mrs. Latimer, as she felt of the hem at the bottom.

“And one can see that he is no slum child,” added Mrs. Evans.

“*Who* can he be? and why should anyone want to leave him?” were the perplexing questions Polly asked of the others.

They all shook their heads and wondered. But the boy had no use for such condolences; he crawled over the divan and when he found not what he was in search of, he screwed up his dimpled face and began a lusty call.

Anne instantly took him up and began to chirp to him. He smiled a cheerful thanks and showed eight little front teeth. That brought all his new friends to his feet—metaphorically speaking.

“*Isn’t* he a dear!” declared Mrs. Stewart to no one in particular.

“Yes, but we have to advertise him at once. It may be that a villain kidnapped him and ran away with him just to get a reward. He may have been seen, or chased by the police, and then dropped the baby in our vestibule,” said Mrs. Latimer.

Anne laughed. “Which analysis shows that one of us married a lawyer—Mrs. Latimer gives us good advice.”

“Or he may belong to a young mother who cannot longer earn a living for him,” added Mrs. Stewart.

“That’s not likely, mother,” returned Anne. “As the child would look thin and sickly if a mother found it hard to support it. I rather think it is a babe that belongs to some distracted mother in the neighborhood. He has evidently been put to bed for the night. Possibly a vindictive nurse-girl took him from his home to make his parents seek for him and then left him at the most convenient door.”

“Anne’s reason sounds the most plausible, and we’d better ’phone the police-stations at once. Billy’s parents may even now be wild with despair, for we do

not know how long he was in the vestibule. All we know is, he was not there when we came in, about eight o'clock," said Mrs. Evans.

So she telephoned the police-stations, near by, and also asked the morning papers to run a short notice under a suitable caption. Before she had finished this work, however, Master Billy began his complaints again, and now he was beginning to look as impatient as such a good-natured baby could.

"Maybe he's hungry?" suddenly suggested Mrs. Stewart.

"That's just what ails him—but we haven't any bottle!" exclaimed Mrs. Evans.

"Perhaps he drinks from a cup—he is old enough to have been weaned, you know," ventured Mrs. Latimer.

A cup of warmed milk was brought in short order, and Mrs. Stewart held it out to Anne, as she was still holding the baby. The moment Billy saw the cup, he almost leaped from Anne's arms, and immediately began gurgling for very glee.

Everyone laughed at his antics, and Anne was about to hold the cup to his lips, when two fat hands clutched at it in a hungry endeavor to reach the contents. Of course, part of the milk spilled on his nightie but the remainder he drank greedily.

"He's well-trained—whoever he is. I should say that he has had every attention in the past, to have him act like this at his age," said Mrs. Latimer.

"But we don't know how old he is. He may be months older than we thought for," argued Mrs. Evans.

"Well, he isn't more than eighteen months at the most," declared Mrs. Stewart.

Polly and Eleanor stood silently by listening to these experienced mothers, but Anne smiled indulgently at them, and kept her opinions to herself.

Dr. Evans and Mr. Latimer stopped for their wives, and when they had heard and been shown the fine boy, they gave their masculine opinions.

"A baby who was boarded out, and the parents hadn't paid up recently. So the woman left him on the first door-step to get rid of him," was the doctor's verdict.

"There spoke the doctor who knows of such cases," said Anne.

"That isn't it, however," remarked Mr. Latimer. "I am of the opinion that this child is of wealthy parentage. He likely is a stumbling-block for some heirs, who wish him safely out of the way so they may claim the estate."

Anne laughed again. "There speaks the attorney. But you should have had the

jealous heirs remove this monogrammed locket before they tried to get rid of all evidence of a barrier to their inheritance.”

“Reckon we’d better stop romancing and put Billy to bed,” said Polly, in a matter-of-fact voice.

Her common sense caused a general laugh, and Dr. Evans added: “Well, ladies! Come on, if we are to get home to-night.”

With a last look at the sleepy cherub, and a good-night to the friends living in the Studio, the four New Yorkers went out.

“Where shall he sleep to-night?” asked Anne.

“Let me have him?” cried Polly.

“Oh—I found him first—let me have him,” begged Eleanor.

“No, girls; babies should sleep absolutely alone. I will get a drawer from the high-boy and rig him up a nice little bed therein. To-morrow night he will be in his own home, most likely,” explained Mrs. Stewart.

So saying, she hurried upstairs, and in a short time returned, carrying the drawer. Anne and the two girls helped cushion it softly, and then they placed Billy in it.

He was asleep almost before the bed was ready, and the moment his head sank into the soft pillow, he closed his eyes.

“He seems unusually good, Anne,” ventured Mrs. Stewart, as the four foster mothers stood gazing down at the flushed little baby-face.

“And very pretty for a young child,” added Anne.

“Well,” sighed Polly, “I suppose we’ll have to hand him back in the morning.”

“Some time during the night, most likely,” grumbled Eleanor. “The police will tell his folks where he is, and they will be at our door ten minutes later.”

But no one called for Billy, that night, and in the morning the papers told the story of the foundling. A minute description of his appearance and clothing was given, and the telephone number of the family where he was to be found. Mrs. Evans had wisely refrained from giving any names of the tenants of the Studio.

Before seven o’clock that morning, the telephone began ringing. Anne answered it, but described the baby left on their door-step differently from what the anxious mother on the other end of the wire had expected.

By eight-thirty, the telephone had called Anne or Polly five times. At last Polly

said: "My goodness! how can five mothers lose boys like ours in one evening? Can't they take care of them?"

Eleanor then said, "Why, in Chicago, there are records of more than a score of babies lost every day. Most of them find their parents again, but lots of them don't."

"What happens to the poor tots who can't find their folks again?" asked Polly, horrified.

"They go to the orphan asylum—or the Children's Home."

With a gasp, Polly glanced at their laughing little Billy. Then she looked anxiously at her three companions. They had all thought of the same thing, it seems.

"I just couldn't let him go to a foundling home," Polly whimpered.

"We can afford to keep him, Polly. You and I can adopt him," declared Eleanor.

But Anne did not seem to approve of the plan. She shook her head as she gazed at the curly-haired boy who was banging the breakfast table with a teaspoon. "That would never do for you, girls."

But another ring on the telephone interrupted further argument on that subject. Anne described Billy all over again—"Large brown eyes, very soft silky hair—yellow and curly. About thirty pounds weight, eight front teeth, aged about sixteen months."

Before she had completed her description of the foundling, the distracted mother at the other end of the wire sighed: "He's not mine—thank you."

"Polly and I are not going to school this morning, Anne," Eleanor now informed the young teacher.

"I don't see why not?" demanded she.

"First, your mother can't be chasing back and forth to the 'phone all day; and secondly, we do not propose having a stranger calling and stealing our baby. Unless the parents present perfectly satisfactory evidence that Billy is theirs, no one shall get him."

Anne smiled, but seeing that it was almost nine o'clock, she consented to the two girls remaining home that session; furthermore, she promised to explain to Mrs. Wellington about the magnet that had kept them at home.

Later in the morning, Dr. Evans stopped in to see if any one had called for the

baby. Polly and Eleanor were in the midst of giving Billy his bath in the large tub. Such laughing and shouting had never been heard in that bathroom before. Even Mrs. Stewart laughed in sympathy, as she told the doctor what a fine well-behaved child Billy was.

“I’ll call again this evening, Mrs. Stewart. If he has not been claimed by that time, I will see what I can do to relieve you of his care.”

“Oh—he is no care whatever, doctor; and I doubt whether the girls will consent to your taking him to a home—for a few days, at any rate. They think someone will call for him.”

“But you haven’t any clothes or other necessities for him, have you?” asked the doctor.

“We didn’t have at first, but Nolla and Polly ran to a department store on Fifth avenue—it’s only a few blocks over, you know,—and bought him everything he needs. When he had his shoes on he stood up and began walking about while he held fast to the chairs. He certainly is a bright child.”

“Well, the girls ought not to go silly over him. Buying clothes and shoes and everything—until they know who he is.”

“If no one ever calls, Billy has to have clothes; anyway, we thought we ought to get them, now, instead of later.”

“I can see, Mrs. Stewart, that you are as foolish about the baby, as the two girls are themselves,” laughed Dr. Evans, as he took up his hat to depart.

Mrs. Stewart laughed, but the moment the doctor was out of the front door, she hurried upstairs to help dress the boy after his bath.

Once he was dressed in his new clothing, and had had a full cup of warm milk and gruel, he cuddled down for his nap.

“Now, no use talking! he is a wonder!” declared Eleanor.

“We can keep him, as well as not. He isn’t one mite of trouble,” added Polly.

Having waited until Billy was fast asleep, Mrs. Stewart tip-toed from the bedroom, beckoning the girls to follow her out.

The police-department had sent their detective to get all the facts from Eleanor and Polly, and the press had sent to find out if there was any other clue or information about the boy; then, no further interruptions took place that day.

The two girls sat out under the locust tree in the yard, because there they could

hear the first whimper from Billy, when he awoke from his nap. As they sat there, they discussed his future.

“If no one ever calls for him, what *shall* we do with him?” asked Polly, giving Eleanor a penetrating look.

“You’ve got something on your mind—what is it?” countered Eleanor.

“Yes, I have, but I want to hear what *you* have to say.”

“I’d love to keep him, Polly—at least as long as we are in New York. I suppose it would be impossible to take him abroad with us, next summer,” returned Eleanor.

“Yes—impossible. And if we keep him with us, we will have to hire a nurse-maid, as poor Mrs. Stewart can’t look after a lively youngster all day, while we are at school.”

“What was your idea, then?” wondered Eleanor.

“Can’t you guess, Nolla? And his name is Billy, too!”

For an instant Eleanor’s face looked too surprised to allow her to speak. Then she stammered: “Well—of all things!”

“What do you make of it?” laughed Polly.

“Wonderful—but what is your plan?”

“Seeing his name is Billy, and his eyes are dark brown and his hair golden curls, and he is about sixteen months old—all of which are in his favor to advance my little scheme, I should say that we try to keep him a few weeks, right now, and see if we can add to Billy’s winsome ways. Meanwhile, we will use every effort to find if he has any relatives; then should he be a veritable foundling, we will present him to dear Mr. Dalken for his very own.”

“Splendiferous! Perfectly great!” cried Eleanor, slapping her friend on the back in her delight.

“We will quietly advertise for and select a fine elderly nurse for Billy, right off, and when we have him all ready to be given away, he will be a little wonder that no one can refuse.”

“Oh, Mr. Dalken won’t think of refusing him, I know! He will be so happy to have a boy again,” Eleanor said, enthusiastically.

Several times during the day, the telephone rang and someone asked for a description of the baby. Also a number of wild looking people called at the

address to have a look at the child, but all departed with forlorn hopes.

As that night was not a class-evening, the girls were free to do as they liked with their time. Anne and her mother were amusing themselves, as much as the baby, by teaching him to say 'Billy.' Polly and Eleanor were eagerly watching results. But harshly upon this sweet scene, the door-bell jangled.

"I'll go!" called Eleanor, and in another minute she had opened the door.

"Oh, Mr. Fabian. Do come in and see our baby!"

Then another admirer joined the circle of worshippers around Billy's feet. Mr. Fabian had heard the story from Dr. Evans and dropped in to see if the boy was still with his friends.

"He is a dear little shaver, isn't he?" laughed Mr. Fabian. "But what will you do with him if no one claims him?"

"We really haven't thought of that," said Anne.

"I'm afraid, if we keep him here with us a week, or more, we won't want to give him up again," added Mrs. Stewart.

Mr. Fabian saw, from the corner of his eye, that Polly was behind him trying to draw his attention. So he managed to turn his head without attracting Anne's or Mrs. Stewart's attention, and saw the two girls shake their heads wisely, meantime their fingers rested upon their lips in sign of keeping silence.

Consequently no more was said, that evening, about Billy, and when Mr. Fabian was ready to leave, Polly and Eleanor said they believed they would walk to the corner with their old friend. The baby had been in bed for some time, and Anne was busy writing manuscript, so no one objected to the proposal. Mrs. Stewart merely remarked: "Don't go any farther than the corner, dearies. And hurry right back home."

CHAPTER XVI—BILLY FINDS A FATHER

The moment the two girls had Mr. Fabian outside of the Studio, where they could talk in perfect freedom, they told him of their secret plan.

“We are going to keep the baby for a few weeks and see that he is perfectly trained, then we are going to present him to dear Mr. Dalken,” began Polly, eagerly.

“Oh, but we will try and find a sensible woman who will take all care of him, and Mr. Dalken can enjoy Billy when he is at home with nothing else to do,” added Eleanor.

Mr. Fabian was speechless, then he smiled. “Does our friend know about this?”

“Mercy sakes, no! We want to surprise him. We thought it would be fine, if we could keep the baby that long, to leave him at Mr. Dalken’s apartment on Thanksgiving morning,” returned Polly.

“Don’t you think he would like that?” from Eleanor, eagerly.

“Mr. Dalken is now out west on important business, so of course, he doesn’t know a thing about Billy, unless he read about it in the New York papers,” remarked Mr. Fabian, thoughtfully. “I don’t suppose he will take time to glance over every news item in the papers, as he is too preoccupied, at present, with the financial pages.”

“Well, what has that to do with our plan?” asked Eleanor.

“He won’t know a thing about the baby, and you can easily keep the idea secret until Thanksgiving, if you can get the right kind of a woman to take daily care of the boy. Of course, you were going to do that, anyway, were you not?”

“I suppose so—we really hadn’t got as far as that in our planning,” admitted Polly.

“But we will, Mr. Fabian, now that you have mentioned it. How shall we know if we have the right sort of nurse?” added Eleanor.

“I’ll call up Ashby. I was there for dinner to-night, and they told me of a woman they know well, who is compelled to earn her living, because of family reverses. Shall we stop in the hotel across the street and use the booth there?”

“Oh, yes! Let’s, Mr. Fabian!” exclaimed Eleanor.

“No time like the present when you have any important work to do,” added Polly.

Mr. Fabian left the door of the telephone booth slightly ajar so the two girls could assist in the conversation. He soon had Mr. Ashby’s house number and asked if Mr. or Mrs. Ashby were in.

Shortly thereafter a man’s voice was heard talking on the wire. “Is this Fabian—oh, yes. What can I do for you, old man?”

Then Mr. Fabian replied: “Why, I called upon my girls at the Studio this evening, after I left you, and I found the most astonishing addition to their family circle. A little baby boy was left on their door-step, it seems. A fine little fellow, too.

“So far, no one has called to claim him, and should no one come, the two girls have a plan to place him in a good home. They told me all about it, and I rather approve of the idea, too. But what they need, at once, is an experienced, capable woman to take care of the boy, until Thanksgiving Day—perhaps after that, if she is found to be satisfactory.

“I thought, at once, of that woman that Mrs. Ashby and you were speaking of, at table, to-night. Do you suppose she would consider a position as second-mother to a baby?”

The girls strained their ears to hear the reply but Mr. Ashby spoke too low, and they could but judge what he said by Mr. Fabian’s words afterward.

“Fine! If Mrs. Ashby will not consider it too much trouble. And she will bring Martha down to-morrow afternoon when the girls are home from school?”

Polly and Eleanor smiled with relief, and Mr. Fabian said over the ’phone, “All right! Thanks, Ashby. And thank your wife for the two girls, too, who are waiting here for the verdict.”

As the three left the hotel again, Mr. Fabian said: “Now that much is satisfactorily settled for you, and Billy shall have a good woman to look after him, if he is still unclaimed to-morrow afternoon.”

The girls were altogether too inexperienced to realize that it was curious how easily the Ashbys, Mr. Dalken’s most intimate friends, and Mr. Fabian agreed to

such a strange plan as trying to saddle a foundling baby on a man who lived a hermit's life when in his own home.

They never questioned the readiness with which these friends accepted their proposition, but they were delighted at the "lucky chance" that brought a woman to Mrs. Ashby on the very day that they began to think of employing a woman-nurse for the baby.

Mr. Fabian walked back to the Studio door with them, smiling at their dreams of future bliss for Mr. Dalken. In fact, their thoughts traveled so far into the future, that they saw Billy a fine young man and Mr. Dalken, white-haired and bent, depending on his beloved adopted son for everything.

The four inmates of the Studio were not aware that they had been kept singularly free from constant annoyance from reporters and police. Nor did they realize that the short news article that had appeared in the papers, had been a wonderful story to catch the eyes of curious readers, but *someone* in authority had ordered it "cut" to an inch.

The afternoon following Mr. Fabian's visit to the girls, they hurried home from school and found Mrs. Ashby's car in front of the house. They quickly entered the front door and greeted her with a smiling welcome.

"I see you have Billy in hand, already," laughed Polly.

"Yes; isn't he a friendly little fellow?" replied Mrs. Ashby.

"Wonderful! We never knew babies were so easy to live with," added Eleanor.

"Mrs. Stewart took Martha upstairs to show her how you managed for the baby. He may need extra things, or other conveniences," suggested Mrs. Ashby.

Even as she spoke, the sound of steps was heard descending the front stairs, and soon after, Mrs. Stewart led Martha in, and introduced her to Polly and Eleanor. The girls liked the refined look and quiet sensible words and manners of the nurse-to-be.

"Isn't it splendid that Martha should have been relieved, last week, of just such a position as we now need her for? She was in the country taking charge of a baby of about this boy's age, but some friends came and took him away, so she was free to find another position," explained Mrs. Ashby.

Martha handled Billy as if she was an expert, and the boy crowed and tried to talk to her, as if he had known her all his life.

"I never saw a friendlier baby than this one. He smiles and is contented with

anybody, and that will make it fine for Martha,” remarked Mrs. Stewart.

So it was immediately decided to retain Martha during the day, but she would have to find a place to lodge, nearby and leave Billy with the girls during the night. This pleased them well, for they did not wish to relinquish all rights of attendance on their baby to a stranger.

“I may as well remain for the rest of this afternoon, Madam,” said Martha, speaking to Mrs. Ashby, “as I have no other place to go.”

“How about seeking for a room in the neighborhood and taking it to-day? You may not have a free half hour, like this, again,” suggested Mrs. Ashby.

Martha silently acquiesced but she cast a troubled gaze at the child; when Eleanor picked him up by the arms, she immediately corrected the mistake, by saying, “Miss, you should always hold a baby at his age, about the waist—a hand on each side of him. *Never* by the arms!”

Mrs. Ashby offered to drive Martha about to hunt up a furnished room, so the girls said good-by to their callers.

That evening was school-night again, and Mr. Fabian was interested in hearing if Martha had proved satisfactory. Even Ruth Ashby took a personal interest in the baby-boy, now that Martha was to be his nurse.

“Do you know Martha?” asked Polly, surprised.

“Of course. Wasn’t she mother’s nurse, years ago?”

“Oh—I thought she was a lady of means who had just lost everything,” remarked Eleanor.

“Well, it is this way. When mother was a little mite Martha was a girl of about fourteen. Grandma engaged her to push mother’s carriage out for a walk every day. Then Martha grew up and married and mother never saw her again, for a long time.

“Her husband’s nephew came to live with them, as Martha never had any children, but her nephew grew up and married. Then Martha’s husband died, and she went to live with the nephew and his wife. They were well-to-do young people, and Martha had an easy life there.

“They had a baby, and Martha took care of him, as if she was his own mother. Then the nephew enlisted in the war and was killed ‘over there.’ His wife pined a lot, and during the epidemic of the flu, last Winter, she took it and died, too.

“That left Martha with the baby, but she hadn’t a cent to live on, because there was only the money the baby ought to have had from the Government, because of losing his father in battle. But Martha didn’t understand how to go about getting it, and when a friend of hers offered to find a good home for the baby, the poor great-aunt consented. She had no other choice, as she would have to work herself, and could not be hampered by a little boy.

“Then she came to mother and that is how it all happened.”

“I wonder what became of her grand-nephew?” asked Polly.

“Mother begged of me not to mention it, and never to refer to the past, when Martha was about,” said Ruth, seriously.

“I suppose the poor thing misses her little nephew so much!” observed Polly, sympathetically.

“Yes, that must be the reason,” agreed Ruth.

Mr. Fabian listened attentively and approved of Mrs. Ashby’s advice to her daughter.

No one came to claim Billy, and the days passed swiftly for the self-appointed mothers of the boy. He was so merry and good-natured a child, that Mrs. Stewart sighed when she thought of the Studio without him. Before November passed, he could walk all alone and even tried to climb the stairs.

Martha was a jewel with him. She never seemed too tired to do things for him. She it was, who taught him his table manners and insisted upon his saying “Plee” and “Tant” for anything. He could say “Dadda” and “Biddy”—the latter meaning himself.

Polly and Eleanor spent every spare moment teaching him new accomplishments, so that before the middle of Thanksgiving month, the boy really was unusually precocious and well-behaved.

Mr. Dalken returned to New York the third week in November and immediately sent out cards to his friends for a dinner-party. It was very private, only the circle acquainted with Polly and Eleanor were to be his guests. But they had a good time, nevertheless, and Mr. Dalken appeared more cheerful than of yore.

“Now what do you suppose I called you together for?” said he, after the table had been cleared of the roast and everyone was ready to listen while waiting for salad.

“Dear me, I hope you are not going to spring a sensational surprise on us!”

Eleanor said, her face expressing worry.

Everyone laughed, but Mr. Dalken said: "What would you call a sensation?"

"Oh, well! in case you were married while in Chicago! That would ruin my hopes," interpolated Polly, anxiously.

A general laugh greeted this, and Mr. Dalken retorted:

"I hadn't even dreamed of such a possibility, but now that you plainly show me how you have been hoping I would propose to you, I may as well take my medicine like a man!"

"Me—you—propose! What *are* you talking of?" cried Polly, aghast.

Everyone laughed teasingly, but Eleanor explained quickly. "He misunderstood your reason for worrying, Polly. Just like a man—they think one is always thinking of marriage, even when there are great charities being perfected."

Mr. Dalken now showed his surprise, and asked what really was the cause of Polly's anxiety.

"Oh, you'll see some day. We can't tell you now!" laughed Eleanor.

"Then I may as well confess to you-all and tell you what my surprise is.

"I finished my business in Chicago much sooner than I had hoped for, and went on to Pebbly Pit to see how things were progressing. I had a delightful visit at the ranch, and am able to say that work has reached the point, now, where the mining machines will start working next week, unless snow stops everything."

"Oh, then you saw father and mother!" cried Polly, eagerly.

"Yes, and I have all sorts of good things for you from home. A jar of preserves, and a dozen or more of glasses filled with jelly and other delectable sweets that Sary insisted that I carry to you. I did my best to explain that it would be cheaper and safer if she sent them by express or parcel post—but no! She told me 'A bird in th' hand is wuth two er three in a bush.'"

Polly and Eleanor instantly visualized Sary as she made this remark, and they laughed merrily.

Mr. Dalken then repeated minutest details of the work on Rainbow Cliffs, and the gold mine on Grizzly Slide. As everything promised so well, the girls felt elated at their future prospects.

Mr. Ashby wanted to know if his friend had succeeded in buying any more stock for him, and Mr. Dalken replied: "You'll have to wait until Latimer issues

another block. No one I know of will sell any of what they hold.”

The evening passed pleasantly with intimate matters to speak of, and at last Anne said: “We must be going, Mr. Dalken. The girls have one of their long class days, to-morrow, you know.”

“Yes, and Martha will want to go to bed,” added Mrs. Stewart.

“Who’s Martha? Got a servant at last?” asked Mr. Dalken.

“Why, no, Martha—” Mrs. Stewart began innocently, but the two girls wildly interrupted her. Polly shouted unusually loud for her, “Oh, I am so tired!”

Eleanor had managed to wink her eyes warningly at Mrs. Stewart, and that lady realized that she had almost “put her foot in it.” Mr. Dalken noticed something was disturbing the two girls, but he never dreamed what it was.

The following evening, at art class, Mr. Fabian had news for the two girls. “Mr. Ashby has invited Mr. Dalken to have his Thanksgiving Dinner with his family, and that will give you the opportunity you need, to get Billy settled in his new home.”

“Oh, how can we part from him!” sighed Eleanor, wiping an eye, as she pictured the lonely rooms.

“Yes—” sighed Polly, mournfully. “That’s the worst of having a dog or a baby that you become so fond of.”

“But you will see Billy three nights a week, and you never could have kept him for yourselves, you know,” said Mr. Fabian.

Thanksgiving Day Martha seemed all upset. The idea of moving the baby to a new home, and perhaps not being welcome, made her cry softly, now and then. The little family at the Studio, instead of being very grateful for all the blessings they had had during the past year, went about looking forlorn and miserable.

They went to the Latimers for dinner that noon, and left Martha with the baby. It had been planned that they would get back home by eight o’clock and accompany their baby-gift over to Mr. Dalken’s apartment. Billy would be placed in bed where his new foster father would find him, and then would come the joy of it all.

The plans worked out as expected to a certain degree. Mr. Dalken went up to the Ashbys for dinner, and a little after eight o’clock, a mournful procession wended its way from the Studio door. Martha carried Billy carefully. Polly and Eleanor carried the tub, chair, and other articles of use for the baby. Anne carried the

bundles of clothing, and Mrs. Stewart carried the milk-warmer, the other food-equipment, and the extra blankets.

Mr. Dalken's chauffeur opened the door to admit the visitors, but when he saw the burdens the ladies carried, he was speechless. Eleanor tried to explain that they had a new boy for Mr. Dalken, but Henri seemed not to appreciate the fact.

Billy was gurgling and trying to get his active fists out of the quilted blanket, but Martha held him firmly until she had him in the bedroom where Mr. Dalken slept.

"We are going to leave him right in the middle of this big bed, Henri, so his new father will find him when he comes in to-night," explained Eleanor, arranging the baby's bedding on the large expanse of bed-spread.

Billy was arrayed for the night, and everyone kissed him tearfully, as if he was about to be placed in his coffin. Then Martha gave him a drink of warm milk and placed him in his blankets.

Hardly had they tucked him up, before the bell at the entrance rang imperatively. Henri glanced distractedly at the baby and then at the other visitors, before he turned to answer the call. It rang a second time before he opened the door.

"Let's turn down the light and hide behind the velour portières," whispered Anne, anxiously.

The five guilty members of the surprise-party quickly hid themselves as best they could, but not so soon, but that they heard Henri returning. He was talking, and other voices were replying.

"I donno why the missee's come in an' fetch a bebbby. Dey say 'He a big surprise,' Mr. Dalken."

To the amazement of the hidden ones, Mr. Dalken's voice now replied: "Never mind, Henri. I'll be out with my visitors, in a moment. I only want to get a handkerchief from the dresser."

The five culprits saw him switch up the lights and they then heard Billy welcome the unusual privilege with a gurgle. Not a sound came from the man who must have heard the baby-voice and seen the occupant of his massive four-poster.

Polly could stand it no longer. She had to peep out at what was going on. The first thing she saw, was Eleanor's head showing from the side of the other portière. Both girls watched the scene with bated breath.

Mr. Dalken stood beside the bed, looking down at the little bundle that made a

dent in the middle of his comfortable mattress. Billy was waving his fists invitingly, as if to say, “Come on and fight!”

As the two girls watched him, Mr. Dalken smiled and said: “So *you* are Billy Martin, are you?”

The two eaves-droppers glanced at each other in consternation. “How and why did Mr. Dalken call *their* baby Billy Martin?”

“Well, Billy, suppose we go out and see what your Daddy thinks of you. For my part, I say you’re just about perfect.” As Mr. Dalken spoke, he carefully lifted the willing baby from the bed and cuddled him in his arms. Then he went from the room.

“Polly!” hissed Eleanor, anxiously, “did you hear what he said?”

“S-sh! let us follow and see what’s the matter. Someone came in with Mr. Dalken, you know,” returned Polly in a low voice.

Mrs. Stewart and Anne now crept from behind the heavy window curtains and tip-toed after Polly and Eleanor. And, last of all, Martha came from behind the door and followed in the wake of the other four. Then they heard Mr. Dalken talking.

“Well, here’s the boy, but how he ever got into my rooms I cannot say. Mrs. Ashby will have to explain that, in a minute, as she is the one who seemed to know where to find Martha and the baby.”

Martha was still in the hall and could not see who was in the living-room with Mr. Dalken, but the four conspirators now stood staring at the group in the center of the lighted room.

Mr. and Mrs. Ashby were seated in comfortable armchairs, smiling happily at the two standing men and about to make the baby comfortable. He had been transferred from Mr. Dalken’s arms to those of a younger man who was trembling with joy at beholding Billy’s smiling little face.

“There, now, Martin. Isn’t he worth living for? You said you wanted to die, when you found your wife was gone. But let me tell you, my boy, this baby ought to make you brace up.” Mr. Dalken patted the strange young man on the shoulder, and just then Martha burst into the room.

“Jimmy! Oh, Jimmy—is it you, or is it someone who looks like my dead Jimmy?”

“Aunt Martha—Dear Aunt Martha—it is your own Jimmy. I was a long time

coming home, but here I am at last!”

Then Polly and Eleanor learned the true story about their precious Billy who was, according to them, to have adopted Mr. Dalken for a father.

“Girls, I appreciate your great sacrifice to try and make me happy, for I have heard from the Ashbys how much you wanted to keep Billy, but you felt that he ought to belong to me. Seeing that he came so near to being mine, I shall always take a great interest in him and his relatives,” began Mr. Dalken, while Jimmy Martin and Martha went into the other room to be alone with the baby.

“You see, Mrs. Ashby is at the bottom of this plot and having roped in her husband to believe just as she did, the next step was to make the whole plan seem accidental.

“So, when Martha was left with the baby, she called on Mrs. Ashby for help. Seeing that the boy had brown eyes and was named Billy, my anxious friend decided that he was what I ought to have to cheer me. Martha was boarded in a country home until I prepared to go west on my business trip.

“Just about that time, you found an unknown babe on your door-step, but had we been able to look behind the scenes, I think you would have seen the Ashby’s car down on the corner, and Martha anxiously waiting to see if you took Billy in, all right.

“After that, Billy made his own way with you people, as he is apt to make it with everyone. And what was so natural, as that you should fall in with Mr. Fabian’s well-learned lesson. The Ashbys made him memorize just what to say and to do it every day.

“All went as had been planned, and my dear friends here were so pleased with themselves at the little scheme, that they planned to return home with me tonight and see how I liked the baby-surprise. But this is where an unexpected and unknown actor entered upon the stage.

“James Martin was not killed in battle. He was wounded and taken prisoner by the Germans. He was so dangerously injured that he was left to die in a small town in the interior. But he managed to pull through, and after many months of convalescence, he worked his way from Germany back to Paris.

“It took several months more to identify him and get a passport for him to America. When he went to his old home town to find his wife and child, he learned that one was dead and the other was taken away by the aunt. The shock sent him to the county hospital again, and it was several months before he could

get out to start a hunt for his boy.

“He learned where Martha had gone, and to-night, James called at the house to ask Mrs. Ashby if she knew anything about his boy and aunt. I happened to be in the hall when he came in.

“So here we are, girls; you lose a protégé and I lose a boy.”

“Oh, but James wins back his boy again!” cried Polly, delightedly.

“I want to know, Mr. Dalken,” demanded Eleanor, frowning, “did Ruth Ashby know the truth about this when she told us that yarn about Martha?”

Mr. Dalken laughed. “No, girls. Poor Ruth is as upset about it as you could wish her to be. She wants me to adopt Billy, anyway, even with his real father on hand to claim him. I really think Mrs. Ashby is the one we have to put through the third degree on this whole plot.”

Mrs. Ashby looked up and smiled. “Well, I told the truth about the matter, didn’t I? But I refrained from telling Ruth that Martha was the same woman who was aunt to Billy, and I withheld the facts that Billy was the same baby that you girls found on your door-step—that’s all.”

“That’s all——” laughed Mr. Dalken. “As if that was not enough! To deprive me of the son my two pet girls tried to place in my arms.”

Polly flung herself in his arms and hugged him as she said, “Nolla and I will have to adopt you ourselves, now.”

And he whispered in her ear, so only she could hear: “You haven’t any idea how happy you girls make me. I have found something in life worth while, since I found all of these good friends.”

Then Mrs. Ashby said: “Dalk, you have been hunting for a reliable man and wife to take charge of your apartment, so I think it is Providence that sent Martha and James to you. You will have admirable help in them and little Billy, too.”

CHAPTER XVII—POLLY AND ELEANOR LEAVE FOR EUROPE

“I do declare! here it is the first of May, and it seems as if it were but yesterday that we came back to New York to study,” exclaimed Eleanor, as Polly and she were returning from art class one evening.

“And we are no more decided about what we shall do this Summer, than we were last Fall. If only Dad would consent to our joining the Ashbys and Mr. Fabian on the European trip, in June,” returned Polly.

“I’m glad father says *I* may go if your father consents. Of course we shall have to go, some time or other, Polly, before we could settle down as experienced decorators; but this is a fine opportunity—to be members of a party of appreciative people such as is seldom offered to young beginners as we are.”

“Eleanor, have you thought of what we shall do, next year of school, if Anne marries John? You know, Mrs. Stewart says she is going back to Denver to keep house for Paul, as he will graduate with the other boys, next month.”

“Uh-huh! John and Tom will settle down at Pebbly Pit to superintend the mine and jewel cliffs, and Paul will join the survey crew in Denver. I suppose my brother Pete will be hanging about them, somewhere, doing odd jobs, now and then.”

Eleanor spoke in a half-humorous tone, but Polly was in earnest.

“Well, then, if Anne is John’s wife, and Mrs. Stewart in Denver, where do we fit in?”

“I’ve thought it all out, Polly—never fear! You see Mr. Fabian expects to bring his wife and daughter back to America this year, as Nancy has finished her art studies abroad. If we make ourselves agreeable to them, and then hint gently, on the trip back home, that we have no place to live in, the coming winter, they’ll take us right in with them. How’d you like that!”

“Oh, it would be great, Nolla, but would it be quite the proper thing for us to do—to throw ourselves upon their hospitality?”

“Polly, they ought to be thankful to have two such nice girls with them! To say nothing of our eventually becoming the greatest interior decorators of the present day,” exclaimed Eleanor, her well-shaped little head rearing itself in conscious pride.

Polly laughed. “Well, Nolla, we will never suffer for lack of self-esteem. Even if others declare we know nothing, you will be able to keep the family pride up to high-water mark. If we knew but one-third of all you *think* we do, we could take Mr. Ashby in partnership with us, now.”

“There’s another thing, Polly, that is a golden opportunity for us. The idea of having a successful decorator like Mr. Ashby plan to take us in his business when we are through school, is enough to turn anyone’s head. But not ours, Polly—we are too sensible!”

Again Polly laughed at her friend’s meekness—so-called. “Mr. Ashby may change his mind before we are ready to accept his offer. We have two years still in which to study, you know.”

“That will fly like these past two years have. Why here we are only sixteen and just see all we know!”

“Yes, and just see all we have yet to know!” retorted Polly.

“I tell you what, those Saturday mornings we spent in Mr. Ashby’s sales-rooms were a wonderful help, eh?”

“Yes; I really believe, Nolla, that I learned as much of textiles, and fabrics, by simply handling and selling the materials, as if I had given days to the study of them.”

“It was not only a brilliant idea of Mr. Fabian’s, to suggest to Mr. Ashby that Ruth and we two girls be permitted to act as clerks in his rooms, but it was as kind and generous of Mr. Ashby to take us. The way he taught us all about different factories and their best and weakest points in manufacture; the time he took to demonstrate differences in lace and silk curtains, the best style of linen for covers and draperies, the tapestries and carpets of modern factories—why, I can tell at a glance now, just whose goods I am handling.”

“Yes,” admitted Polly. “How many decorators’ assistants know the style of upholstery buttons that ought to be used on a French divan? Or what shaped button ought to go on a Turkish chair? I never dreamed that there was any difference, according to art, between a tufted wing-chair and one that was smoothly upholstered. I bet the majority of people select one or the other

because they like the looks, but very few know that certain lines in a fireside chair demand tufted upholstery, and another period must never have buttons or fringe.”

“Exactly! That is what I mean, Polly, when I say I am sure we two know an awful lot about decorating, already. It is so.”

“Dear old Fabian says, this is our critical year—if we can manage to pass through the period between second and third years of study without discovering that we know it all, we may eventually hope to become average decorators,” Polly laughed.

“Pooh! We both know Mr. Fabian is a dotard about us. If anyone dares to hint that we are not as advanced as he says we are, he glares like a jealous cat over her kittens.”

Polly and Eleanor reached the Studio by this time and found Anne reading a long letter from John. She was smiling happily as she read, and Eleanor grinned charitably at her.

Polly sat down to wait till the letter was read. Then Anne glanced over at the girls.

“Well, dears, John has definitely settled everything. Tom Latimer and he are coming on to New York directly their college commencement is over. Polly’s father and mother *may* decide to come, but that is not yet certain. As soon as you two girls are off, we will all go back home and stay.”

““And they lived happily ever after,”” quoth Eleanor, teasingly.

Anne smiled. Polly seemed dissatisfied.

“What do you mean ‘as soon as you girls are off?’”

“Why, off on the European trip. The Ashbys were here to-night and it is all settled. Mr. Brewster wrote a fine letter and thanked them for their wonderful offer to chaperone you girls.”

“Oh, oh!” shouted Eleanor, springing up and throwing her arms about Polly’s neck.

Anne and her mother laughed as the impulsive girl whirled Polly around and around, until both, exhausted, fell upon the divan. Then Polly asked the question Eleanor had choked in her throat.

“What about John, Anne? Are you going to Denver or to Pebbly Pit?”

“I expect to go to Pebbly Pit, dear,” said Anne, blushing.

“No need to feel embarrassed over it, Anne,” laughed Eleanor. “It isn’t as if we had never heard of your plan. Besides we are all in the family, now—or at least we will be.”

“Where does your relationship come in, Nolla?” asked Mrs. Stewart, quizzically.

“Why, didn’t you know, Mother Stewart? I propose to become Paul’s bride, some day, but he doesn’t know it, either!” and the irrepressible girl laughed madly as she ran upstairs to her room.

Her friends in the living-room laughed also, but Polly doubted that it was said in fun. She rather suspected Eleanor of receiving many nice letters from Paul Stewart, during her second year in New York. But Eleanor kept her own secret.

As June entered and schools were all beginning their examinations, Mrs. Stewart began to clear up the rooms in the home they had occupied for two years. Anne’s and her own personal property were to be packed and sent to Denver. Polly and Eleanor’s had to be sorted and packed and stored; the winter clothing in strong moth-proof chests, and the things they proposed taking abroad with them, in small steamer trunks.

Mr. Fabian had spoken for the lease on the Studio when Mrs. Stewart’s time expired, and until then, most of the furniture could remain as it was. Polly and Eleanor were to have the two small rooms and live with the Fabians, and Mrs. Fabian had written that she would buy back the things as they stood, thus saving everyone trouble and time.

As the days of June passed, Anne had another letter from John, begging her to come to the graduation in Chicago. But Polly and Eleanor needed her in New York, as everything was in a panic preparing for the ocean voyage, and working so hard at school, too.

Before the girls knew it, therefore, the westerners were with them in New York. Mr. and Mrs. Brewster expected to see Polly off on the steamer, and John said he had unexpectedly planned to have Anne marry him before Polly sailed.

“Oh, that will be great! A wedding and a farewell party all in one,” cried Eleanor.

But John took Polly aside and whispered: “Polly, I want my only sister to witness my marriage to the best girl living, so you will have to persuade Anne to look at it as I do.”

“All right, John,” laughingly replied Polly. “I’ll do my best to make her steal my only brother from me.”

Tom Latimer joined them at this moment, and said to Polly: “You have grown so tall and look such a fine young lady, that I wonder how Anne can steal any man from you. Now if I were John, I should never *want* to be stolen from you.”

“Oh, Tom!” laughed Polly, greatly amused at his words. “You talk exactly like Winnie Trevors. He’s the society pet that expects to marry Elizabeth Dalken. But you should see him—and hear him talk!”

“Tom Latimer would never thank you for that left-handed compliment, Polly, if he could but see the slim little dude you compared to him,” said Eleanor, joining the group.

“I believe I do know him, Polly—If he is the silver-haired lap-dog I went to grammar-school with.”

“Yes—he *has* got whitish hair, Tom!” laughed Eleanor.

Polly smiled but said nothing. Then Tom said, “Will you take all that back, Poll, or must I punish you severely, some day?”

“I never take back a word I once have said—unless I can see where I can benefit myself. You see, Tom, I have changed woefully, since living in New York. I am exactly like other citizens here—I am supremely selfish, these days.”

Tom smiled. “I can offer you a bite of attractive bait. Will you apologise for calling me ‘exactly like Winnie’ if I tell you a profound secret?”

“That depends! What do you call ‘profound,’ and will I be concerned in hearing it?” teased Polly.

Eleanor had never known Polly to behave so coquettishly before, and to her astonishment, she beheld her little model of virtue flirt distractingly with Tom. Or Eleanor *thought* Polly was flirting, when she sent a dazzling look at him from her wonderful eyes.

“It is the secret about the Valentine Roses. At last I have managed to learn who really sent them to you.”

Eleanor perked up. Here was a delightful situation. Polly had never been able to find out who had sent the roses, and Tom was ready to confess.

“Oh, really!” exclaimed Polly, eagerly inquisitive.

Tom laughed. “Are you concerned? Is it a profound secret?”

“Yes, oh, yes, Tom!” cried Eleanor, excitedly. “Do tell us what you know.”

“But Polly has to show her interest, too. If she says she is sorry for likening me to Winfield, I will tell her who sent the roses.”

“Is he nice, Tom?” asked Polly, anxiously.

“I have heard people say he is, and *I* think him great!”

Eleanor chuckled. This was a scene after her own heart.

“Is he old—or ugly, Tom?” added Polly.

“No—he is young, and not *very* bad-looking.”

Polly thought seriously, then said: “Does he live in New York?”

“I won’t answer any more such questions, Polly, it isn’t fair unless you do your part,” laughed Tom.

“Oh, well, then, please excuse me for ever mentioning you in the same *breath* with Winnie,” giggled Polly. “Now tell me who sent those roses.”

“I will, Polly, but not to-day. I did not promise to tell you, at once—so I will wait until after John’s wedding.”

Polly stamped her foot as Tom hurried away, and Eleanor laughed merrily at the hoax. But there was too much going on all about them, to bother, now, about roses that were almost two years old.

Mr. Maynard arrived from Chicago in time for the quiet little wedding at “The Church around the Corner,” and then everyone went to the Studio for a reception. John and his bride left for a very short honeymoon, and later, all thoughts centered on Polly and Eleanor. It would be their turn to say good-by in a few days.

Tom Latimer outdid himself during the days intervening between John’s wedding and Polly’s sailing. Jim and Ken were back from college, but somehow the two girls who had been such fine young pals out in the Rockies, and on that Coney Island trip, now seemed several years older than these boys. They couldn’t understand it.

Mr. Fabian could have explained the change. It was mostly psychological, due to the advanced mental training his girls had received in their study of a chosen high profession. They truly were far superior, now, to either of the two boys at Yale, although they were not aware of it at the time.

The day for the sailing of the steamer arrived, and a gay party stood on the pier

just before the good-bys had to be said. Mrs. Brewster gave Polly many warnings and advices, and Mr. Maynard begged Eleanor not to bankrupt him during her stay in Paris.

Books, flowers, fruit and candy, had been piled up in the arms of Ruth Ashby, Polly and Eleanor, until they could not shake the extended hands of their friends when the time came to really say good-by.

“Never mind your hands, we’ll kiss your faces!” laughed Mr. Maynard, and straightway began kissing the pretty struggling girls.

As everyone in the group was an old friend, each one took toll of the girls’ cheeks, and just as Jim Latimer, the last in the line, caught a swift brush of Ruth’s ear, Tom Latimer strolled up.

“Hello, Tom! Where have you been?” called his father.

“Better get your kiss, Tom, or you’ll be left,” added Jim.

So Tom managed to get his “good-by” from Ruth and from Eleanor, but Polly blushed furiously, and reared her head.

“If another silly man kisses me, I’ll—I’ll—slap him!”

Of course everyone laughed uproariously at this, but the guard suddenly shouted, “All aboard.” And the sailing party rushed up the gang-plank.

Once on deck, however, Polly remembered something she had meant to ask Tom Latimer. She leaned over the rail and called back:

“Oh, Tom! you never told me who sent the roses!”

“You’ll find out about it when you reach your stateroom,” shouted Tom, making a megaphone of his hands. “I met him there, talking to the steward, and you will know as soon as you go down.”

Eleanor giggled. “That’s where Tom was when Mr. Dalken dared anyone to take one of his girls away from him.”

“But who could Tom have met in our stateroom, Nolla? I thought everyone was on the pier with us?”

The steamer had already swung down-stream, and the friends on the pier were mere dots, so the curious girls hurried down to see who had sent Polly the Valentine roses. Ruth accompanied them, as she felt she should have been the third in this girl relationship—like triplets, she said, one day, to her father.

Then the door was opened, and sweet fragrance greeted the girls. There in a

corner of the stateroom stood a dozen American Beauty roses, each with a stem almost four feet long. And about the stems a golden cord was tied, and upon this cord hung a card.

The three girls stood admiring the great crimson beauties and then Ruth said: "See who they are from—and who for?"

"Why, they're Polly's, of course. The same 'old valentine' sent them!" laughed Eleanor.

Polly's fingers trembled as she bent forward and read what was written on the card: "Your Valentine that was, and is, and always will be, in this world, and in the next, and forever, Tom."

"Oh, no! No! No! No! I won't have you so, Tom!" cried Polly, throwing herself in the chair and covering her face with her hands. Eleanor and Ruth stood perfectly still, not knowing what to do or say.

Then Polly lifted her face. She was trying to smile. "Dear old Tom only did that to tease me. Isn't he an old plague?"

"I should say he was!" exclaimed Ruth, innocently.

Eleanor with the worldly wisdom learned from her mother, added guilefully: "He sure is. But you tricked him, Polly."

"How?" eagerly inquired Polly.

"He was the only one in the party who didn't get a kiss from you!" laughed Eleanor.

"That's so!" admitted Polly, but Eleanor was not sure whether her friend was sorry or satisfied at the result.

Then, as the days passed, Eleanor noticed that Polly never mentioned the roses again, but they were kept as fresh as possible, and weeks later, Eleanor found one of them carefully pressed with the card still tied to it.

But this discovery, and all that happened during that Summer in Europe, while visiting famous places and viewing rare objects of antiquity, are told in another volume called "Polly and Eleanor Abroad."

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This volume tells how the club journeyed to the seashore and how they not only kept up their riddles but likewise had good times on the sand and on the water. Once they got lost in a fog and are marooned on an island. Here they made a discovery that greatly pleased the folks at home.

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