

# Beverly Gray's

# PROBLEM

CLAIR  
BLANK



**\* A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook \***

This eBook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the eBook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the eBook. If either of these conditions applies, please contact a <https://www.fadedpage.com> administrator before proceeding. Thousands more FREE eBooks are available at <https://www.fadedpage.com>.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. IF THE BOOK IS UNDER COPYRIGHT IN YOUR COUNTRY, DO NOT DOWNLOAD OR REDISTRIBUTE THIS FILE.

*Title:* Beverly Gray's Problem

*Date of first publication:* 1943

*Author:* Clarissa Mabel Blank (as Clair Blank) (1915-1965)

*Date first posted:* Sep. 10, 2022

*Date last updated:* Sep. 10, 2022

Faded Page eBook #20220932

This eBook was produced by: Stephen Hutcheson, Cindy Beyer & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>



*Frontispiece (Page 197)*

BEVERLY HAD AN IMPULSE TO SNATCH THE MASK FROM THE  
DANCER'S FACE

*The Beverly Gray College Mystery Series*

---

BEVERLY GRAY'S  
PROBLEM  
By CLAIR BLANK



---

**GROSSET & DUNLAP**

*Publishers*

NEW YORK

Copyright, 1943, by  
GROSSET & DUNLAP, INC.

---

*All Rights Reserved*

*Printed in the United States of America*

# *Contents*

CHAPTER	PAGE
I Beverly's Play	<a href="#">1</a>
II True Torston	<a href="#">5</a>
III Unrest	<a href="#">24</a>
IV Reunion	<a href="#">33</a>
V Collapse	<a href="#">60</a>
VI Mountain View	<a href="#">75</a>
VII The Mystery Man	<a href="#">90</a>
VIII Lost	<a href="#">100</a>
IX Wilderness	<a href="#">108</a>
X Robbery	<a href="#">119</a>
XI Discovered	<a href="#">155</a>
XII Escape	<a href="#">162</a>
XIII A Rival	<a href="#">169</a>
XIV Shirley Steps In	<a href="#">198</a>
XV Opening Night	<a href="#">209</a>

# BEVERLY GRAY'S PROBLEM

## CHAPTER I

# *Beverly's Play*

---

LENORA WHITEHILL put down her letter and looked across the breakfast table at her friends.

“My sister is coming to New York for a visit.”

“That’s nice,” Shirley Parker remarked, “but you don’t look too happy about it.”

“She wants to stay here with us,” Lenora continued.

“Why not?” Beverly Gray asked.

“She can sleep with you and I’ll sleep on the studio couch in the living room,” Lois Mason offered.

“It will be nice having her here,” Lenora smiled thoughtfully. “She will liven things up a bit.”

“As if they were ever dull,” Beverly laughed.

“How old is she?” Shirley inquired.

“About eighteen,” Lenora replied. “Blond, with blue eyes. She has been studying voice at the local conservatory.”

“A prima donna!” Lois exclaimed. “We are asking for trouble.”

Beverly rose from the table and reached for her hat. “If anyone intends to ride downtown with me, she had better hurry.”

Lois swallowed the last of her toast. “Coming!”

When Beverly reached her desk in the *Tribune* office the telephone was ringing. It was Larry Owens with an invitation to lunch.

“Jim asked me to go to a new Chinese restaurant,” Beverly said eagerly. “Come along.”

“Jim?” he murmured.

“He telephoned me last night,” she answered.

“Do you realize we have been home over a week and I haven’t had five minutes to talk with you alone? I’ll begin to think you are engaged to both of us,” Larry declared. “I’ll meet you at twelve-thirty.”

Beverly smiled as she hung up. During the short time since their return from South America the three of them had gone everywhere together. She knew the girls laughingly referred to Jim, Larry, and herself as “The Three Musketeers.” She was engaged to Larry, and Jim was one of her oldest friends.

Charlie Blaine, her editor, sent for her shortly after Larry’s telephone call and her busy day began. She managed to finish an interview with a visiting celebrity in time to meet Jim at the appointed place. She had just arrived when Larry joined them.

“Go away,” Jim laughed. “I thought Beverly and I would be alone.”

“What?” Larry demanded in mock amazement. “Break up this beautiful trio? ‘The Three Musketeers’ are a tradition—like coffee and doughnuts or do-re-me——”

“Let’s go,” Beverly interrupted, “I haven’t much time.”

It was a very gay luncheon, as it always was when the three of them were together. It was a bright spot in the day, providing Beverly with a pleasant memory for the whole afternoon.

On her way home that evening she stopped by the theater to meet Shirley. The red-haired girl was in her dressing room changing into street clothes.

“Beverly! I didn’t expect you!”

“I thought we could walk home together,” Beverly replied.

“Oh. I’m sorry, but I’m not going home to dinner,” Shirley said hastily. “I—I have an engagement.”

“That’s all right,” Beverly said cheerfully. “I’ll see you later. Good-by.”

When Beverly had left, Shirley slipped into her coat. Tucking a thick brown envelope under her arm, she went out into the cold December air. She had a definite objective about which she had told no one.

At a party several days before she had met a man, a Mr. Morgan, from the firm of Play Productions, Inc. They had discussed new plays. During their conversation he had told her of the difficulty he experienced in finding good, new plays. Shirley had thought immediately of Beverly and the play on which she had worked so hard. She had told Mr. Morgan about it and also the fact that it had been produced once during the past summer by an amateur group. He had been interested and promised to read the script. Shirley had leaped at the chance and, unknown to Beverly, she was now taking a copy of the play to Mr. Morgan with the highest hopes for the future.

## CHAPTER II

### *True Torston*

---

SATURDAY morning the four girls went to Grand Central Station to meet Lenora's sister. While they were waiting for the train, Lenora laughed nervously.

"I'm not sure I'll recognize her. I haven't seen her for two years. Every time I went home for a visit she was away at school."

"What is she like?" Lois inquired. "What shall we look for?"

"I suppose she is still blond," Lenora frowned. "Plump, with braces on her teeth, straight hair, very shy——"

"We will give her a royal welcome," Lois promised.

"She probably will want to ride in the subway and on the top of a Fifth Avenue bus, and go to the zoo, and do everything a regular tourist does," Lenora warned.

"It will give us a chance to become reacquainted with the city," Shirley declared.

"The train is in," Beverly reported as the gate swung back and the rush of new arrivals started.

The girls stood on tiptoe to peer over the crowd, eagerly scanning the faces, but they could see no one who answered the description Lenora had given them.

"She might have taken another train," Lois murmured, as the last few stragglers came through the gate.

"Could this be your sister?" Beverly asked.

A blond young lady in a smartly tailored suit was just coming through the gate. She was not quite so tall as Lenora, but slender and pretty. Her hair was waved becomingly back from her face, and her lips, parting in a smile, revealed even, white teeth. She came directly to Lenora, so there could be no mistake.

"Plump, straight hair, braces on her teeth!" Lois muttered to Beverly. "What an understatement. She is lovely."

“Like something out of a fashion magazine,” Shirley agreed.

They gave Susan a hearty welcome and in the taxi listened to her low, sweet voice tell of the train ride from home.

“The first thing I want to do is shop for some decent clothes,” she announced. “I’m going on a spending spree.”

Connie and Kathleen, two of the Alpha Delta girls who had the apartment on the floor above, had prepared lunch in honor of the occasion. Immediately afterward Lenora and her sister departed to go shopping. Shirley went to the theater for the matinee. Lois had to deliver some sketches. Beverly went to the *Tribune* office, while Connie and Kathleen went to a movie. They did not meet again until dinnertime when, one by one, they straggled back to the apartment.

Lenora and Susan were the last to arrive. Lenora came in first, dropped her packages, and collapsed in the nearest chair. Then Susan, also laden with parcels, flushed and excited, struggled through the doorway.

“I am exhausted,” Lenora groaned. She looked after Susan who had taken her bundles into the bedroom. “We were in every store in New York. What smells so good?”

“Dinner,” Lois replied. “Take a shower and change into something comfortable while we set the table.”

Lois and Beverly were preparing dinner, with Shirley looking on, when Lenora posed in the doorway to give full dramatic effect to her new pajamas.

“And I thought all those packages belonged to Susan,” Lois murmured.

Lenora whirled before them. “Don’t I look elegant? This shade is called heavenly blue. Isn’t it gorgeous? I saw them in a shop window and simply couldn’t resist them. There’s a robe to match, too. Don’t you think they bring out the color in my eyes?”

“Divine,” Lois agreed. “Too, too divine. Whom do you think you will meet in your dreams?”

“You look as if you were prepared for a stroll on Hollywood Boulevard,” Shirley laughed.

“You’re just envious,” Lenora retorted with a toss of her head. “Was that someone at the door?”

“I didn’t hear anything,” Lois replied.

Lenora donned her robe and went into the living room. “I’m sure I heard someone knock—” her voice broke off suddenly.

The girls exchanged glances and went to see what the matter was. Lenora had opened the door. On the threshold stood a tall, smiling young man in the uniform of a Royal Air Force officer.

“Terry!” Lenora whispered in amazement. “Terry!”

He advanced into the room and put his arms about her, smiling at the other girls. “Hello, everybody.”

It was Terry, the young Englishman whom they all liked so much and who had sailed to the Orient with them on the *Susabella*. Recently he had returned to his own country to join the Air Force. His going had been keenly felt by all of them, and especially by Lenora. She had missed him very much, and now, suddenly, he was here. She was so moved that she was, for several moments, speechless.

Terry immediately was surrounded by the other girls. Their voices rose in endless questions until he laughingly protested. Lenora, recovering, drew him to a chair and stood before him.

“Explain yourself, Terence Cartwright!” she commanded. “How did you get here? Why didn’t you let me know you were coming?”

“I wanted to surprise you,” he said, relaxing with a grin. “My, this is good. You don’t know how often I’ve thought of all of you. How is everyone?”

“Terry!” Lenora persisted. “How do you happen to be here? You’re pale—and just now, when you walked across the room, I thought you limped.”

He colored. “A little souvenir of a plane crash. That explains my vacation. I’m here to recuperate. Do I smell something burning?”

“Heavens!” Lois cried. “Our dinner!”

As Lois and Beverly rushed kitchenward, Susan emerged from the bedroom. She posed on the threshold, blushing becomingly, eyes on her sister and Terry. The young man rose to his feet and smiled. As Shirley described it to the others afterward, he fairly beamed upon Susan.

Lois telephoned Paul to come over and Beverly called Jim and Larry. Shirley had to go to the theater, but after the performance she and Roger came back to the apartment. It was a very gay, impromptu party, and the merriment continued until early morning.

On Sunday afternoon they gathered together again and wandered about the city so that Terry might become reacquainted.

By Monday morning they were exhausted. At the breakfast table they were still wrapped in a cloud of joy and contentment.

“Anything interesting in the mail today?” Lenora asked across the breakfast table.

“An invitation to tea,” Beverly said, indicating the letter in her hand, “from Miss Beatrice Colfax. I met her in Florida, remember?”

“Shall we ever forget?” Lenora countered. “That was on our return from South America and the little episode with the head-hunters.”

“A tea!” Lois murmured. “Dear me!”

“Beatrice Colfax,” Shirley murmured. “She isn’t given to many social affairs, is she? In whose honor is she giving the tea?”

“The invitation merely states that it is a literary tea at four o’clock on the twenty-fifth.”

“What do you do at a literary tea?” Lenora wanted to know.

“Are you going, Bev?”

“I don’t know,” Beverly said. “I suppose so.”

“You shouldn’t miss a chance like that!” Lenora cried. “You might have fun.”

The last time Beverly had seen Beatrice Colfax, the woman had asked Beverly to come to see her in New York, but still it seemed strange to the girl that she should receive such an invitation. However, as Shirley reminded her, Beatrice Colfax was known for her strange activities—such as coming back to New York in the heart of winter when the social season was in full swing in Florida.

The afternoon of the tea found Beverly ringing the doorbell of the Colfax Mansion at the appointed hour. A maid took her coat and, after Beatrice Colfax introduced her to several people, Beverly wandered about looking at the pictures on the walls. Miss Colfax’s valuable paintings were well known. When Beverly had seen them all she turned her attention to the people in the room.

There was Sir Donald Charles, the distinguished British novelist, guest of honor, and many lesser literary lights, as well as actors, artists, and one or two businessmen.

“Hello.” A voice spoke in her ear and Beverly turned to see a girl about her own age. “Quite a crowd here, isn’t there?”

“Yes,” Beverly agreed. “Perhaps——”

A group of people moved from the center of the room, giving Beverly a clear view of the far corner. There, perfectly at ease and chatting with the guest of honor, was Lenora.

Beverly excused herself and wandered over until she stood opposite Lenora. The blond girl smiled at her friend vaguely but made no move to join her.

“Ah, Miss Gray, there you are!” Beverly’s hostess came up behind her. “You know,” she confided, “that young lady with Sir Charles is puzzling me. I can’t remember her at all. I wonder if she has an invitation?”

“I’m sure she hasn’t,” Beverly murmured.

“Dear me! He seems to be enjoying it, though, and he is very difficult to please,” Miss Colfax continued.

Leave it to Lenora, Beverly thought, to accomplish the impossible.

“Shall I introduce her to you?” Beverly asked her hostess.

“Is she a friend of yours?”

“Yes, but I don’t know how she got here,” Beverly laughed.

Beverly and Miss Colfax approached Lenora and the Englishman.

“Oh, Beverly,” Lenora said brightly. “May I introduce Sir Donald Charles?”

“And may I introduce your hostess?” Beverly countered.

“Oh!” Lenora exclaimed in dismay.

“I was just about to get this young lady a cup of tea,” Sir Charles told Miss Colfax. “She has been telling me the most amazing things about New York.”

“How could you?” Beverly demanded in Lenora’s ear, as they followed their hostess and the guest of honor across the room. “This is a fine thing!”

“He likes it,” Lenora grinned. “We talked about everybody in the room.”

“We both will probably be put out,” Beverly sighed.

“Who was the girl you were talking to?” Lenora inquired. “Beautiful, isn’t she?”

“I don’t know who she is. Uh-oh! Miss Colfax is coming toward us. Prepare for trouble.”

“Miss Gray, a few of the guests are staying for dinner, and I should like you and your friend to remain,” Miss Colfax murmured to Beverly.

“We would like to,” Beverly replied.

“See?” Lenora muttered. “Put out, indeed!”

It developed that the girls, Sir Charles, and the young woman, True Torston, who had spoken to Beverly earlier in the afternoon, were the only ones who stayed for dinner. They dined at a long table in a high-ceilinged

room. There were candles and gleaming silver, and quick, witty conversation.

Afterward they went into the library where Miss Colfax showed them some moving pictures she herself had taken on her last journey to the Orient. They were especially interesting to Beverly and Lenora, because they had seen many of the places on their own trip there aboard the *Susabella*.

"I must show you something," Miss Colfax said eagerly between reels. She went to a huge, old-fashioned desk and from a drawer brought out a small chamois bag. From this she took a round jade stone.

"It is a tiny figure of Buddha carved many centuries ago. It is supposed to have been blessed by Buddha himself and will bring the owner wisdom, long life, wealth, and contentment."

The tiny green figure with its intricate carvings was passed back and forth among them while they commented on its weight and the angry expression on the tiny face, and debated whether or not the prediction was true.

"I should like to own this," True declared. "Things from the Orient fascinate me."

Miss Colfax set the tiny figure on top of the radio.

"Strange how anything so small can be so valuable. A man on the liner on which I returned to the States offered me thousands of dollars for it." She turned back to the motion picture projector. "I have a picture here of the man from whom I bought the figure. He had a stall in the market place in Bombay."

Through the magic of the motion picture the girls and Sir Charles were transported thousands of miles to the narrow, crowded streets of India. They saw the white-robed, brown-faced natives marketing, arguing, watching a snake charmer, laughing, frowning, staring at the camera.

"Bev, don't you wish we were there right this minute?" Lenora whispered. "What fun we had!"

"Look," Beverly whispered in return. "The Taj Mahal!"

The white structure, against an unbelievably blue sky, was thrown on the small screen. The unspeakable beauty and peace of the scene seemed to reach out and enwrap them.

"Oh!" Lenora exclaimed in disappointment as the picture faded and Miss Colfax snapped on the light. "Is that all?"

"Don't coax me!" Miss Colfax laughed. "I have a cabinet full of reels but I don't want to bore you."

“You aren’t,” Beverly assured her.

“I’d like to see every one,” Lenora added. “Photography is my hobby, too, but I haven’t gone into the moving-picture field yet. I hope to—what’s wrong?” The latter question was directed to Miss Colfax who was stooping over to peer under the radio.

“My little jade Buddha—it’s gone,” their hostess said. “I thought I had put it right here——”

“You did,” Sir Charles nodded. “Perhaps it has fallen behind the cabinet. Wait, I will look.”

They all helped to move the cabinet, but the little jade figure was not there. Sir Charles even ventured to open the radio and look inside.

“It must be here,” Lenora frowned. “We all saw you place it on the radio. Surely it hasn’t walked away!”

“Very strange,” True Torston murmured. She sank into a chair and surveyed the others interestedly. “What shall we do?”

“We will hunt some more,” Lenora replied. “*It must* be here!”

However, at the end of a thorough search the jade figure had not been found.

“I don’t understand it,” Miss Colfax sighed.

“Neither do I,” Beverly murmured.

“It looks as though one of us must have it,” Lenora said bluntly. “There are only the five of us here.”

There was a moment of silence, each one recognizing the truth of the words.

“It isn’t a very pleasant thought,” Miss Colfax declared at last.

“But true, my dear lady,” Sir Charles said. “I am quite willing to turn out my pockets and prove I do not have it.”

“Sir Charles!” Miss Colfax said in distress. “No one has accused you! Suppose we look once more.”

Furniture was moved, cushions turned out of chairs, small rugs shaken, even plants on the window sills were lifted and peered into.

“Here it is!” True Torston made the announcement triumphantly. “It had slipped down under the cushions of this chair.”

Everyone breathed a sigh of relief, and the little jade Buddha was restored to its locked desk drawer. It did not occur to Beverly until later, when she was walking homeward with Lenora, that the Buddha had been found in the chair in which True had been sitting, and that it was across the

room from where Miss Colfax had left it. The girl must have picked it up to examine it more closely, dropped it, and forgotten it.

As though Lenora had read her thoughts, the blond girl spoke.

“I don’t suppose True was trying to hide the Buddha, do you? It seems funny that she should find it.”

“Why?” Beverly asked, wondering what Lenora thought about it.

“Oh, nothing,” Lenora shrugged. “Forget it. I guess I’m beginning to see a mystery in everything.”

“Did Miss Colfax say anything to you about a dance she plans to give?” Beverly asked.

“In honor of True Torston?” Lenora murmured. “Yes. I hope she will remember to invite us.”

She need not have worried, for three days later both girls received personal notes inviting them to attend the dance and also to bring escorts if they cared to do so. It promised to be a gala event. The newspapers mentioned it often, and the girls looked forward eagerly to the night.

Terry and Larry came at the arranged time and the four drove to the Colfax home together.

“We shall be the most handsome foursome there,” Lenora declared confidently.

It was the sort of affair the girls had often read about. There were beautifully gowned women, sparkling with jewels, men, darkly handsome in evening clothes, enchanting music and laughter.

Halfway through the evening Miss Colfax announced that True Torston would dance for them. The lights dimmed, the orchestra crashed into a gay, gypsylike tune, and the dancer leaped gracefully into the center of the ballroom. She had changed from her evening gown into a ballerina costume and, as she whirled gracefully about the circle of onlookers, she appeared almost like a butterfly caught for a moment in the rosy glow of the lights. When her dance was over the applause was deafening.

“She is good!” Lenora exclaimed. “I had no idea!”

General dancing was resumed and everyone seemed to be having an excellent time. Suddenly a scream cut across the gaiety. At the same time, and before anyone could move or say a word, a figure in black darted across the stand in back of the orchestra and out through the French windows into the garden.

“What was that?” Lenora asked in amazement.

“My necklace!” came the same shrill voice that had been heard before. “Someone took my necklace!”

“Here we go again,” Lenora murmured to Beverly. “Let’s get closer and see what happened.”

People were gathering in a tight little group about a woman near the door.

“He stole her necklace.”

“Who did?”

“That fellow who just dashed out the window.”

Different voices with answers and questions reached the girls who could not succeed in pushing through the crowd.

“Bev, they’re gone!” Lenora exclaimed.

“You mean Larry and Terry?” Beverly asked.

“Yes. They must have gone after the figure in black,” Lenora said excitedly. “Let’s follow them.”

Beverly moved after her friend as Lenora hastened to the French windows. Together they stepped from the lighted ballroom into the cold darkness on the porch.

“I can’t see or hear a thing,” Lenora muttered, shivering. “Which way did they go?”

“It is darker down this way,” Beverly started toward the back of the house.

“Terreeee!” Lenora called softly.

There was no answer except the wind sighing in the trees.

Beverly went down the steps into the garden and followed the path to the garage. Lenora went in the opposite direction.

Beverly had about decided to return to the house out of the cold when she heard a stealthy footstep on the gravel path ahead of her. Instantly she crouched in the protecting shadow of a clump of rhododendron bushes. Was the mysterious intruder coming this way? Again there was the sound of someone approaching cautiously and secretly. Then she saw Larry coming from the garage and she laughed to herself. He had been the one she heard. She rose from her hiding place so suddenly she startled him.

“I thought you were the burglar!” he laughed.

“There’s no sign of him here,” Beverly said. “We might as well go back.”

“We’ll find Terry first,” Larry replied. He took off his coat and held it out to her. “Put this on, it’s cold.”

They moved along the garden path, looking for Lenora and Terry. Suddenly there was a commotion ahead of them and Lenora’s voice rang out.

“I’ve got him! Help, somebody! Help!”

Beverly and Larry immediately broke into a run. They came upon Lenora and a man. Her arms were about the man’s waist, her head against his chest, pushing him against a tree, while she screamed for help.

Terry stood helpless in her grasp, shaking with laughter. At last she looked up and recognized him.

“I say, Lenora, do you really think I did it?” Terry chuckled.

“I grabbed the first one who came along the path,” Lenora said in embarrassment.

“Let’s go inside,” Larry suggested. “Our burglar certainly isn’t waiting in the garden for us to catch him.”

The four young people moved toward the house, still chuckling in delight at Lenora’s mistake. A dark figure moved from behind the rose trellis and the face behind the mask was smiling, too, as he melted into the shadows closer to the house.

## CHAPTER III

### *Unrest*

---

“HE was all in black and he wore a mask,” Beverly told them dramatically.

“And he leaped over the railing on the porch as if it were nothing,” added Lenora.

“Didn’t the police recover the necklace?” Lois inquired over her breakfast toast.

Beverly shook her head. “Both the necklace and the thief disappeared.”

“It must have been one of the guests,” Shirley frowned.

“The police looked over the list and there was no one missing—nor did they find the necklace anywhere in the house.”

There was a knock on the door at that point and when Shirley opened it Mrs. Callahan, their landlady, stepped inside, dark disapproval on her usually smiling face.

“The police are here,” she announced.

“How interesting,” Lenora murmured.

“Have they come for breakfast?” inquired Lois.

Ordinarily the girls’ teasing would have brought forth a witty return from Mrs. Callahan, but this morning she was too perturbed.

“This time your shenanigans have caught up with ye,” she declared. “’Tis a fine state of affairs.”

“Will you come and visit us in jail?” Lenora asked.

“Enough of your nonsense!” Mrs. Callahan returned. “The officers are waiting for you and Miss Gray.”

“Beverly, too?” Lenora cried. “Oh, no, not that! We are innocent!”

Amid laughter the girls, Beverly and Lenora, went downstairs, Mrs. Callahan following more slowly. Inspector Martin and the detective who accompanied him were standing by the window. The girls advanced into the room and Mrs. Callahan went on toward the kitchen.

“Good morning, Inspector,” Beverly said. “What have we done this time?”

He laughed. He and Beverly had been acquainted for a long while.

“I thought you might tell me something about the robbery at the Colfax place last night. You were there, weren’t you?”

“We were,” Lenora acknowledged, “and we saw the mystery man.”

“Could you give us a description of him?” Inspector Martin asked eagerly.

“No,” the girls said together.

“He went through the room so quickly it was impossible to get a good look at him,” Beverly added.

“You were there during the police inspection of the scene. Did you notice anything?”

“No.”

“Don’t you have any suspects?” Lenora asked.

“There were three people absent from the ballroom when it was first learned the necklace was missing and the thief dashed through,” the Inspector said. “Miss Colfax, Miss Torston, and Sir Donald Charles.”

“It could hardly be any of those,” Lenora declared.

“Have you considered the possibility that the theft might have been committed by an outsider?” Beverly ventured.

“That seems the only solution,” the Inspector sighed. “He must have slipped in when the lights were low and Miss Torston was dancing. The loss wasn’t noticed until later.”

“Sorry we can’t help you,” Beverly said.

“We might be back to ask some more questions,” Inspector Martin smiled.

“The plot thickens,” Lenora murmured as the girls went upstairs again. “Did the necklace walk away by itself?”

“Perhaps,” Beverly laughed. “Anyway, I’m sure Inspector Martin will find it.”

“You mean you aren’t interested?”

“That’s right.”

“Tsk! Tsk!” Lenora shook her head. “I never thought the day would come when a mystery would fail to excite you.”

“I like the peace and quiet for a change,” Beverly said.

“It isn’t like you,” Lenora told her bluntly, “and if this state continues, I shall call a doctor.”

The girls returned to the breakfast table in time to hear Susan announce:

“I don’t believe I shall go back to the conservatory at home. I believe I shall stay in New York. I’ve enrolled with a music teacher and I’ll live here with you girls. Won’t that be jolly?”

Lois choked on her orange juice. Lenora dropped her toast, and Beverly and Shirley exchanged dismayed glances.

Little by little, Susan was beginning to grow into their scheme of things. She was always on hand to comment on new hats or clothes, but she never bothered to do her share in keeping the apartment spic and span. When Jim or Larry or Terry came, Susan was not backward in any way about including herself in the plans for an evening. She chose moments Lois wanted to sketch, or Beverly to write, to practice her singing.

Because she was Lenora’s sister, the girls suffered in silence, but she was becoming more and more of a daily trial. Now came her alarming announcement.

“That will be ducky,” Lois murmured.

“Everyone has been so nice to me, I know I shall love it here.”

“I’m going to be late to the office,” Lois muttered, and pushed back her chair.

“I’ll do the breakfast dishes,” Susan offered.

“She must have had a change of heart,” Lois murmured to Beverly as they went downstairs together. “I hope it lasts.”

Beverly had a very busy day and it was long after dinnertime when she returned to the apartment. She found Lois alone with a book.

“A quiet evening at home.” Lois indicated the volume in her hand. “It is a ‘who-done-it.’ So far there have been five murders.”

“I noticed your hair was standing on end,” Beverly laughed. “Is there anything to eat in the house?”

“Some fruit,” Lois answered, following her friend into the kitchen. “And there are some cookies in the jar.”

The girls were chatting pleasantly when there was a loud crash overhead.

“Connie and Kathleen must have come home,” Lois giggled.

“Let’s go up and see what happened,” Beverly suggested.

The two went upstairs to the apartment occupied by their three fellow Alpha Deltas and Hope Rodgers, Lenora’s business partner. They found

Kathleen and Connie doubled over in mirth, the wreckage of a floor lamp strewn around them.

“What happened?” Lois demanded. “We thought you were coming through the floor.”

“We came home and started across the room to light the lamp,” Connie explained, “and walked right into it. We forgot the lamp would be standing in the middle of the floor because half the floor was varnished today.”

“When the lamp fell over Connie went with it,” finished Kathleen. “The shade landed on her head and looked just like the latest model hat.”

Virginia Harris entered at that point, looking very trim in her air hostess’ uniform, and together they cleaned up the wreckage. They spent the rest of the evening talking and planning the reunion of the Alpha Deltas which was to take place on New Year’s Day.

When Beverly and Lois returned to their own apartment they found a large florist box full of red roses for Beverly. There was no card, but she knew they were from Larry. She had begun to think it strange that she hadn’t seen him for several days. Nor had he telephoned. She knew his office was very busy with plans for some new type airplanes, yet there had been a feeling that she was being neglected. Now everything was all right again. Even though he was unable to see her, he was thinking of her.

Shirley came from the kitchen, a glass of milk in her hand.

“Hello. I thought you would be in bed,” Lois said.

“I have something on my mind,” Shirley said. “Roger is taking Susan to lunch tomorrow. Yesterday it was a matinee.”

“You, too?” Lois giggled. “She took Paul to a concert on Monday night.”

“Susan is certainly popular,” Beverly declared.

“With our friends,” Lois muttered. “She is making a mess of trouble.”

“It can’t last,” Beverly returned soothingly.

“Why doesn’t Lenora send her home?” Shirley wanted to know.

“We will have to do something,” Lois declared. “She is about to ruin our happy home.”

“She might help a little with the work in the apartment,” Beverly acknowledged.

“She borrows my silk stockings,” added Shirley darkly.

Lois giggled suddenly. “We are like the three witches in *Macbeth*. Remember, ‘Double, double toil and trouble——’ ”

“We’ll hatch a plot, too,” Shirley retorted. “If she doesn’t go home, I’ll tell her to.”

“We don’t want to hurt her feelings,” Beverly cautioned more slowly.

“She doesn’t care how she hurts ours,” Lois retorted. “Perhaps we should talk to Lenora.”

But they knew it was no use appealing to Lenora. She went around these days in a dazed cloud of happiness over Terry’s return. She did not notice the growing resentment of the other girls toward her sister, or the upsetting effect that Susan was having upon the peaceful life in the apartment. She magnanimously gave Susan anything the girl wanted, and Susan, knowing that her security in the apartment lay in keeping Lenora contented with her, did her best to be pleasant when Lenora was around.

## CHAPTER IV

# *Reunion*

---

IT was after dinner and the girls were dressing to go various places—Shirley to the theater, Lois and Beverly to a lecture, Susan to a recital—when Lenora stuck her head in the bedroom.

“Hist, Bev, there is a man downstairs asking for you.”

“Who is he?”

Lenora consulted the card in her hand. “Mr. Arnold D. Morgan.”

“Never heard of him,” Beverly said.

“He is middle-aged, neatly dressed, seems very nice,” Lenora further elaborated.

“I’ll go down and see him,” Beverly sighed, “but if he tries to sell me insurance or something——”

“Perhaps I should go along,” Lenora offered. “You might need help.”

“No, thanks,” Beverly laughed.

She was totally unprepared for the man’s first question.

“Miss Gray, I believe you wrote a play which was produced last summer in a small summer stock theater in Maine, did you not?”

“Yes,” Beverly admitted, wondering what was coming.

“I represent Play Productions, Inc., and we feel that your play has definite possibilities. With a little work and a few changes we feel we could make a hit of it.”

Here, when she least expected it, was the chance she had been dreaming of. Beverly felt incapable of speech. She could only marvel that out of nowhere had come such a chance.

“You understand, of course, that it will take weeks of work, perhaps even months, and we are anxious to start as soon as possible. If you will call at our offices tomorrow morning, all the details can be arranged.”

“I shall be there,” Beverly managed to say, “and thank you.”

He smiled. "Our aim is to discover new writers with a flair for the drama. We believe you have a talent for writing for the stage—even more so than for books—although your book is very good. The theater is a realm of living words and people, and we feel that your play has a message. You are standing on the threshold of a new world, and I wish you the best of luck."

Then he was gone and Beverly was left standing with his card in her hand.

"What did he sell you?" Lenora asked from the doorway.

"A future," Beverly said rapturously. "A golden, rose-colored, whole new world."

Lenora whistled. "What a salesman! He didn't by any chance throw in the Brooklyn Bridge or Radio City?"

Beverly laughed and hugged Lenora ecstatically.

"I am so happy I could burst!"

"I'm happy that you're happy, but would you mind telling me what I should celebrate?"

"My play," Beverly said. "My play," she repeated. "Tell me I'm not dreaming, Lenora. Tell me that man was actually here and offered to put my play on Broadway."

"Yipee!" Lenora yelled. "A playwright! You did it, Bev! I always knew you would," she added modestly. "Let's tell the others." She dragged Beverly up the stairs two at a time. "Bow in homage, you gals," Lenora commanded as she flung open the apartment door. "We have a playwright in our midst!"

"What are you talking about?" Lois demanded.

Beverly explained about Mr. Morgan while the girls listened attentively. Shirley, particularly, felt gratified at the happy light in Beverly's eyes. No one would ever know she had submitted the manuscript, for Shirley did not want any of the glory of her friend's success. All she had wanted to do was help Beverly to realize the dream that had lain in her heart since school days.

At the appointed hour the next day Beverly appeared in Mr. Morgan's office. She met a great many people associated with him and the first plans for her play were made. There was much revision to be done on the script: dialogue to be changed, a whole scene to be rewritten, the climax to be built up. It would mean hard work, but Beverly felt more than equal to it.

When she left the offices of Play Productions, Inc., she telephoned Larry, eager to share the news with him, but his secretary told her he was in conference with the president of the firm and could not be disturbed.

Beverly plunged into work on her play, and between that and her job on the *Tribune*, she had very little free time.

Christmas became a close reality as the days hurried by. There was a flurry of excitement as the girls did their shopping and made plans to go home to their respective families for the holidays.

“I don’t believe I shall return to New York,” Susan announced at dinner on their last evening together.

“You don’t?” Lois murmured, in what she hoped was not too pleased a voice.

“No. I believe Professor Tompkins can do more for my voice than the school here. He understands me,” she added.

“It might be the best thing—for your voice, I mean,” Lenora said. “Of course we will miss you.”

“Oh, we will!” chorused the other girls.

“That is sweet of you,” Susan smiled, “but I believe I really shouldn’t come back here. After all, my career comes first.”

“Absolutely,” Lois agreed solemnly.

The next morning Lenora and Susan departed for the holiday, and Beverly tried again to get in touch with Larry. It wasn’t like him to keep such a silence. She took the afternoon off, borrowed Shirley’s car, and drove to his office. There they told her he was working at the plant on Long Island, so, undaunted, Beverly went there.

The whole plant consisted of a series of buildings. The one where Larry had an office was a flat, gray affair, only two stories high, but a half block long and about a block wide. As she walked past the partly open doors she could see the fuselage of a half-finished airplane and scores of busy workers inside the building. She mounted a narrow stairway to the second floor and entered the door marked “Office.”

A girl was seated at a desk typing. Behind her were two more doors, each marked “Private.” She looked up and smiled when Beverly entered.

Larry was not in the office, so Beverly sat down to wait for him. The girl gave her a magazine and, while Beverly read, she was but dimly conscious of people coming and going in the office. She looked up in time to see the stenographer disappear into an inner office and a young man, standing at her desk, reach over and slip a bunch of keys from the desk drawer into his own pocket. When the girl returned he was looking out the window, unaware that Beverly had seen his action.

Beverly wondered whether or not to say anything. The girl and young man seemed to be on friendly terms. Perhaps his action was not out of the ordinary.

At that moment Larry strode in, a roll of blueprints under his arm.

“Beverly!” he exclaimed in amazement. “What are you doing here? Come inside.”

He opened the door into one of the private offices and dropped his blueprints on a desk.

“I came to thank you for the flowers,” Beverly said, “and to see what has suddenly turned you into a Sphinx.”

“It is this flying boat,” he sighed. “We have been working night and day to complete our newest ship.”

“What’s the rush?” Beverly wanted to know.

“We are trying to be the first to show a new design to a South American firm,” he explained. “It is a big chance for the firm and for me personally. We hope to have the most modern and best plane in the world. If only——”

“If only what?”

He looked around to see if the door were tightly closed.

“There is a plant in Florida working on the same type of plane,” he confided, “and it is uncanny how all their plans duplicate ours. One day we will be certain that we have something no other firm has thought of or attempted. The next day we will learn that the Blue Comet Company is working on the same thing. We believe someone here is selling them information about our plans.”

“What makes you think that? Have you any real evidence?”

“It started very simply,” Larry said. “I came in one morning and couldn’t find my chart book. Then I began to notice other things out of place on subsequent mornings. Someone comes in here at night, someone who knows where I keep my things and who can find them in the dark!”

“Is it really important that the plans be kept secret?” Beverly asked.

“Yes, at least until the ship has been tested. We believe this plane will revolutionize ocean air travel. It has more speed, more capacity, and uses less fuel than the ones used at the present time. It will cut nearly a day’s travel off the flight to Europe and will carry almost twice as many passengers.”

“Who besides yourself works on the plans?” Beverly asked.

“Only one other man, and I don’t believe he would do anything against our company. He has worked here for ten years and is in line for

promotion.”

“I suppose anyone can come into your office,” Beverly remarked. “You don’t lock the door, do you?”

“No,” Larry admitted, “but the plans are always locked in the filing cabinet.”

“You have something on your mind,” Beverly accused, watching him pace up and down the room. “What are you plotting?”

“I am going to hide in here tonight and catch the culprit,” Larry told her.

“I’ll help,” Beverly said eagerly. “Two heads are better than one.”

“No,” Larry said firmly. “You go home to Renville for Christmas. I’ll join you there when I’ve solved the mystery.”

“But I don’t want to go home without you,” Beverly protested. “I’ll wait for you—right here,” she added. “Inspector Martin once said I’d make a good detective, and I want to help you.”

“No,” Larry said again. “I——”

The door opened and the stenographer paused on the threshold.

“Will you want anything more tonight?”

“No, Miss Johnson,” Larry said. “I am leaving now. Good night.” He got up from his chair, snatched his hat, and, taking Beverly’s arm, led the way out to the stairs.

“Is this to throw them off guard?” Beverly whispered teasingly. “Sherlock at work!”

“I’ll take you to dinner and then I want you to go home!” he exclaimed.

“We’ll argue about it after dinner,” Beverly answered cheerfully. “Where are we going?”

“It won’t be fancy,” Larry warned, “but Pete has good food. Lots of the workers eat here.”

The restaurant made up in good food what it lacked in spaciousness. It was brightly lighted and crowded. They found a table for two close to the door where they could see everyone coming and going.

“Larry, do you know that man?” Beverly asked. The man she had seen take Miss Johnson’s keys was paying his check at the door.

“Never saw him before,” Larry replied. “What do you want for dessert?”

“He was in your office this afternoon,” Beverly told him.

“He was? Probably a friend of Miss Johnson.” Larry dismissed the matter without another thought and began to talk about something else.

Beverly followed Larry from the restaurant back to the plant, despite his protests. Some of the buildings were still aglow, and there were lights in the office next to Larry's.

"I am going to stand out here until everyone goes," Larry told her, stopping in the shadow of the hangar doors. "I wish you would go home."

"You will be lonely here by yourself," Beverly replied lightly. "I will keep you company."

"You are only after a story for Charlie Blaine," he accused.

She nodded cheerfully. "That is my secret motive. Think of the headlines: '*Tribune* Reporter Captures Thief of New Airliner Plans.'"

"What will I be doing while you are capturing him?" Larry wanted to know.

Beverly laughed and pinched his arm. "I was only teasing. I'll put your name in the headline."

"I don't want my name in the paper," he protested. "I only want to keep our nice new plane for ourselves."

One by one the lights in the building went out. Workers drifted off in twos and threes and the night watchman made his round. It was cold but Beverly felt herself trembling more from suspense than anything else. Standing beside Larry in the darkness, she imagined that in every shadow there lurked an ominous figure, and the half-finished plane in the hangar seemed too huge for just the two of them to protect.

"Let's go!" Larry whispered. "Stay close to me."

"Don't worry," she returned, "you won't lose me!"

In the darkness they stumbled up the stairs, striving in vain for silence. At last they reached Larry's office and closed the door behind them.

"All clear so far," Larry whispered. "Now to become like ghosts ourselves."

Beverly took up a stand at one window and Larry at the other. In the darkness the ticking of her wrist watch seemed unusually loud.

Nothing could be seen from the window except the empty runway stretching from the hangar below them. The moonlight made a pathway of light down the center of the field and a few adventurous rays crept into the room where Larry and Beverly stood.

"He may not come tonight," Beverly suggested suddenly. "Why do you think he will?"

"Because tomorrow we are moving the plane to Connecticut," Larry returned. "This is his last chance."

Silence fell again, heavy, ominous. Beverly thought of dozens of places she would rather be. She had a strange premonition that something unpleasant was about to happen. Indeed, it might at this moment be happening all around them while they stood waiting.

“Larry,” she whispered tensely, “there is someone down there by the fence. See him?”

“I see him,” Larry agreed. “He is coming toward the building. Remember, Bev stay out of the way. Don’t move until I give the word.”

Once more they lapsed into silence while they waited, straining their ears to hear a footstep or the creak of a floorboard that would tell them how close the intruder was. There was only silence, broken occasionally by the whiz of cars speeding past on the highway.

Beverly tried to make herself as small and inconspicuous as possible, crowding into the corner between the window and the filing cabinets. She was aware that Larry had moved quickly across the room and was standing behind the door. There was the dreadful feeling that she was going to sneeze and she tried in vain to smother it.

“Sh-sh!” Larry warned.

At the same instant there appeared the shadow of a man on the glass panel in the door. The doorknob turned noiselessly. Beverly watched it in fascination. The moonlight played upon it and made it seem like a small silver ball. The shadow above it, on the glass, seemed unusually large and dark. Then, she could scarcely believe her eyes, the shadow melted away and the door did not open. In some mysterious way the intruder had guessed that a trap lay waiting for him and he did not propose to walk into it.

“Larry!” she whispered in disappointment. “He isn’t coming in!”

“Wait,” Larry replied. “We must be sure!”

They remained in their places, alert and listening, but there was not a sound from the outer room. The intruder had gone as silently and mysteriously as he had come.

“How did he know we were here?” Larry wanted to know. “We were as quiet as mice!”

“Except for my sneeze,” Beverly said regretfully. “He must have heard me.”

“Beverly, you stay here. I’m going to see if I can catch him.”

Larry was gone before she could say another word, and Beverly waited uncomfortably in the darkness. Somewhere, perhaps in the room next to her, there lurked a shadowy figure. At any moment he might appear before her. It

was not a pleasant thought. She looked around uneasily, almost expecting him to spring up out of the wastepaper basket.

She moved nearer to the window and looked down, hoping to catch a reassuring glimpse of Larry, but the scene was empty of any moving thing. She was still staring out the window when she first felt the presence of someone else in the room, someone who moved silently, like a shadow. She knew, even before she turned around, that it was the thief. Perhaps he thought there had been only Larry waiting for him, and when he saw Larry leave he had come to complete his mission.

Where *was* Larry? Why didn't he come back? What could she do alone? Guarding the plans for the huge airplane had suddenly become her responsibility. In some way she must save the plans, or at least keep the thief here until Larry should return.

In her secluded corner Beverly was not visible to anyone standing by Larry's desk, and the thief was not aware of her presence in the room. She was not quite tall enough to peer over the top of the filing cabinet, but she could hear the sliding of the desk drawers and the rustle of papers as he went through the desk. Then there was the faint jingle of keys and the intruder started toward her corner. In a flash Beverly remembered the young man who had taken the keys from Miss Johnson's desk. This was his purpose! He, then, was the thief!

Without thinking of the consequences, Beverly left her corner and started across the room. With a muttered exclamation the man whirled about just as Beverly snapped on the overhead lights.

He dropped the keys and leaped for the door. Instinctively Beverly moved in the same direction, screaming Larry's name. Both Beverly and the thief reached the door at the same time. Her slender strength was no match for his, and she was thrust backward as he jerked open the door and pushed past. He was gone in an instant. Beverly followed as quickly as she could, and bumped into Larry halfway down the stairs.

"He's gone!" she said. "Just a minute ago. He can't be far away."

They hurried out of the building but could see no one.

"He has disappeared this time," Larry said, "and I don't think he will come back now that he knows we expect him. Did you get a look at the fellow?"

"It was the man I showed you in the restaurant—the one who was in the office this afternoon. I saw him steal Miss Johnson's keys, too," Beverly added.

“I’ll ask Miss Johnson about him the first thing in the morning,” Larry declared. “We might as well go home now. Wait until I go back and turn out the lights in my office.”

They had turned to go back into the building when Beverly gripped Larry’s arm. What was that tiny, flickering glow inside the window of the hangar?

“Larry!” she cried. “Look! Fire!”

Together they raced to the hangar. The doors were locked but Larry broke a window and climbed in. Beverly followed, tearing her dress on a splinter of glass.

A box of waste material close to the plane was ablaze, the flames straining hungrily to reach the fuselage.

“There is a fire alarm by the door,” Larry called over his shoulder to Beverly while he ripped a fire extinguisher from the wall.

Beverly ran toward the alarm, stumbling over ropes and boxes in her haste. She smashed the tiny glass door on the alarm and pulled the red handle. Then she turned to go back to Larry. She saw another fire extinguisher, and though it was heavy she began to drag it across the floor toward the flames. As she did so she thought she saw a figure move by the huge double doors. The thief!

“Larry!” she cried. “He is in here!”

Larry released his fire extinguisher to her and grimly moved across the room. Beverly had to direct the stream of liquid from the extinguisher upon the flames, and it was impossible to watch Larry at the same time. She heard a loud exclamation and knew that the thief had been discovered. Then there was a crash and the sound of a brief struggle. At the same moment there came the wail of a siren and Beverly thankfully turned to meet the help that hurried into the hangar.

The building was heavy with the odor of burned wood and the fire-fighting chemical. Beverly slipped outside and saw Larry, a firm hold on another young man’s collar, talking to the fire chief and a policeman. She was in time to hear Larry explain:

“He says he posed as a mechanic and copied all the plans he could lay his hands on. He sold them to our rival company and fooled them as well as us. Tonight he came back to get the plans of our extra fuel tanks and the proposed robot control. Miss Gray surprised him in my office and he fled down here. He says the fire was an accident and that he didn’t really intend to destroy the plane.”

“We’ll see that he doesn’t cause any more trouble,” the policeman assured Larry.

Larry nodded and hurried over to Beverly.

“Everything all right?”

She nodded.

“I’ll take you home,” Larry said. “What a night this has been!”

“I have Shirley’s car,” Beverly told him.

“Then you can take me home,” he laughed.

“I’ll take you to the *Tribune* office,” Beverly retorted. “Your precious airplane rates the front page.”

“The plane is a secret,” Larry pointed out.

“Oh, I won’t give out any vital statistics,” she smiled, “but you don’t expect me to keep the fire and the thief a secret, do you?”

They drove to the *Tribune* office where Beverly wrote her story while Larry waited in the car.

“I’m afraid you will have to go home alone tomorrow,” Larry told her as they drove to the girls’ apartment. “I must go to Connecticut with the plane, but I’ll join you for Christmas.”

It was not until Larry had gone that Beverly remembered she had forgotten to tell him about her play. She finished packing in the morning and took an early train to Renville where her parents met her at the station.

Beverly spent her first day home visiting her old friends, and then she went back to work on her play. She had purposely come home early so that she would have a few uninterrupted days of work. She labored steadily, refusing to heed her mother’s plea to rest. Every word written brought her nearer to realizing her dream. Every word seemed a step into a brighter future.

Christmas Eve was clear and cold. The stars were bright outside Beverly’s window. She looked up from her typewriter to watch them winking.

“Twinkle, twinkle, little star—” a voice murmured at the door.

“Jim!”

“Hi! Your mother sent me up to drag you away from that typewriter. What are you trying to do, be sick on Christmas? It isn’t allowed.”

“I have to finish my play,” she replied.

“Not tonight, you don’t,” he said firmly. He picked up her coat and held it out to her. “Come along, we are going for a walk. It will dust the cobwebs

from our brains.”

She submitted because she was too tired to argue. They walked through the silent, darkened streets, her spirits rising at each step.

“This is so different from New York,” Beverly sighed happily. “It is like walking in a different world. Let’s never stop.”

“We have to trim your Christmas tree,” he reminded.

“Let’s stop and see Anne and Tom first,” Beverly proposed. “Tom is going to dress as Santa Claus for young Tommy.”

Anne had been Beverly’s roommate at college and today she and her husband and young son were among Beverly’s closest and warmest friends. Their house was alive with lights and laughter, and they welcomed Beverly and Jim joyously. Tommy gave Beverly a sticky kiss and held up a pink elephant to receive a like tribute from her.

“Tom couldn’t find a Santa Claus suit to fit him,” Anne confided laughingly to Beverly. “The stores were completely sold out.”

“I believe I have one at home,” Jim said. “I wore it once in a church play. I’ll go home and get it. What’s Christmas Eve without a Santa Claus?”

While they waited for Jim to return, Anne decided to give young Tommy his bath and get him ready to pop into bed the minute Santa had delivered his presents. Beverly watched the proceedings with much laughter.

“He splashes like a duck,” Beverly chuckled.

“He is showing off for the company,” Anne returned. “Bev, where’s Larry? Isn’t he going to be here for Christmas?”

“I thought he was,” Beverly returned. “He had to go to Connecticut on business, but he promised to be here for Christmas.”

“He had better hurry or he won’t make it,” Anne smiled.

Anne hoisted her pajama-clad son to her shoulder and led the way downstairs. At that moment there was a commotion at the door and, amid hearty laughter and the ringing of bells, Santa Claus descended upon the Chandler home. With a squeal of delight Tommy leaped for Santa Claus’ beard. When the others had rescued Santa, the pack of toys which Tom produced was sufficient to keep Tommy in a constant state of awe until the sandman sneaked up on him and he fell asleep clutching his new teddy bear.

When Tommy had been put to bed the four young people sat and talked for hours.

“They are very lucky to be so happy,” Beverly said when she and Jim were walking homeward.

Jim still was wearing the Santa Claus suit, carrying his beard in his hand, and when they entered Beverly's home they were laughing at the amazed look a passer-by had given him.

A young man rose from a chair by the fire and with a little cry Beverly ran to him.

"Larry! You did get here for Christmas!"

"I promised I would," he grinned.

"Is the plane safe?" she asked eagerly when they were alone. "Did anything new happen?"

"No. It is safe now and under guard twenty-four hours a day. You look tired. What have you been doing?"

"It is my play," she explained, and told him about her good fortune. "I want to finish it before I go back to New York," she added. "How long can you stay, Larry?"

"I must leave tomorrow afternoon," he replied. "You will have time to finish the play after I have gone."

Christmas was a huge success. Beverly, Larry, Jim, and some of the other young people whom Beverly had known all her life in Renville kept the Gray home ringing with laughter. The gaiety continued after both Jim and Larry had gone back to New York, and even after Christmas day, so that Beverly was unable to do all the work on her play she had planned to do. Finally she returned to New York, and found the other girls already there.

On New Year's Eve Roger's parents gave a party and all the Alpha Delta girls and their friends were present.

New Year's Day was the day of the long awaited and eagerly anticipated reunion of the Alpha Delta girls. For months the girls had planned that no matter where they were, or what they were doing, on New Year's Day they would come to New York for a grand reunion.

Lenora and Lois had taken charge of securing reservations, planning the menu, ordering flowers, etc., so they were the first ones stirring in the morning.

"Go away!" Shirley implored as Lenora raised the window shade and let in the sunlight.

"How can you sleep so long?" Lenora inquired sweetly.

"Sleep!" Shirley echoed. "I just got to bed. I feel as if I haven't had any sleep. Why do people give parties on New Year's Eve?"

"You don't have to go to them," Lenora pointed out.

"I'm not going to stay at home and miss all the fun," Shirley mumbled. "Gosh, it was a beautiful party."

"And this is a beautiful day," Lois declared. "Come and have some breakfast. Beverly is making it."

Shirley yawned. "Say, do you think Beverly is looking well? I mean, she is so pale——"

"Overwork," was Lois' comment.

"I wonder if Rosalie and Evelyn will be there," Lenora murmured, thinking of the coming reunion.

"Ada wrote me last week that she is coming," Lois said. "Most of them will be able to spend only the day with us."

"Even that is something," Lenora replied. "It is ages since we have had a real gab fest."

"You are having one constantly," Lois giggled. "Don't chatter so much and eat your breakfast. We've things to do."

"Yes, Mama," Lenora said meekly and wrinkled her nose at her friend.

Beverly went to the Pennsylvania Station to meet Anne who was coming from Renville for the occasion. From there the two went to join Kathleen at the bus station to wait for Ada. By the time the four reached Tony's, the appointed place, the other girls were on hand and the greetings started all over again with the new arrivals.

A delicious lunch had been planned and ordered by Lois and Lenora, but it was doubtful whether the girls realized what they were eating, they had so much to talk about. Careers and plans for the future were discussed. Pictures were passed back and forth. Finally Rosalie stood up and smiled at them all. It was a long time since they all had been together, and she thought, sentimentally, that it might be a long time before such a meeting took place again.

"I might as well announce it now," Rosalie said. "You are all invited to a wedding tomorrow afternoon at five o'clock in The Little Church Around the Corner."

"Rosalie!" Lenora exclaimed. "You——"

Rosalie nodded, blushing becomingly.

"I'd like to have you, Lenora, as my maid of honor."

"I'd love it!" Lenora cried. "Oh! What'll I wear?"

"It isn't a formal wedding," Rosalie smiled, "so don't worry. We wanted it very simple, because right after the ceremony we are boarding a ship for South America."

Rosalie's announcement gave them an opportunity for more discussion and they did not realize how rapidly the time passed.

## CHAPTER V

# *Collapse*

---

THE sun shone with a brilliance that seemed to indicate that it, too, knew the day was a special one and had chased away all dark clouds.

“I love weddings,” Lenora announced sentimentally, with a deep sigh.

The Alpha Delta girls and some of their friends were returning from Rosalie’s wedding when Lenora made her observation. It had been a simple and impressive ceremony, after which the young couple boarded a steamer.

“With a little coaxing you might induce me—” Terry began teasingly.

“I mean other people’s weddings,” Lenora amended hastily. “It is my romantic nature. I love the music, the flowers, the bridesmaids’ dresses, everybody crying——”

“Will someone please tell me why people cry at weddings? Rosalie and Bob seemed very happy,” Terry said in bewilderment.

At that point the taxi occupied by Lenora, Terry, Jim, Lois, and Paul Benson became involved in a snarl of traffic and the car in back jolted into them. In the second cab were Beverly, Shirley, Larry, and Roger. Lenora leaned out the window to wave to them.

There was a great deal of horn honking and blowing of policemen’s whistles before the cars were on their way, but at last they came to their destination, the stage door of the theater where *Lonesome Lady*, Shirley’s current play, was in its last weeks.

The young people tumbled out on the pavement and after noisy good-bys, Shirley went into the theater while the rest went on to have their dinner.

The whole group planned to have dinner together and then go to a concert. Beverly had dinner with them but begged off from the concert.

“I’m on the last scene and I want to finish it,” she told them.

“That play of yours!” Lenora exclaimed. “Bev, you eat, sleep, and talk nothing but that. You owe yourself an evening off.”

“When it is finished I’ll have my evenings off,” Beverly replied.

She had worked long and earnestly, until she was tired and irritable, but now the end of her work was in sight. Then would come the biggest trial—the first performance.

Larry insisted on taking her home, despite her protestations that he should accompany the others.

“Lenora is right, you know,” Larry told her when they reached the girls’ apartment. “You are making yourself ill working so hard. Why don’t you give up the paper?”

“Leave the *Tribune*?” Beverly echoed in amazement.

“You can’t do two jobs,” he smiled.

“But I like the paper,” she murmured.

“You like too many things,” he laughed. “Your days are too full.”

“If my days weren’t full, I wouldn’t feel that I was living,” Beverly said.

Afterward, when she sat down at her desk, she thought about what they had said. Her days *were* full. There was rarely a moment when she had nothing to do. Especially these last weeks when she had had her play to struggle with. There was no denying she was tired from all the work and long hours. She was exhausted, mentally as well as physically, but out of her mind and heart she was creating something for others to enjoy. At least she hoped the public would find a message and enjoy her play. Suppose they didn’t? She turned her thoughts away from that possibility. She would just have to wait and see.

Beverly took the cover off her typewriter and inserted a sheet of paper. She had written only one line when the telephone rang. It was Charlie Blaine, editor of the *Tribune*.

“Beverly, there’s a fire downtown—big tenement district——”

“Okay,” she said wearily.

“Foster was supposed to go but he’s sick,” Blaine continued. “Get down there and phone me every twenty minutes.”

“Newspapers!” Beverly grumbled as she changed into a warm suit. Maybe Larry was right. Maybe she should give up the paper. Even as she had that thought, she knew that tomorrow when her head didn’t ache any more and she had checked the cold she felt coming on, she would enjoy these unexpected assignments again.

It was a bitter cold night. A strong, misty wind had sprung up and it whipped her breath away as she walked downtown. For three hours she stood in the cold and pouring rain, until she felt as stiff and frozen as the fire hose looked. Certainly she was almost as wet, she told herself.

When the flames had died to smoldering black ruins, she left the scene and went to the hospital to get a report on the injured. It was there, while she was talking to the girl at the switchboard, that it happened. One moment she felt stiff and frozen, as if she would never be warm again, and the next a curious laxity began to steal over her. The room seemed almost hot, and when she turned to walk away, her knees buckled under her.

The wind whistled past the windows and the shade rattled irritatingly. Twice Lenora got up to fix it and each time she noted, with growing anxiety, the lateness of the hour and Beverly's absence. When she woke in the morning she was prepared to demand an explanation, but Beverly was still absent.

"Beverly didn't come home last night," Lenora announced to the girls.

"I know," Shirley returned in a worried tone.

"Maybe she eloped," Lois yawned. "Rosalie and Bob might have given her ideas. Brrr! It's cold."

"She wouldn't do that, would she?" Lenora murmured. "Gosh, I'll have to press that skirt before I can wear it."

"She is probably at the office," Shirley said more easily.

"Do or die for dear old *Tribune*," Lenora muttered. "Where's the iron?"

The girls straggled into the kitchen, Lois the fastest since she had to report to her office. Lenora and Shirley lingered over their breakfast and mail after Lois had gone. Virginia Harris, enjoying a day of freedom, came in and they chatted a while longer. At last Lenora got busy pressing a skirt, while Shirley did the breakfast dishes and Virginia devoted herself to the sweater she was knitting. It was a peaceful, uneventful morning until the telephone sent out its shrill summons.

Lenora, whistling, set the iron down and went to the telephone. Shirley hung up the dish towels and Virginia began to grumble over a dropped stitch.

"Beverly is in the hospital," Lenora announced from the doorway.

"What?" Shirley dropped the dishpan.

"What?" Virginia echoed, leaping to her feet, the ball of yarn rolling across the room.

"Beverly is in the hospital," Lenora said again, her expression one of dazed incredulousness. "The Foster Memorial Hospital."

“What happened?” Shirley was shaking Lenora’s arm in her excitement. “What’s the matter with her?”

“I was too amazed to ask,” Lenora murmured.

“Let’s go over at once,” Virginia proposed. “I’ll get my coat.”

Shirley’s car was in a garage across the street and the girls hurried to it. Considering the way Shirley tore across town, they marveled, afterward, that they reached the hospital safely. There, at the receiving desk, they were told to wait in the room at the end of the hall. Other people were waiting there, too, and the girls sat down reluctantly to pass the time. After twenty minutes Lenora, impatient at the delay and determined to get action, went out to the desk again. She returned with a nurse who took the three of them up in an elevator to the fourth floor. Outside a closed door they paused.

“The doctor will be out in a moment,” the nurse said. “You can talk to him yourselves.”

The doctor proved to be a white-coated, serious young man who talked to them in the hall outside the door to Beverly’s room.

“It might easily develop into pneumonia if we aren’t careful,” he finished his diagnosis of Beverly’s illness.

“That is pretty serious, isn’t it?” Shirley asked. She was the only one of the group who seemed able to say anything.

“Yes,” the doctor admitted. “But don’t worry. She will have the best of attention. I would suggest you go home now. We will telephone you if there is any change.”

“No,” Lenora said loudly. “We want to wait here.”

“It will be hours—perhaps a day or two before she may see anyone,” he said kindly.

The girls were silent, hating this brown, firm man with the kind gray eyes who stood between them and their friend.

“I hate hospitals,” Lenora said vigorously as they went out, defeated, into the cold morning, “and doctors with their stethoscopes give me the creeps.”

“Me, too,” Shirley agreed.

“It—it doesn’t seem right for us to walk away and leave her in there,” Lenora gulped.

The other girls agreed with her heartily but their feelings were too deep for words.

It was two days before the girls were allowed to see Beverly.

“You must not stay any longer than ten minutes,” the nurse said firmly. “Your friend needs complete rest.”

They found Beverly white but smiling, thinner, too, only a ghost of her former self.

“My gosh, Bev, what happened to you?” Lenora murmured. “In only two days you’ve changed—Ouch!” She glared at Shirley. “Why did you kick me?”

“Don’t be so tactless,” Shirley muttered. “You look good to us, honey,” she assured Beverly.

“I wish you would get me out of here,” Beverly said wistfully. “How is everybody?”

“Except for the scare you gave us we are fine,” Lenora said.

“We thought all kinds of things,” Shirley continued.

“I was afraid they would scare you when I asked them to telephone and let you know where I was,” Beverly sighed. “Anyway, now that you are here maybe you can persuade them to let me go home. I’m not sick enough to stay in a hospital.”

“The doctor says you are,” Lenora pronounced, “and here you stay until he says you can come home.”

“Fiddlesticks!” Beverly said, sitting up. “Ooo!” she fell back again on the pillow. “My head feels all fuzzy inside.”

“See?” Shirley murmured. “Now be a good girl and swallow all the pink pills they give you. We’ll be back again later. They told us to stay only ten minutes.”

At that moment the door opened and the doctor came in. He smiled at all the girls and took Beverly’s wrist in his hand.

“How are you feeling now?”

Beverly frowned as he stuck a thermometer in her mouth.

“I want to go home,” she announced at last.

“You just got here,” he grinned. “I’ll send the nurse in with some medicine and then I want you to sleep. If you are good, you might have one more visitor tonight.” With a nod he was gone.

“Why are doctors so cheerful when the patients feel so awful?” Beverly groaned.

“Say, he’s pretty nice,” Lenora giggled. “Do you suppose I could move in with you?”

“We’ll go now,” Shirley said, patting Beverly’s hand. “Do what they tell you, Bev, so you can come home soon.”

During the days that followed the girls were frequent visitors, as were her parents and Larry. It really was not difficult to lie in the sun, relaxing in the delicious warmth, but Beverly was not content. She kept remembering that the final scene in her play was not finished. So she was restless and impatient and kept insisting that she be allowed to go home.

“You won’t rest if you go home,” the doctor told her, “so you are going to stay here.”

“I have to go home,” Beverly insisted. “If you don’t discharge me officially I’ll sneak out,” she threatened.

“Not in a nightgown and with the temperature at freezing,” he returned cheerfully. “Here, put this in your mouth.”

Over the thermometer Beverly glared at him. When she could speak again she flung out:

“You are discharged. I won’t have you for my doctor.”

“Your parents engaged me and only they can discharge me,” he said smilingly. “Good morning, Miss Gray.”

Beverly was still restless when Lenora arrived, bearing books and magazines and fruit.

“Is there anything else I could bring you, Bev?”

“My typewriter,” Beverly said. “I have to finish my play and the doctor won’t let me go home.”

“He knows what he is doing, Bev.”

“I’d get better a lot faster if I had that play off my mind. Lenora, you could bring me some clothes and help me get out of here.”

“Against the doctor’s orders?” Lenora asked. “Oh, no, not me!”

“Lenora!”

“You would be back here within a week,” was the blond girl’s frank reply. “Behave and do what they tell you.”

“If you won’t help me, someone else will,” Beverly said. “I just have to finish that play!”

Lenora considered her friend thoughtfully. She realized that Beverly was determined to get back to work on her play even at the risk of her health.

“Suppose you dictate to me, Bev. I can take it home and type it. In that way your play will get finished, you’ll still be under the doctor’s supervision, and you can finish your rest here.”

“Rest!” Beverly exclaimed in disgust. “I don’t want to rest. I’m perfectly all right.”

“You look like a ghost,” Lenora retorted. “Bev, you were very sick. You must be careful.”

In spite of her determination, Beverly realized the wisdom of Lenora’s words. She was pale and alarmingly weak. Yet she couldn’t lay contentedly idle when she knew Mr. Morgan was waiting for her play.

“Do you think you could type the last scene for me?” she asked Lenora.

“Of course I could,” Lenora said eagerly. “I’ll come back tomorrow and bring a pad and pencil. We will have to do it secretly. If the doctor knew about it, he wouldn’t let me come any more.”

So, stealthily, bit by bit, Lenora and Beverly finished the play. Every afternoon Lenora would come and they would work as long as they dared. If the doctor or nurse sometimes wondered why Lenora hastily closed her book upon their appearance, there were no questions asked. When the play was finished Lenora delivered it for her friend, and Beverly, more at peace now, gained strength rapidly.

During her convalescence Beverly often sat out on the sun porch. Among the patients there, she came to know another girl, the same one she had met at Beatrice Colfax’s party, True Torston. The girls often sat together and talked of the little country in Europe from which True had come, of New York which she had grown to love, and of the dancing career which her illness had interrupted. True was still a patient when the day came for Beverly to leave.

“You are not to do a bit of work for at least a month,” were the doctor’s parting words. “The best thing for you would be to go up in the mountains. The fresh air and sunshine are what you need.”

Larry, Lenora, and Terry had come for her. Beverly linked her arm in Larry’s and started up the avenue. The sun shone with brittle winter brightness, and the air was tingling with cold.

“I want to walk and walk and walk,” Beverly sighed happily.

“Not too much the first day,” Larry cautioned.

“I feel wonderful,” Beverly continued. “I could just keep going on and on and never stop.”

“You might think of me,” Lenora groaned. “My new shoes are killing me.”

They hired a hansom cab and rode around and around in the park, warm and glowing under the fur robes.

“It feels just like my first day in New York,” Beverly declared. “It is as if I had been away for years and this is all a bright new world.”

“Don’t people get hungry in your new world?” Lenora asked hopefully. “Smitty has steak on the menu tonight——”

“Let’s go someplace else,” Beverly suggested.

“But Smitty’s dinners are so good,” Lenora began.

Beverly yielded with a laugh.

“Smitty’s it is!”

When they entered the little restaurant she realized why Lenora had been so insistent upon Smitty’s. All the Alpha Delta girls from Mrs. Callahan’s and many of their friends were there to give Beverly a rousing welcome home.

## CHAPTER VI

# *Mountain View*

---

IDLENESS was hard on Beverly. She had never been one to waste time, to squander precious minutes doing nothing. Now, with hours forced upon her and the means to fill them taken away, she was at a loss trying to find things to do. At first it was a novelty to sleep late in the morning, have a leisurely breakfast and then shop or go to a matinee or the library. But soon it was no longer fun. She saw all the important shows, read the good books, attended lectures and concerts, and still she felt time heavy on her hands.

Then, one morning, Beverly received a note from Beatrice Colfax which she read aloud to Lenora.

“Wait a minute!” Lenora said. “Read it again—slowly. She has invited you and me to her mountain lodge. It should be fun!”

“She asks us to meet her for lunch today to talk it over.”

Miss Colfax had chosen the dining room of one of the popular hotels. She was waiting when the girls arrived and came forward eagerly to meet them.

“I’m so glad you could come,” she said. “I hope this means you have decided to go to Mountain View with me.”

“Where is your winter lodge?” Beverly asked.

“Up near the Canadian border,” Miss Colfax returned. “There will be plenty of winter sports for you.”

“Ice skating?” Lenora inquired eagerly. “And tobogganing?”

“And skiing,” Beatrice Colfax nodded.

“Let’s go, Bev,” Lenora said, eyes shining.

“But I should go back to work,” Beverly began doubtfully. “And my play——”

“Your play won’t be ready for a long time,” Lenora declared. “You know it will take weeks of rehearsing.”

“You can tell your editor you are up there to get a story on Prince Einar,” added Beatrice Colfax.

“I don’t know what to say,” Beverly was beginning when she received a kick under the table.

“We would love to come,” the blond girl put in sublimely, “and I think it is very sweet of you to ask us.”

“Miss Torston will go up with us,” continued Miss Colfax, “and Sir Charles will join us next week. A few other people will come later to meet the Prince.”

“A regular house party,” Lenora murmured.

“We will leave from Grand Central Station next Monday in my private car.”

Everything was settled with such speed and without any effort on their part that the girls were breathless. After lunch they left Miss Colfax and went out into the brisk winter sunshine, aglow with anticipation.

“Three weeks or so in the mountains,” Lenora sighed. “Doesn’t it sound heavenly?”

“Mmmm,” Beverly agreed.

Suddenly Lenora stopped and regarded Beverly with wide, horrified eyes.

“Bev! I haven’t any clothes! What can I take with me? Oh, my goodness, we will have to do some shopping.”

The girls spent the next three hours going in and out of stores, deliberating, choosing with care and enthusiasm.

“My last big fling,” Lenora sighed.

Beverly was much too engrossed in trying on a snow suit to ask Lenora what her remark meant.

They met Terry and Larry for dinner and eagerly announced their new plans. It was not until their excitement had abated somewhat and they had ordered dessert that Terry had his chance.

“When you return to the city I shall probably be gone,” he told them. “I plan to go back to England next week.”

“Oh, Terry!” Lenora exclaimed in dismay. “You didn’t tell me.”

“I’ve been off long enough,” the young man smiled.

“I had hoped you would stay here for good,” Lenora murmured.

“I shall always come back,” he replied, ignoring Beverly and Larry, and taking her hand. “As long as you are here.”

“Oh, Terry, I wish——”

“What?”

“Nothing. You will be careful, won’t you? No more airplane crashes!”

“I hope not,” Terry laughed. “I say, let’s go and see the new musical show that opened last night.”

“All right,” Lenora agreed.

“You two run along,” Beverly said. “I don’t feel up to it.”

“What’s wrong?” Lenora inquired anxiously.

“Nothing serious,” Beverly smiled. “You’d better hurry or you’ll miss the overture.”

Lenora went reluctantly but Terry winked at Beverly before they disappeared.

“You did that so they could have an evening alone,” Larry smiled at her. “You think of everything.”

The light shone on her hair, pointing it with reddish gold diamonds.

“So you are going away again. I shall miss you, Bev.”

“And I shall miss you,” she returned. “Perhaps you can come up for a week or so. Would you like that?”

“Of course, would you?”

“Larry! Of course I want you there. Maybe I could fix it so that you can be guest of honor instead of Prince what’s-his-name,” she teased. “There will be lots of pretty girls there.”

“I’m not interested,” he returned laughingly. “I have the girl I want.” His fingers were warm upon hers. “But sometimes I wonder.”

“About what?”

“You.”

“That’s good,” she teased. “I devote the hour between three and four every afternoon just to thinking about you, too.”

He laughed and just then they saw Lois and Paul coming toward them. There was no more opportunity for confidences.

The next morning Lenora brought the newspaper to the breakfast table with her.

“Look at this!” she commanded. “‘Mystery man again foils police and escapes with diamond necklace,’ ” she read aloud.

“The same one who was at the Colfax party?” Beverly asked with interest.

“Is sounds like it from the description here,” Lenora nodded. “Another item of interest is this: ‘Among the guests were Sir Donald Charles, the

distinguished British author, Miss Beatrice Colfax, and Miss True Torston.’ ”

“The same three,” Beverley murmured.

“Just what I was thinking,” Lenora agreed. “Do you think there is any connection?”

“No, I suppose not,” Beverly replied. “It might have been just a coincidence.” She arose and picked up her coat. “Well, gals, rehearsals started yesterday and I’m off to watch my brain child in action.”

“Don’t forget you have to go with me to buy ice skates this afternoon,” Lenora shouted after her friend.

Rehearsals of Beverly’s play had begun and though Beverly felt she should remain in close touch with Mr. Morgan, she knew that a vacation in the mountains would do her much good. She would not have revealed to anyone the fact that she still felt weak from her recent illness and tired easily. It would be best to go away for a few weeks and come back completely well and strong. Mr. Morgan had promised to telegraph her if any difficulties were encountered, and, though she wanted to watch every step of this new venture, she felt confident that her play would be well presented.

The three girls and Miss Colfax boarded the train Monday morning. All day they sped northward. Their meals were served to them and everything was provided for their comfort. During the afternoon they ran into a snowstorm which continued all the way to their destination.

They alighted from the train amid much laughter and gay chatter and piled into the two horse-drawn sleighs that awaited them at the station. Lenora and Beverly were in one, nearly smothered under the heavy fur robe the driver put over them, while Miss Colfax and True Torston were in the second sleigh. They glided smoothly over the frozen road, the bells on the horses’ harness giving off a clear, gay jingle.

“This,” Lenora announced, settling back with a sigh of delight, “is the life. Private car, private sleigh, mountain retreat. Boy, I wish I were rich.”

“Then you wouldn’t appreciate it,” Beverly returned with a laugh. “Look, that must be the lodge.”

“The castle, you mean,” Lenora said. “I feel like Alice ready to step through the looking glass.”

The snow-covered gabled roof of Mountain View Lodge was visible over the crest of the hill, and as they drew nearer the girls could see that the building was immense. It was a two-story, dark brown house, and the trees

and shrubbery surrounding the long drive and the house were bent low under the still falling snow.

“Christmas!” Lenora murmured. “It looks just like a Christmas card, trees covered with white, lights shining through the snow.”

“It is beautiful,” Beverly agreed.

The sleighs stopped and the huge oak door was thrown open. Laughing, shaking the snow from their shoulders, the four crowded inside, into the bright warmth of the hall and on to the huge sitting room where a supper was laid before the open fire. The walls were lined with books and a deer head was mounted over the fireplace. Two love seats were drawn up to the low table.

“I like this,” Lenora declared later, lying in one of the twin beds in the girls’ room, hands clasped behind her head, watching Beverly brush her hair.

“I do, too,” Beverly smiled.

“I was born with extravagant tastes,” Lenora sighed. “I wish I knew how to make a million dollars quickly.”

“A lot of people wish the same thing,” Beverly laughed. She switched off the light and opened the window, lingering to watch the snowflakes piling upon the sill.

“I like snow,” Beverly said. “It gives me a lighthearted feeling. Everything looks so fresh and cool under it.”

“While it is nice and white,” Lenora agreed, sliding down under the blankets, “but when it gets dirty and slushy it is a mess.”

“Beverly.” Lenora spoke thoughtfully into the darkness after her friend was in bed.

“Yes?”

“I think you missed the point about my wanting a million dollars.”

“I did?” Beverly inquired.

“Yes. You see—I will soon have to become a working girl and it is not a pleasant prospect.”

Beverly sat up. “Are you joking?”

“No,” Lenora said quietly. “I mean it.”

“Do you need money?” Beverly continued. “I could——”

“I’m not down to borrowing—yet,” Lenora replied. “The thing to do is get myself a job.”

“I don’t understand,” Beverly said in bewilderment. “The dress shop \_\_\_\_\_”

"I sold my half of the shop," Lenora said surprisingly, "and gave Susan most of the money for college tuition and music lessons. Now, since I don't have that income, I have to do something else."

"Well," Beverly sighed, settling back again, "you'll find a job somewhere. Don't worry."

"But I do worry," Lenora insisted. "I don't like to work," she added honestly.

Beverly laughed. "You'll feel differently when you find something you like."

"How do I know that a month from now I'll still like the job I get?" Lenora inquired. "I want something with a future. I won't be a drudge."

"How about your photography?" Beverly suggested. "Mr. Blaine has used many of your pictures in the *Tribune*. He might——"

"You know very well he doesn't approve of women news photographers," Lenora said. "Oh, well," she turned over with a sigh. "I won't let it spoil my vacation. I'll think about it when I get back to New York."

That was the proper way to feel, Beverly reflected. She should let nothing spoil this vacation. She must banish the worries and doubts about her play. She must lose her uncertainties in the peace and contentment that surrounded this house.

Beverly was awake early the next morning and she got up and dressed without waking Lenora. She had planned to go for an early morning walk, but it was still snowing. As she went down the stairs, two Shepherd dogs rose from the rug in the hall where they had been sleeping and rushed for her. In their puppy exuberance they leaped all over her, until she sat down on the steps and devoted herself completely to petting them. At last they let her go on into the sitting room but continued close at her heels.

Beatrice Colfax was at the telephone and Beverly caught just the closing words of her conversation.

"Yes, at once, please. It is very valuable." She hung up and turned to Beverly. "My ring," she explained. "I must have left it on the train. I see you have met Tip and Top."

"Yes," Beverly laughed. "They overwhelmed me as I came downstairs. Where were they last night?"

"They usually sleep in the stable but I felt safer with them in the house."

"Safer?" Beverly asked in surprise.

“Yes. Ever since the robbery at True’s dance I’ve realized how careless I have been with my jewels. I brought them here with me because I was afraid to leave them in New York. I’m sure Tip and Top will give warning if any thieves try to break in.”

“Snow, snow, beautiful snow,” Lenora said from the doorway. “Good morning. Hey, wait a minute!” The last was directed to the dogs who were ecstatically kissing her with their rough, red tongues.

“Introducing Tip and Top,” Miss Colfax laughed. “Down, boys! Shall we have breakfast? True is going to have hers in bed.”

“Why didn’t I think of that?” Lenora demanded.

“Since it is still snowing I’m afraid there won’t be much to do today,” Miss Colfax apologized.

“The more snow the better,” Lenora assured her. “We’ll find something to do.”

They spent the day acquainting themselves with Mountain View inside. It was a huge place, with high-ceilinged rooms and rich, comfortable furnishings. In the hall Lenora discovered a suit of armor dating back to medieval times, and she proceeded to take it apart, stating firmly:

“I always wanted to see what these things were made of and to try one on.”

“If you get into that one, we will have to cut you out with a can opener,” Miss Colfax prophesied.

The dogs enjoyed Lenora’s struggle with the armor and barked loudly every time a piece clattered to the floor.

True Torston appeared for lunch and then disappeared to write letters and read until dinnertime.

With the coming of darkness the snow ceased and the moon came out, its brilliance making diamonds of the snow crystals.

“Let’s go for a walk,” Lenora proposed.

“Not I,” True Torston said firmly.

“Nor I,” Beatrice Colfax smiled.

Tip barked eagerly and Top echoed his partner’s sentiments.

“They have adopted me,” Lenora smiled. “Okay, boys.” She rose and Beverly followed.

The dogs dashed ahead and were whimpering at the door when the girls came down in snow suits.

The night lay still and cold about them. There was a generous moon and the stars were so close and so numerous that they made a pathway of light beyond the trees.

“Stardust trail,” Lenora murmured. “I feel so romantic I could burst.”

The trees were tall, dark sentinels wrapped in silent white. The girls’ footsteps gave off a soft crunch as they walked down the path. The air was brittle and their breath formed tiny clouds of white in the darkness. The snow was an unbroken blanket of white, dotted here and there with shadows.

They walked a good distance from the house, their footprints a series of holes in the snow, then they turned to look back at the lodge. In the moonlight the buildings were outlined in brilliance. The windows in the house looked like little yellow eyes. There was a balcony along the second floor on this side and as Beverly watched, a figure moved along the balcony, crossing in front of the lighted window. It was only a fleeting impression, and it was gone in a moment.

“Did you see anyone?” she asked of Lenora.

“Where? By the house? No, why?”

“I thought I saw someone on the balcony.”

“A shadow on the moon, perhaps,” Lenora said. She whistled for the dogs. “Going back?”

Beverly followed more slowly. A shadow on the moon? Perhaps. But she could not forget the fact that Beatrice Colfax had brought valuable jewels with her to this deserted spot.

## CHAPTER VII

# *The Mystery Man*

---

BEVERLY'S green snow suit was a bright splash of color against the snow. Lenora waved frantically as she shot past on her skis.

"Beverly! I can't stop! Oooo-o-o-o!" Her voice drifted back on the wind.

Beverly watched as Lenora sped down the slope, did some wild gymnastics in an effort to stop her swift pace, and finally came to rest, headfirst, in a snowbank. Tip and Top witnessed the accident from afar and, with yelps of joy, dashed for the spot. When Beverly reached her friend the dogs were digging madly and Lenora was struggling to stand upright, snow clinging to her face and suit.

"Miss Colfax warned you not to try that steep hill until you had more practice," Beverly admonished.

"I know," Lenora agreed, "but, gee, it was a thrill. I'm going to do it again."

"You better learn how to stop first," Beverly laughed. "I'm going skating. See you for lunch."

Lenora went back up the hill, Tip and Top at her heels. Beverly swung her skates over her shoulder and started toward the small skating pond in back of the lodge. True Torston was there, executing intricate figures on the ice. She skated as gracefully as she danced. Beverly watched her for a while and then put on her own skates. It was glorious here in the cold sunshine. It was the kind of day to be free from all care—especially free of thoughts of thieves in the night.

Beatrice Colfax walked down to the edge of the ice and waved to them. Both Beverly and True glided toward her and their skates swooshed as they slid to a halt, sending up a little shower of ice.

"Sir Charles is at the station. He will be here for lunch," Miss Colfax reported, "which is in about thirty minutes."

"I'd better find Lenora," Beverly said, sitting down on a log to remove her skates.

She walked back up the hill and waved Lenora down. While she waited for Lenora to join her, Beverly thought again about the footprints she had seen on the balcony. It had not been her imagination at work last night. This morning she had seen footprints in the drifted snow on the balcony—small footprints, not the kind she had imagined a burglar would leave. Upon inquiry, the maid had told her no one was in that wing of the house. Yet those footprints! How did they get there?

“How can you frown like that on such a beautiful day?” Lenora demanded, coming up breathlessly.

“I was thinking,” Beverly laughed. “Let’s go.”

After lunch Beverly, Lenora, and True walked in to the village. It was a good three miles to the little cluster of buildings in the valley. When the trio arrived they were ready for hot chocolate and cookies at the local sweet shop.

Over their chocolate they discussed the Prince who was to visit Mountain View and the beauty of the lodge.

“Beverly thought she saw someone on the balcony of the lodge last night,” Lenora remarked.

“Yes?” True shot Beverly an inquiring glance.

“It was probably just a shadow,” Lenora continued calmly.

“Probably,” True said.

Beverly said nothing. She was trying to decide why True had looked so startled when Lenora mentioned the figure on the balcony.

The three walked back to Mountain View and the incident was forgotten—until that evening.

Sir Charles and Miss Colfax were playing chess. True Torston had pleaded weariness and retired to her room. Beverly was writing letters and Lenora was trying to teach Tip and Top to sit up. It was very quiet and when the maid screamed it echoed piercingly through the house. The dogs dashed out into the hall with Beverly and Lenora in close pursuit. Sir Charles and Miss Colfax upset the chess table in their haste to follow.

The maid was clinging to the stair railing, her face white, pointing down the second floor hall.

“What’s the matter?” Lenora cried.

John, the houseman, came running from the kitchen.

“Marie! What is it?”

“A man,” the maid said. “I passed him in the hall. He wore a mask and a long, black cape——”

“Where did he go?” Sir Charles demanded.

“Down—down there, sir. Toward Miss Torston’s room.”

Sir Charles and the houseman ran down the hall with the others following.

“True! True, are you all right?” Miss Colfax knocked on the dancer’s door and threw it open.

The room was in darkness save for the moonlight pouring in through the window. True sat up in bed.

“What’s wrong?”

“The maid said she saw a man coming toward your room,” Miss Colfax explained.

“There isn’t any man in here,” True reported, stifling a yawn. “You scared me to death!”

“Sorry,” Sir Charles said. “Come, John, we’ll search the house.”

The two men went off and the maid hurried down to the kitchen. Beverly, Lenora, and Miss Colfax returned to the sitting room with the dogs.

“A mask and a cape,” Lenora muttered. “Sounds familiar.”

Miss Colfax paced up and down the room. “I don’t understand. If a stranger had entered, I’m sure Tip and Top would have known——”

“He might have come in through an upstairs window,” Lenora suggested.

“If it is the same man who appeared at the party in New York,” Beverly murmured, “I wonder what he is after.”

“Probably the star sapphire I have,” Miss Colfax said. “It is very old and very valuable. Oh, why did I bring it with me?”

“We could find nothing,” Sir Charles reported, returning at last. “Everything seems secure.”

“Marie must have been dreaming,” the houseman smiled and withdrew.

“Do you think the maid was dreaming?” Lenora asked Beverly later when the girls were alone in their room.

“If she really saw a man, where did he go?” Beverly countered. “True has the room at the end of the hall. He couldn’t get out any other way without going down the stairs—past us.”

Lenora snapped off the light and jumped into bed.

“I’d think it was a dream, too, except that the maid’s description fits the mystery man who popped up at the dance in New York.”

“Maybe she read about him and imagined she saw him here. What she probably saw was that suit of armor standing in the corner. That scares me sometimes,” Beverly smiled.

“That was probably it,” Lenora agreed.

There was silence for a few moments and then Lenora spoke again.

“The Prince is supposed to arrive tomorrow, isn’t he?”

“Yes.”

“Bev, what is he Prince of?”

“I believe he comes from a small country near Turkey,” Beverly said. “Miss Colfax met him on one of her trips around the world. I believe he saved her from a runaway horse or something.”

“How gallant!” Lenora sighed. “Why does she make him come all the way up here? Why doesn’t she show him New York?”

“He doesn’t like crowds. It was his idea to come here to the mountains.”

“Very interesting. I can hardly wait to meet him,” Lenora yawned. “A real, live Prince! Do we bow? Do we call him ‘Your Highness’? Is he different from other people?”

“Just be yourself,” Beverly advised with a laugh. “Miss Colfax said he is very informal and charming.”

Silence settled over the lodge and if an intruder was lurking within, he did not disturb the serenity of the night.

When Beverly awoke the next morning Lenora’s bed was empty. It had happened before when she took Tip and Top for an early morning romp. Beverly began to dress leisurely. As she was combing her hair, she stood by the window and had a perfect view of the driveway below.

Lenora was dashing up the driveway, the two dogs straining at their leashes in front of her. A young man came around the corner of the house just as Lenora and her canine friends took that path. The young man went down in the snow, twisted in the leash, and dragged Lenora and the dogs with him.

Beverly watched as Lenora extricated herself and pulled the dogs off the young man. When Lenora reached the girls’ room Beverly was waiting, a broad smile on her face.

“Bev! Bev! Have you heard? The Prince arrived last night.” Lenora swept in breathlessly. “Gosh, I can’t wait to meet him. What are you laughing at?”

“I was remembering how Lois said you would bowl him over,” Beverly chuckled. “You certainly did.”

“I did?” Lenora looked mystified, then she sank down on the bed, clapping a hand over her mouth to stifle a shriek. “Oh, no! Bev, it wasn’t the Prince the dogs and I just knocked down!”

Beverly nodded and giggled again. “I would say he fell for you the first time he saw you.”

“How awful!” Lenora gasped. “I thought he was just another one of the guests Miss Colfax said was coming. I talked to him just like I would to anybody—not like a Prince at all. In fact, I even said it was his own fault for being in the way. Oh, I wish I were in New York! Miss Colfax will probably ask me to leave. Oh, why does everything happen to me?” she wailed.

“Come, let’s go down to breakfast,” Beverly said.

“I can’t,” Lenora cried. “I can’t face him.”

“Of course you can,” Beverly laughed. “Come along.”

With the greatest reluctance Lenora followed Beverly downstairs. Miss Colfax, True Torston, and Prince Einar were in the sitting room. Introductions were accomplished quickly. The tall young man in brown tweed, his face tan and smiling, gray eyes alight, came forward to shake hands with Lenora.

“I trust you have fully recovered from your fall,” he smiled.

“I’m awfully sorry about that,” Lenora returned, coloring in embarrassment.

“Don’t be,” he said. “You looked as if you were having fun.”

“I was,” Lenora admitted. “That is, until——”

“Perhaps I may go with you and the dogs tomorrow morning?” he suggested.

Miss Colfax spoke to Beverly just then and she did not hear Lenora’s reply, but she smiled to herself as she visioned the delight the girl would have in recounting this adventure to her friends in New York.

## CHAPTER VIII

# *Lost*

---

THE PRINCE proved to be a very sociable person. He was an expert on skis, and undertook to teach the girls some of the fine points. They spent almost every minute of two sun-filled days on the snow-covered slopes behind the lodge. True, though she did not join in the sport, was often an interested spectator. That was how she came to be standing beside Beverly under an overhanging ledge of rock, watching Lenora and the Prince execute some difficult turns. Suddenly Lenora began to gesture toward Beverly and True.

"I'll see what they want," True said.

When she started toward the skiers, Lenora and the Prince doubled their frantic gestures, waving her back. Then True looked upward. Over the edge of the rock beneath which she and Beverly were standing was a tip of ice. It moved with fascinating deliberation, growing in size. With a sudden swift movement, True flung herself back upon Beverly so forcefully that they were both hurled into a snowbank against the base of the rocky cliff just as a landslide of jagged ice fell from the ledge above.

"Oh, hurry!" Lenora cried, kicking off her skis.

Together Lenora and the Prince worked silently, swiftly, and pulled first True and then Beverly, wet and disheveled, from the snow.

"Thanks," Beverly gasped to True when she recovered her breath.

"It was nothing," True shrugged.

"Nothing!" Lenora echoed. "Why, if some of those jagged points of ice had hit Beverly or you—" she shivered into silence.

"It was very quick and clear thinking," the Prince declared, looking at True admiringly. "Come, we will go back to the lodge."

Beverly and True changed at once into dry clothes, while Lenora and the Prince told Miss Colfax what had happened. After luncheon, they sat in the sitting room to read their mail and talk over plans for the next week when more guests should arrive.

The radio was turned on and the voice of the announcer could scarcely be heard above the chatter until Beverly murmured: "Sh-sh-sh!" Then his voice came cold and crisp into the center of them.

"Growing anxiety was felt over the Red Star Transport plane flying from New York to Ontario. The plane is now ten hours overdue at its destination and officials feel the pilot may have been lost in the blizzard now raging over the Canadian border. A complete list of passengers was not available at the beginning of this broadcast but the pilot is Stanley Barnes, a veteran of twenty thousand hours in the air. The co-pilot is Gary Phillips, also a veteran airman, and the stewardess is Miss Virginia Harris, making her first trip on the New York to Ontario run."

Lenora was galvanized into action.

"Virginia!" she exclaimed, jumping up and shaking Beverly's arm. "Did you hear him? He said it was Virginia!"

"A friend of yours?" Miss Colfax inquired.

"Ever since college," Lenora nodded. "Can't we do something, Bev? We are in the same part of the country. Miss Colfax said this was directly in the route of the transport planes."

"More than one plane has been lost in the mountains past Silver Lake," Miss Colfax murmured.

"How far is that?" Beverly asked.

"About sixty miles."

"No distance at all in an airplane," Beverly continued. "I believe there is an airfield near here, too."

"Two miles on the other side of the village," Sir Charles interposed.

"I wonder if we could charter a plane and help in the search?" Beverly murmured.

"My plane is hangared there," Miss Colfax said. "You are welcome to use it if you wish."

"Could we, Bev?" Lenora asked eagerly. "You could pilot it, and I could go along."

"I'll call the airport and have them make it ready for you," Miss Colfax said in answer to Beverly's mute appeal.

"And I'll drive you over in the sleigh," added Sir Charles.

They were ready in surprisingly short time. Everyone did his best to speed them. They were about to climb into the sleigh when True Torston stopped Beverly and handed her a package.

"You might need this." It was a first-aid kit.

“That was thoughtful of her,” Beverly said as the sleigh started.

“Yes. I like her,” Lenora added.

Sir Charles did not waste any time covering the distance to the airport, and when they arrived a small yellow cabin plane was waiting, the motor whirring in anticipation.

“Imagine Miss Colfax having her own plane!” Lenora exclaimed as they climbed inside.

“Imagine her lending it to us!” Beverly corrected. “Here we go.”

The motor broke into a roar. The plane ran the length of the cleared space and rose gracefully and effortlessly into the air. It was a modern ship, easy to operate, and Beverly relaxed somewhat as it obeyed her slightest pressure.

They flew over the spot the report had indicated as the place where the plane may have crashed, but there was nothing to be seen. They passed other planes also in the search, and so they knew the wreck had not been found.

“The announcer said there was a blizzard,” Lenora muttered. “I don’t see any.”

“The snow on the ground is fresh and unbroken,” Beverly replied. “The sun hasn’t been out very long.”

“You know, sometimes these things go on for days,” Lenora said with a frown. “You’d wonder how anything as big as an airplane could get lost.”

Beverly nodded in agreement but did not reply, keeping her eyes on the ground below.

“Airplanes!” Lenora continued. “Seems to me we are always looking for wrecks. Why do people ride in the things?”

“Why do you?” Beverly countered.

Lenora grinned. “Because I like ’em.”

“Considering the millions of miles being flown every day,” Beverly said, “the percentage of plane wrecks is very small. Every day aviation is improving, but it is still a new field and there are always dangers. But if you don’t want to go on——”

“Catch me staying home!” Lenora exclaimed. “Did you think, because I said what I did, that I didn’t want to go? Gosh, I love flying. To me it isn’t as dangerous as riding in a car with Lois at the wheel.”

A wilderness of white, unbroken snow lay beneath them. Now and then jagged rocks pushed dark heads above the blanket of white, and trees nodded in the wind, shaking off their covering of fairylike crystals.

“It looks so peaceful and calm and serene,” Beverly thought. Yet she knew that beneath the snow there lay sharp rocks, unsuspected gullies, perhaps even the wreckage of an airplane.

“Beverly! Look! Down there!”

Beverly circled over the spot Lenora had indicated. It was far from the route of the transport line—that was probably why no other plane had come this way.

Half-buried in a clump of trees they could see the crumpled silver wings of the plane for which they searched.

“We can’t land here,” Beverly said, her eyes scanning the scene below for an open space large enough to set the plane down. “We’ll have to go back and organize a rescue party.”

“That would take time,” Lenora replied. “A parachute could make it,” she continued. “I’ll go, Bev.”

“You’ve never jumped from a plane,” Beverly said. “You might be hurt.”

“I’ll take the chance. There might be somebody alive in that wreck,” Lenora returned, already unbuckling her seat belt. “Perhaps I can help them.”

“But, Lenora——”

“But me no buts,” Lenora retorted. “Where is that first-aid kit?”

Once at the door to the plane Lenora grinned over her shoulder at Beverly.

“Remember what I told you,” Beverly cautioned. “Don’t pull the ring too quickly.”

“Don’t worry,” Lenora replied. “Just you get back and send some of those Mounties to the rescue. Send some good-looking ones,” she added with a wink. “Cheerio!” Then she was gone, whipped off into space.

Beverly hovered over the spot, watching for her friend’s parachute to open. At last it popped open and hung like a mushroom below her. She waited, flying round and round, until Lenora hit the ground and disappeared into a snowbank. In a few moments she scrambled to her feet and waved. Beverly dipped the plane in salute and sent it streaking across the sky.

## CHAPTER IX

# *Wilderness*

---

LENORA watched the little plane until it was a mere speck against the blue, then she turned and disentangled herself from the silk of the parachute. She had just gone through the most thrilling experience of her life. Her heart still was pounding and her breath came in gasps. There had never been anything like that first frightening moment when her breath was snatched away and she hurtled through empty space toward the earth.

She shook the snow from her hair. There was no time to dwell on her sensations. There was work to be done. She made sure the first-aid kit was safe and started wading through the snow toward the silent plane.

She had come down several hundred yards away from the wreck and now, as she stumbled toward it, she wondered. Surely if there was anyone about, he would have heard the plane and seen her landing. When she thought of what she might find in the wrecked plane, her courage almost failed her.

“Hello, there!”

Lenora shouted as she paused for a moment at the edge of the woods. Her voice echoed back to her in the fresh, cold sunshine. A breeze stirred the trees, sending down a fine shower of snow upon her, but there was no answer.

Forcing her courage to the fore, Lenora approached the plane. It lay on one side, one wing completely crumpled, the other sticking up into the air like the silent trees around it. The propeller was a twisted sliver of light where the sun shone upon it.

Several times her courage failed her as she crept closer and closer to the plane. She had been valiant enough to parachute to the scene, but now she was shaking.

She called aloud several times, but only her own voice rang in her ears.

At last she could put the moment off no longer. She approached the door of the plane. It was on the side uppermost and the door hung by only one

hinge. The interior of the plane yawned black and silent.

Lenora pulled herself up on the fuselage until she could slide through the opening. She had to crawl and it was so dark inside that she pulled out the tiny flashlight she had put in her pocket. She had been almost afraid to enter the plane, afraid of what she might see, but certainly she was not prepared for what she did discover.

The airplane was empty. There was no doubt of it. A hasty search amid the wreckage did not reveal one solitary living thing. It was as silent as a tomb, and suddenly it was too much for Lenora. She turned and hastily made her way out into the sunshine.

Once free of the wreckage Lenora considered the situation thoughtfully. When the plane was in the sky it had carried passengers, a pilot, co-pilot, and a stewardess. Now it lay a broken, twisted thing, the whereabouts of its occupants a secret hidden in its battered frame.

For the first time Lenora became aware of footprints in the snow—and tiny drops of red, like blood. She considered the footprints thoughtfully.

“Did I make all those?” she asked herself aloud.

Carefully fitting her boot into one of the prints, she discovered that the footprint was several sizes larger. They all seemed to lead to one spot past the nose of the fallen plane. There they merged into a single trail and this Lenora followed. Her heart beat fast with anticipation. What had happened was clear. The occupants had not been killed, as she had at first feared. They were alive somewhere in this vast expanse of forest.

Here and there snow had drifted down from the trees and obliterated the tracks. Twice she lost the trail and had to retrace her own steps. She had forgotten the time and forgotten, too, that the sun went down swiftly. With the coming of twilight it grew colder, but Lenora refused to give up. Besides, she told herself, what could she do but go on? She refused to return to sit in that silent plane and wait for Beverly to send help. It was better to be doing something. At any moment she might round a turn and see the occupants of the plane!

Her flashlight began to dim and she turned it off. The moon would rise soon and she would be able to see the footprints by its light. Meanwhile she would have her dinner. She sat on a fallen log and digested a chocolate bar while she waited for the moon to rise. The woods were silent around her. There had been a time when she would have been afraid in the woods alone, but tonight, under the blanket of snow, it seemed almost friendly. She imagined the trees were sentinels, guarding her, and the wind that rustled in the treetops was a voice whispering encouragement to her.

As soon as the moon appeared over the horizon and its rays cast a patchwork pattern on the snow, Lenora was on her way. Some of the snowdrifts were as high as her waist. These she tried to avoid and in so doing often lost sight of those precious footprints. Once she stopped and sent a lusty shout ringing through the woods, hoping someone would hear her. But there was no answer and she struggled on. She had to stop now and then to rest and each time it was harder to get up and go on.

She looked at her watch in the moonlight and was amazed to see the time. She had no idea she had spent so many hours alone in the woods. Time went swiftly. No wonder she was almost exhausted.

Suddenly she stopped. Mingled with the fragrant odor of the pine trees was something else now. Wood smoke! For a moment Lenora thought wildly of a forest fire. Then reason took charge again. Smoke! It probably meant someone had built a campfire. It might even mean she had found the people from the plane!

She hurried on eagerly. As she came to the crest of a hill she saw an open space before her. In the center of it was a small log cabin, smoke curling up from the chimney. The footprints she was following led directly to the door.

Lenora went on almost at a run, stumbling and sliding in her haste. When she reached the cabin she did not have breath enough to shout, but leaned upon the door and, as it opened, half fell into the little group of people within.

“Lenora!”

The girl lying on a blanket before the rough fireplace half rose and fell back again.

“Anybody home?” Lenora grinned.

“Where did you come from?” a voice asked.

“Help at last!” someone else put in thankfully.

“Isn’t there anyone with you?” A young man, evidently the pilot, one arm in a sling across his chest, came forward.

“I’m all there is at the moment,” Lenora said, “but there should be some others here by morning.” She looked about at the tense, small group of white, tired faces. “Gosh, am I glad to see you!”

“Not half as glad as we are to see you,” Virginia spoke again.

“Did you bring anything to eat?” the pilot asked.

“Only some chocolate bars,” Lenora said and pulled them from her pocket. She gave them to the pilot and crossed to Virginia. “What’s wrong,

Ginny?”

“I feel as if a couple of elephants jumped on me,” Virginia smiled.

Lenora looked inquiringly at the pilot. From him her eyes wandered about the group. Each one wore a blood-stained bandage. Each one had his sorry souvenir of the wreck. The co-pilot lay unconscious on a blanket in the corner.

“We’re a sorry crew,” the pilot said in response to her glance.

“You need more help than a first-aid kit,” Lenora said bluntly. “Can’t you send anyone——”

“I’m the only one fit to walk and I thought it would be better if I stayed here to help the others,” the pilot replied. “I knew help would come.”

Lenora reflected silently that even he looked as if he needed aid desperately, despite his brave words. Certainly his injured arm needed attention.

The fire felt good and when the story of the wreck had been told, as well as Lenora’s parachute landing, she sat down close to Virginia. It was her plan to keep vigil throughout what remained of the night, but before she knew it she was asleep. When she woke, the gray light of morning was at the window. The others were still asleep and silently she went outside, hoping there would be some sign of rescue. The sky was overcast and a biting wind swept down from the north. It had snowed again and her footprints, made the night before, were obliterated. There was no sign of life anywhere. How long would they have to wait before help arrived?

Morning went slowly enough but the afternoon seemed never ending. By nightfall Lenora was pacing nervously up and down. All too clearly she remembered the wild country over which she and Beverly had flown. It might take another day for a rescue party to come through. During that time anything might happen here.

“Do you have a map of this region?” she asked the pilot.

He nodded and drew a soiled, much folded sheet from his pocket.

“I’m going on for aid,” Lenora said. “Help me to find a route.”

“Not alone,” he protested.

“Yes,” she said calmly. “You were right to stay here. You’re needed. You can help these people. I’ll go on until I find a doctor.”

“Your friend will send help soon,” he pointed out.

“Yes,” Lenora agreed, “but perhaps I can find someone closer at hand who can give us a sleigh to get these people out.”

Lenora overrode all his protests and concentrated on a direct route toward Silver Lake. She had heard Beatrice Colfax say that there were cabins at the lake. One of them might be occupied.

She forgot her weariness when she looked at Virginia's white face and the tense expression of the others. True, she was tired, but these people were injured and in need of medical attention and food. She must go on. They couldn't wait another day and it was impossible for them to walk through the snow.

Fortified with words of encouragement from the eight people in the little cabin and the memory of the bravery with which they were suffering, Lenora started out.

Perhaps it would have been wiser to wait until morning, but on the other hand it might snow again and that would only make it harder. The snow last night had wiped out her footprints. That meant that the help on the way would not have the guide she had had. They might be delayed many precious hours.

The wind was cold, biting her cheeks and nose. Even the circle of light from the pilot's flashlight looked cold as it danced ahead of her. There was a dreadful emptiness within her, too, and silently she prayed she would find help soon.

The pilot and she had studied his map carefully. She had memorized the route she must take, but it was difficult to be sure she was going in the right direction. Everything looked so different under a blanket of snow.

She walked for two hours and saw nothing but trees and snow and moonlight. She began to wish she had stayed in the cabin and had never come out in this bitter wind. At such times she would remind herself of the people waiting, depending upon her.

Stiff and cold she stumbled wildly over something hidden in the snow. She picked herself up, took another step, and stumbled again. When she started to rise she heard a faint shriek. At the same time her hand came in contact with something hard that vibrated slightly. Then came that eerie shriek again. She turned the glare of her flashlight downward. She was kneeling in the middle of a railroad track and that shriek was the whistle of an approaching train!

## CHAPTER X

# *Robbery*

---

“It turned out to be a ski train taking some week-enders to a place up above Silver Lake,” Lenora explained. “The engineer took me to a lookout station where the ranger telephoned for help. We reached the cabin just before the party Beverly had sent arrived.”

Lenora was back at Mountain View, telling her story to an admiring audience and enjoying every minute of it. The newspapers had made her quite a heroine and now she was delightedly basking in her glory.

“Is everyone from the plane going to be all right?” True asked.

“Eventually,” Lenora nodded. “It will, of course, take a while until they are completely well again, but the doctor said they all would come around all right—Virginia included,” she assured Beverly. “I told Ginny we would be over to see her after she has had a good rest.”

When the group left the breakfast table Lenora caught up with Beverly in the hall.

“You look about as cheerful as a goldfish,” she declared. “Aren’t you glad to see me back from the snowdrifts?”

Beverly put an arm about the other girl. “Of course I am. Very glad. Get your coat and take a walk with me. I want to talk with you.”

“I feel as if I have been walking half my life,” Lenora groaned, “but okay.”

The girls went out, Tip and Top bounding ahead of them, and Lenora waited for her friend to speak.

“Lenora,” Beverly said at last, “do you remember the night the maid saw a mysterious man in the hall?”

“Yes.”

“The next morning Miss Colfax told me where she had hidden her star sapphire.”

“Oh,” Lenora murmured. “Now you are worrying about it—in case anything should happen to it.”

“It has already happened,” Beverly said. “It is gone.”

“Gone? You mean someone has stolen it?”

Beverly nodded. “That makes it nice for me, doesn’t it? I’m the only one, besides Miss Colfax, of course, who knew where it was.”

Lenora whistled. “Has she said anything to you?”

“No. Nothing beyond telling me it is gone. I believe she has telephoned to New York and asked Inspector Martin to come up here. She told me she liked him because he was so polite.”

“Well, he will know you didn’t take it,” Lenora said comfortingly.

“But where is it?” Beverly persisted. “Who is taking these things? It must be someone right here in the house.”

“There are only us, True, Sir Charles, the Prince, and Miss Colfax,” Lenora frowned. “In mystery stories it usually turns out to be the butler or the maid, but I don’t think it will in this case. It is someone who was at the parties in New York.”

“Then that eliminates Prince Einar, too,” Beverly added.

“Do you suppose Sir Charles—?” Lenora murmured. “No, it can’t be him. Terry knows him and——”

“Then that is how you happened to be at the literary tea!” Beverly exclaimed. “You came with Sir Charles!”

“Terry introduced me to him at lunch that day,” Lenora confessed.

“How about True?” Beverly wondered aloud. “Do you think it is she?”

“We are looking for a man,” Lenora laughed. “Remember? Mask—long cape—I must say he is a bit theatrical.”

“He will have another chance to appear at the party tonight,” Beverly continued. “There should be some fancy jewels when the local gentry turn out to meet the Prince. I believe there are some people coming from New York, too.”

“It isn’t safe in the house,” continued Lenora with a laugh. “The place is in an uproar with people cleaning, decorating, polishing silver— Let’s take the sleigh and go for a ride into the hills.”

“An excellent idea!” Beverly exclaimed.

It took about a half-hour to return to the house, have the horse hitched to the sleigh, and climb under the fur robes. Lenora was to drive and as she picked up the reins, True Torston appeared.

“May I go with you?”

“Of course,” Beverly replied.

With the three girls settled, the sleigh moved down the driveway and onto the highway. After about five minutes they left the highway and took a side road that led directly toward the mountain.

“Do you know where you are going?” True asked.

“No,” Lenora admitted, “but Miss Colfax said there was a beautiful view from the mountainside and we want to see it. This road should take us there.”

“It looks like there is more snow in those clouds,” Beverly remarked.

“It wouldn’t be very pleasant to be stranded on the mountain in a blizzard,” True murmured.

“Isn’t this glorious?” Lenora asked with a sigh, ignoring True’s uneasiness.

The horse trotted ahead eagerly, his mane tossing in the wind, the bells on his harness jingling merrily. The snow on the road was packed hard by many other sleighs coming this way, and they mounted the hillside rapidly, pausing now and then to enjoy the view spread out below them like a magic carpet.

“Shall we stop at that little cabin and give the horse a rest?” Beverly asked, pointing to where the snow-covered roof of a tiny log cabin could be seen nestling against the hill on a curve above them.

“It must be a ski rest,” True said. “There are several here in the mountains.”

“Just in case of a storm, I suppose,” Lenora nodded, pulling the horse to a halt. “Perhaps we can get a drink of water.”

When they jumped down from the sleigh and approached the tiny house, they saw that it was not the customary hut built as a shelter for the skiers who ventured up to the highest slope. There was smoke coming from the chimney and there were curtains at the windows. At their approach a dog started barking and a man came to the door. He was an old man with white hair and a red, round face.

“Come in, ladies. The air is cold today.” He bowed them into his little house.

“We thought we might get a drink of water here,” Lenora ventured.

“Yes, indeed,” he nodded. “People often stop here to rest and talk to me. I am always glad to have company.”

“Do you live here all the time?” True asked.

“Yes. I like the snow and the mountains.”

“But isn’t it lonely?” Lenora wondered.

“Not to me. I have my dog, my visitors, and my work.”

His work, they discovered, was carving small figures from polished wood. All about the room were intricate carvings of animals and men, delicate and fragile, and amazingly true to life.

“Do you sell them?” True wanted to know.

The old man shook his head. “No. Every Christmas I send them to the children’s hospital.”

“How nice!” Lenora exclaimed.

“Look at this one!” True picked up a tiny carved sleigh and horse. Every detail was perfect. They could almost imagine that if they set it on the floor the sleigh would move.

“I would love to have that,” True declared. “I will buy it from you.”

“I’m sorry,” the old man apologized. “It is for a very special little girl’s birthday next week and I could not sell it.”

True replaced the sleigh on the shelf over the fireplace but continued to stare at it in fascination.

“Do you have any others?” Lenora asked.

“If you will come back here to my workshop I shall be happy to show you what I have. Children seem to like animals best.”

Beverly followed Lenora into the tiny room at the back of the cabin. It was a small, complete workshop and the little carved figures stood about in various stages of completion.

“It is amazing,” Lenora murmured, lifting a tiny dog in her hand. “The work is so fine! I don’t see how you do it.”

The girls moved about inspecting everything. The man seemed delighted to show his treasures.

Beverly was not sure when she first became aware of True’s absence. The dancer had followed them into the workshop but now, suddenly, she was gone. Beverly wandered to the doorway and looked into the other room. True was turning away from the fireplace. Instinctively Beverly’s eyes darted past the girl to the empty shelf. True looked up in time to see Beverly step into the room.

“May I see the little sleigh again?” Beverly asked, advancing toward the dancer with hand outstretched.

True hesitated, her eyes searching Beverly’s face, then she slowly drew her hand from her coat pocket and laid the carving on the table between them.

“He could make another one,” she said slowly.

“Yes, I suppose so,” Beverly agreed, “but this one is promised to a little girl.”

Whether or not True had intended to take the carving Beverly did not know. No one but True herself would ever know, but Beverly felt a strange disappointment—as if she had come upon an ugly part of a picture she had once considered perfect. That True would even consider stealing the tiny thing was unbelievable to Beverly. True, with her wide gray eyes and pleasant smile, a thief? Beverly did not want to believe it, yet she had a fleeting recollection of the night she had first met True when the little jade Buddha had disappeared and later been found by True. Beverly had doubted True then, too. Some people had no sense of right and wrong. What they wanted they took, regardless of other people. Could True be like that?

“If you ladies will sit down I will serve you tea. It is all made and waiting.”

The girls seated themselves around the little table, and the man brought out delicate china cups into which he poured fragrant tea. He entertained them with stories of his home in Switzerland where he had learned his trade, and the time flew by alarmingly fast.

When the girls climbed back into the sleigh the sky was a dark, lowering gray.

“The winds do blow and we shall have snow,” Lenora sang as she took up the reins. “On your way, horse!”

It was colder now but there was no wind. The air was calm and bitter, heavy with the promise of storm.

Lenora looked at the other two girls and back to the road again.

“You two are awfully silent.”

Beverly smiled and wondered if True had been thinking, too, of the scene in the cabin. She couldn’t erase the picture from her mind. The carving was such a little thing, yet if True would stoop to take that, might she not also steal valuable jewels?

“Beverly thinks I was going to steal the little carving of the horse and sleigh,” True said unexpectedly, her laugh ringing out clearly and merrily. “Is it not so, Beverly?”

Beverly felt her cheeks growing red. True must have read her mind! Now she was bringing the suspicion out for them to look and laugh at.

“I—” Beverly began, but True patted her shoulder.

“Do not say anything. It would have been very easy to do,” she sighed.

“It would have been stealing,” Lenora said bluntly.

True looked straight ahead and said nothing more. It started to snow and, for the time being, they thought no more about the old man and his carvings.

“It seems to be taking us a long while to reach the valley,” Beverly remarked.

“It is becoming more difficult for the horse to pull the sleigh,” added True.

“We should not have waited so long before starting back,” Lenora said in a worried tone. “I can scarcely see the road.”

After another fifteen minutes of slow and careful progress the horse halted.

“I believe we are lost,” True said calmly.

“I know it,” Lenora murmured. “Somehow I missed the road down.”

“We still may find it,” Beverly attempted to put warm confidence into her voice.

“At least we don’t want to stand still,” Lenora agreed, urging the horse on.

However, the animal had other ideas. No amount of coaxing could make him go a step farther. He stamped his feet, shook his head, and whinnied softly into the face of the gale.

“Maybe he is stuck. I’ll try to get him started,” Lenora said, jumping down from the sleigh.

The wind hurled against her and snatched her breath away. The snow stung her face, blinding in its thickness. Using the rein as a guide, Lenora worked her way along. Her tight grasp on the rein was all that saved her. As she reached the horse’s head her foot slipped. She started to slide downward. The horse reared sharply, backing away. In so doing he pulled Lenora back from the slope, but at the same time he upset the sleigh, plunging True and Beverly headlong into the snow.

Beverly struggled to her feet and went over to Lenora.

“Are you all right?”

Lenora was sitting in the snow, wiping her face.

“Bev, we were trying to drive him over the side of the mountain,” Lenora whispered through chattering teeth. “Suppose he had gone!”

“Are you hurt?” Beverly wanted to know.

Lenora shook her head. “I always did say horses had sense.”

“Beverly—Lenora—” True joined them, breathless and excited. “There is a cabin over there where we can get out of the storm.”

The three girls made their way to the small hut which evidently was a shelter for skiers. It was dark inside but Beverly rummaged about and found an oil lamp and a tin box of matches. When they could see, they discovered two rough wooden bunks built against one wall and a fireplace with a good supply of wood.

Lenora, her normal self again, went out to free the horse from the upset sleigh while Beverly and True made a fire. When Lenora returned she led the horse right into the cabin.

“What are you doing?” True cried.

“He’s cold, too,” Lenora returned, “and after saving us from falling over the cliff, I think he rates a warm bed.”

“But to sleep with a horse—” True began.

“He will just stay here in the corner and he won’t bother anyone,” Lenora assured her. “Will you, boy?”

The horse nodded violently as if in reply and the girls laughed.

“I’ll go out and get the fur robes from the sleigh,” Lenora continued.

“I’ll help you,” Beverly offered.

The two girls tramped through the deepening snow. It was totally dark now and they had to be guided by instinct and memory, for they could not see through the whirling flakes. The light and warmth of the barren little cabin were indeed welcome when they stumbled back to it.

There was nothing they could do but wait until morning, and there was no way they could let Miss Colfax and the others at the lodge know they were safe. They wrapped themselves in the fur robes and tried to talk, but for a while they did not seem to have much interest in conversation.

“I wonder if we will ever see our mystery man again,” Lenora mused. “He rather made life interesting.”

“Every time we see him something disappears,” Beverly smiled. “I hope he stays away.”

“Just like Miss Colfax’s sapphire,” Lenora nodded. “I’ve been thinking, Bev. Do you suppose he took it and if he did, how did he know where to find it?”

“You’ll have to ask him,” Beverly laughed.

“I wonder—” Lenora murmured.

“About what?” True asked.

Beverly sat on the lower bunk and watched the firelight on True’s smiling face. This promised to be a very interesting conversation. She had

often wondered what True thought of the mysterious stranger who came and went so quickly and silently.

“Oh, about his mask and cape,” Lenora explained. “It seems very theatrical. Perhaps he just does it to make newspaper headlines.”

“Perhaps,” True laughed.

“Lenora and I believe it is someone at Mountain View,” Beverly said and wished immediately that she had remained silent.

“You do?” True turned a sharp glance on Beverly.

“Yes,” Lenora nodded. “What do you think?”

“I have not thought of it,” True replied.

“Even though he was last seen going toward your room?” Lenora inquired.

“What do you mean?”

“Weren’t you frightened?”

True laughed. “That was a week ago. Nothing has happened since.”

“Nothing but the theft of the star sapphire,” Beverly put in.

“Oh, yes, that,” True said. She shrugged. “Anyone of us might have taken it.”

“At the time of the theft there were only four people in the house: Miss Colfax, Sir Charles, you, and I.”

“And what makes it worse,” Lenora interrupted, “is that only Miss Colfax and Beverly knew where it was hidden.”

“Beverly!” True exclaimed.

Beverly nodded. “However, I know I didn’t take it. Miss Colfax is certainly innocent, and I think Sir Charles is, too.”

“That leaves only me,” True said clearly. “Do you think I took it, Beverly?”

Beverly felt she could not honestly say either yes or no.

“I don’t want to think that,” she murmured.

“But you do,” True said earnestly. She paced the length of the cabin and back again. “You thought this afternoon, too, that I was a thief. Why? What made you decide that I was the guilty one?”

“I haven’t decided any such thing,” Beverly said hastily.

“Of course not,” Lenora interrupted. “We were merely talking about what had happened. Let’s talk about something else. Do you realize we won’t have any dinner tonight and maybe no breakfast tomorrow morning?”

Conversation was diverted but not thoughts. What they had said lingered and whirled in Beverly's mind. Would a guilty person talk as True had? Was it just an act to divert suspicion from her? If True wasn't the thief, who was?

The girls tried to sleep in the rough bunks, made more comfortable with the fur robes, but the howling wind and crackling fire made them uneasy and restless.

"I can't sleep," Lenora muttered, sitting up in despair.

"It is impossible to sleep," True agreed, rising. "Can't we go back to the lodge? I must get back!"

"Go out into that blizzard?" Lenora inquired. "Thank you, but I'll stay here where there is a nice warm fire."

"We couldn't find our way in the dark," added Beverly.

"But I must get back!" exclaimed True.

True stared longingly through the tiny window, and Beverly wished she knew what the girl was thinking. Why did she suddenly want to return to the lodge so desperately? There really was nothing to worry about here. When it stopped snowing they could find their way down to the valley. There was actually no reason for them to hurry other than to reassure their friends.

Morning came slowly and as the darkness faded the snow ceased. The girls left the cabin and, leading the horse, began their walk to the valley. The sleigh was too heavy for them to right, and they were forced to leave it where it was.

The snow was deep and soft. Branches of trees were heavy with it and the early rays of the sun crusted it with diamonds.

"Snow, snow, beautiful snow!" Lenora sighed happily as she tramped along. "In spite of the fact that I am starving, I feel wonderful."

"It is a beautiful morning," True agreed. "It is like the mornings in my country used to be."

"Why did you ever leave your country?" Lenora inquired.

"To dance," True said. "I wanted to dance everywhere in the world." When she spoke of her dancing her eyes glowed.

"You love your dancing, don't you?" Beverly murmured.

"It is my life," True nodded. "Ever since I was a little girl I have studied. I danced before a king once," she went on, her expression dreamy. "It was a great honor, and I was very proud."

This was another side to True that threatened to upset all of Beverly's suspicions. If True loved her dancing so much, would she steal and thus endanger the very career she treasured?

“What a view there is from up here!” Lenora exclaimed, pausing to glance out over the valley below. She raised her arm in a wide sweep. “Behold!”

“It looks like a toy village,” True added.

The dancer left the other two girls and moved closer to the ledge to obtain a better view. One moment she was standing there, in full view of Beverly and Lenora, her scarf blowing in the wind, her face lighted by the sun, and the next instant there was a dreadful, frightening, cracking noise and True had disappeared.

Beverly shut her eyes for an instant and opened them again. It was true, the girl was gone.

“Beverly!” Lenora gasped, shaking her friend’s arm. “She—she has disappeared!” Lenora moved toward the spot where True had been standing.

“Wait!” Beverly caught her friend and pulled her back. “Be careful. It must have been an ice ledge and her weight must have broken it off.”

Cautiously the girls approached the spot. It was as Beverly had said. The snow the night before had covered the ice, and when True innocently walked out upon the jutting ledge her weight had caused it to break.

Beverly dropped to her hands and knees and crawled forward slowly, inch by inch, listening for the cracking noise that would warn her in time to pull back.

“Can you see her?” Lenora asked.

“No,” Beverly murmured. “I—yes, she is right below us. She has fallen into a snowbank——”

“Is she all right?”

“I can’t tell,” Beverly replied. “She is just lying there——”

“Shall I run to the lodge for help?” Lenora wanted to know. “It might take an hour or more.”

“There is a rope in the cabin where we spent last night,” Beverly said, returning carefully to her friend. “If we lowered it over the edge——”

“The horse could pull her up,” Lenora finished excitedly. “I’ll get it.” She departed hastily, scrambling back up the hillside, while Beverly tied the reins of the horse to a tree and crawled back to the overhanging ledge to call to True.

The dancer had not moved. She lay face down, her suit a splash of color against the whiteness of the snow. Beverly shivered and wished Lenora would hurry. True might be hurt, and she might not. She had fallen into a snowbank and not from a very great height. It might be that she had just had

the breath knocked out of her, or that she had fainted when she felt herself falling.

It was impossible to get a foothold to climb down to her, the wall of the mountain was a sheet of ice. Yesterday the snow on the summit had begun to melt. The water had run down this way, and during the night had frozen again until now it glistened like a pane of glass. A rope, lowered over the side, was the only answer.

Behind her, the horse whinnied softly and Beverly smiled.

“Don’t worry, I don’t intend to jump,” she told him, walking over to stroke his satin-smooth nose.

There was a call and Lenora came sliding down the path toward her, breathless from haste, but waving the rope triumphantly.

“Here it is! It is nice and long, too!”

“Good!” Beverly examined the rope. It seemed to be sturdy enough. She tied one end of the coil firmly to the harness on the horse and the other end about her own waist.

“You aren’t going over the side!” Lenora gasped. “Suppose the rope breaks?”

Beverly made a face at her. “You think of the nicest things! It is your job to handle the horse. Do you think you can do it? Don’t let him get too near the edge.”

“I won’t,” Lenora assured her. “Oh, Beverly, do be careful! I wish you wouldn’t——”

Beverly cut short her friend’s words as she slid toward the edge of the projecting ledge. Lenora took her place at the horse’s head, a firm hand on his bridle, murmuring soothing words to him, and slowly Beverly began the trip downward. She shut her eyes as she swung out over nothingness, realizing what a long fall it would be if the rope broke and she missed the ledge on which True had landed. She bumped against the wall of ice, scraping her arm. After that she was too busy trying to guide her descent to worry about any ifs.

True still was lying in the snow, just as she had fallen, and the thought sped through Beverly’s brain that perhaps she would never dance again. All her suspicions and fears that True might be a thief were wiped out in this newest calamity. Suppose such a thing happened? What would the girl do?

Beverly’s feet touched the snow-covered ledge for just an instant and then she swung out into space again. The second time she touched far enough in to be able to drop beside True. For a moment she lay breathless.

When she scrambled to her feet, True was watching her in a dazed, incredulous fashion.

“Beverly!”

“Hello,” Beverly smiled. “Are you all right?”

“I think so,” True murmured, shaking her head. “It was so sudden—so unexpected——”

“The ice broke,” Beverly explained. “Can you stand? Are you sure you haven’t broken any bones?” She still had a fear that something might be tragically wrong.

“My life must be charmed,” True smiled. “But how shall we get up from here?”

“Lenora will pull us up the same way I came down,” Beverly continued.

“The rope is so slender and there is such a long drop——” True’s eyes were dark with fear.

“Concentrate on bracing your legs against the wall so you don’t bump against it,” Beverly advised. “It is really a short trip,” she added with a smile. “Here, let me tie the rope about your waist.”

True submitted reluctantly. When Beverly tied the knot and stepped back True asked unexpectedly:

“Why did you come down for me, Beverly?”

“We couldn’t tell whether or not you were hurt,” Beverly replied. “I came to find out.”

“You risked your life for me,” True murmured. “Even though you think I may be a thief. Why?”

“I didn’t think of that at the time,” Beverly said frankly, “but even if I had, I still would have come.”

“For the same reason Lenora jumped from an airplane with a first-aid kit,” True murmured.

“Yes,” Beverly nodded.

“Are you two going to chat all day?” Lenora’s face appeared over the ledge above them. “Let’s get this over with.”

“Isn’t there some other way?” True asked, looking at the slender rope and then at the long drop to the valley. “I am afraid.”

“So am I,” Beverly acknowledged, “but there is no other way.”

“You do not understand,” True said. “I am afraid of high places. Just the thought that I might fall terrorizes me. I am the same way on a tall building. I can’t go near the edge——”

“You went near the edge to look at the view when you fell,” Beverly reminded her.

“Yes,” True agreed, “but now—when I think of the narrow escape I had—I am weak.”

“Just close your eyes and let Lenora take care of the rest,” Beverly smiled. “Do not think of the drop.”

“How can I help it?” True cried. “No, I won’t do it. You must think of something else.”

Beverly thought for a moment that the girl was joking, but then she realized that True was quite serious. She was afraid, petrified, and she did not intend to take the step that would leave her hanging in mid-air.

“What is the hold-up?” Lenora called from above. “Hurry up! This isn’t any picnic.”

“Either you go up on the rope or you stay here,” Beverly said firmly to True. “I certainly thought you had more courage than this.”

“I do not care what you think,” True returned, her face pale. “I cannot do it.”

What could she say? Beverly cast around hastily for an argument that might persuade True. At last she shrugged her shoulders.

“Very well. You may stay here. I apologize for ever thinking you had the determination necessary to become a great dancer.”

True stared at her in silence for a moment, then her chin set stubbornly and she tugged a signal on the rope.

Beverly watched, smilingly, while True swung out into space. Slowly the dancer began to move upward, and at last she disappeared from sight. A few moments more and the rope wriggled down toward Beverly. She made it secure about her waist and waved to Lenora who again was leaning over, watching her.

The journey up was accomplished quickly and without mishap. When Beverly was safe, Lenora let out a long-drawn sigh and sat down abruptly in the snow.

“I wouldn’t go through that again for any amount of money!” she declared. “I kept thinking ‘Suppose the rope should break?’”

“You need some breakfast,” Beverly laughed. “Let’s go!”

Halfway down the mountain they met a party of villagers, led by Prince Einar, coming in search of them.

The rest of the journey was completed quickly and easily. When they reached the lodge Miss Colfax had an enormous breakfast waiting for them.

After giving an account of their adventures, the girls went to their rooms to rest, bathe, and dress. It was after lunch when Lenora, coming downstairs, a vase of flowers in her hands, saw John usher two new arrivals into the hall.

“Terry!” she shrieked.

The vase slipped from her fingers and crashed on the stairs.

“Terry, I thought you were on your way to England!”

“My trip has been postponed until next month,” he returned. “Come here and let me look at you. What do you mean by jumping out of an airplane?”

“I’ve been lost in a blizzard, too,” she informed him.

The crash of the vase on the steps had brought other people, and now Miss Colfax hurried forward to greet the new arrivals. It was not until then that Lenora saw the second young man.

“Larry!” she exclaimed. “This certainly is a day for surprises! Did Beverly know you were coming?”

“No one knew,” Miss Colfax interrupted. “I wanted it to be a surprise for you both. Do find Beverly. She is with True in the sitting room, I think.”

Lenora turned to leave but at that moment Beverly came into the hall. She thought she never before had been so glad to see anyone. Here was someone who would help her solve the mystery of the robberies. She could rely on Larry’s judgment and she lost no time in confiding in him.

It was after lunch and the four of them, Terry, Lenora, Beverly and Larry, were out skiing when Beverly had an opportunity to talk to Larry. As they trudged up the long slope, Lenora and Terry in the lead, Beverly told Larry of all that had happened since they reached Mountain View, including the latest and greatest loss of Miss Colfax’s star sapphire.

“When does she expect Inspector Martin?” Larry wanted to know.

“Not until tomorrow,” Beverly said with a frown, “and tonight is the party.”

“So?”

“I have a feeling our mystery man will pop up again.”

“We will let Inspector Martin worry about him,” Larry smiled.

That would be the wisest course, Beverly had to admit, but still she wondered about the unknown thief. Even as she sped down the slope, the wind whipping against her, her thoughts were on the morning Miss Colfax had told her where the star sapphire was hidden. True had entered the room just as Miss Colfax finished speaking. It was possible she had overheard, though there had been no sign that she did.

Beverly came to rest finally at the base of the slope and looked about for her friends. Somehow, in that little clump of trees, they had become separated. Beverly removed her skis and began to walk back to the lodge. She had too much on her mind to stay out here. She wanted to think, to piece together the tantalizing puzzle and see what she could make of it.

Her thoughts always came back to the three people present at each appearance of the mystery man. Miss Colfax she automatically eliminated, since she had become a victim of the thief. Sir Charles, too, could scarcely be the one, since he had been with them when the maid saw the strange figure. That left only True. But, as Lenora had said, they were looking for a man. Of course, the thief could have been an outsider, but she did not put much faith in that possibility. What made her even more suspicious of True was the fact that on the train Miss Colfax's ring had disappeared. Beverly did not believe it was an ordinary loss. Yet there had been only the four of them on the train: Miss Colfax, Lenora, Beverly, and True.

Against all her suspicions of True was the fact that she liked the girl. It wasn't only that True had saved her from injury that day of the ice avalanche. She had been drawn to True even before that. She liked the dancer's friendliness and charm.

Stubbornly her mind clung to the fact that True was the logical suspect. Yet how could she distrust someone she liked? She didn't understand it—but there it was.

As if her thoughts had magically conjured up the girl Beverly saw True coming toward her, skis balanced on her shoulder.

"Just going out?" Beverly asked with a smile.

"Yes, I think I shall have a last run," True returned.

"Last?" Beverly murmured.

"Before dinner." With a wave of the hand True went on.

Now, Beverly thought. Now, while True is out, she could make sure. She could search True's room and satisfy her suspicions.

Beverly hurried to the house. She left her skis in her room and went down the hall, her boots making loud scuffing noises.

She opened the door and stepped quickly inside. She leaned against the door and contemplated the room. The bed was neatly made. The windows were thrown wide to the sun and air. Everything was neat and orderly and Beverly turned to go. She couldn't search another girl's room. It just wasn't the thing to do.

Then, her hand on the door, she paused. The room was so very neat it almost looked as if no one occupied it. Beverly had a fleeting mental picture of the room she shared with Lenora. No one would doubt that it was occupied—books, sweaters, skates, skis, boots—it was always in a pleasant state of confusion.

She turned back and, crossing quickly to the dressing table, pulled open the top drawer. It was empty. So were all the others she looked into. The closet revealed only one dress and coat, but three locked and heavy suitcases.

“I think I shall have a last run.”

The dancer’s words came back to Beverly. It was indeed to be a last run—not only the last before dinner as she had said. She was leaving and evidently her going was to be a secret.

Meanwhile, Larry sped across the snow-covered valley on his skis and saw in the distance the bright green suit of another skier. Believing it to be Beverly he started toward her when he saw her take a headlong plunge off a jutting ledge of ice.

The suit was a bright blot against the snow as Larry streaked down the hill to skid to a stop in a shower of snow. He kicked off his skis and dropped to one knee.

“Darling, are you hurt?” Gently he turned the girl over and then he saw his mistake.

“It is my ankle, I think,” True said, sitting up.

“Can you stand on it?” Larry asked.

“No.” She shook her head. “It is too painful.”

“We must get you back to the house at once,” he declared. “I’ll carry you.”

“Perhaps that would be best,” the girl agreed gravely.

Larry propped their skis against a tree, intending to return for them later. True, her lower lip caught between white teeth, said not a word as he trudged through the snow with her. At the door to the lodge they met Miss Colfax.

“True! What happened?”

“My ankle,” True explained. “I think it is sprained. Take me to my room, please,” she appealed to Larry.

“I’ll get some bandages,” Miss Colfax added hastily.

“I’ll help, too,” Beverly offered from the stairs.

“Is there something I can do?” Lenora came in at that point, with Terry following.

Larry carried True upstairs, conscious of Beverly’s amused glance upon him.

“Thank you, you are very sweet,” True murmured as Larry put her gently on the bed. He went out and down the stairs, remembering Beverly’s half-smiling face when she heard True’s words. He walked out to where he had left the skis and when he returned Lenora was coming down the stairs.

“She will survive,” Lenora reported, and with a twinkle in her eye continued: “She told me to thank you again for helping her. I believe the lady likes you. How did you happen to be Johnny-on-the-spot?”

“I saw her fall and since Beverly also has a green suit, I thought it was she. I stopped beside her and said ‘Darling, are you hurt?’ It was purely a case of mistaken identity.”

Lenora chuckled.

Larry reddened. “Stop it. Beverly might——”

“Beverly is just as wise as True,” Lenora said calmly. “She will know our little glamour girl is after something.”

“What?”

“Oh, your strong-arm protection,” Lenora said airily. “If she gets you on her side, nobody is apt to suspect her of anything.”

“What is she suspected of?” Larry demanded.

“Right at the moment I suspect her of everything. Her ankle is no more sprained than mine is. At least it doesn’t look it,” she added more reasonably. “Every sprained ankle I’ve ever seen was swollen.”

Pretext or not, the story of the sprained ankle served to keep True in her room and away from the dinner party. Right after dinner and before the dancing started, Beverly and Lenora went up to True’s room.

“We wanted to make sure you aren’t lonely,” Lenora said. “Would you like me to sit with you a while?”

“No, indeed. I wouldn’t dream of taking you away from the party,” True assured her.

“It is a shame you have to miss all the fun,” added Beverly. “Everyone is very gay and the Prince seems to be enjoying himself immensely. All the important people from the village and Park Avenue are here and the jewels are enormous. Miss Colfax wanted the Prince to wear his royal ruby but he said he wasn’t trying to impress anyone, and he refused to even take it out of his suitcase.”

“It must be very valuable,” True said.

“Oh, it is,” Beverly agreed. “It is supposed to be one of the largest in the world. Well, if we can’t do anything for you, we will let you get back to your book. Good night!”

Lenora, a little bewildered at Beverly’s chatter, followed her friend into the hall.

“Would you mind telling me what that build-up for the Prince was about? Miss Colfax never mentioned a ruby——”

“Sh-sh-sh!” Beverly warned and drew Lenora into the girls’ room. “Listen,” she said hurriedly, “I want you to——”

“Why the coat? Where are you going?” Lenora demanded.

“Don’t ask questions now,” Beverly said. “I’ll explain later. I want you to stand here at the window and watch that spot under the trees.” Beverly pointed out the window and slipped a flashlight into her pocket. “When you see a light blink twice I want you to go and knock on the door to Prince Einar’s room. Wait a few minutes and knock again.”

“Then what?”

“Then you can go back to the party. I will know.”

“You’ll know what?” Lenora asked. “What *are* you up to?”

“I’ll explain later,” Beverly promised breathlessly. “Now don’t forget! When I blink my flashlight two times.”

“I don’t see——” Lenora began and realized she was talking to empty air. Beverly had gone.

## CHAPTER XI

# *Discovered*

---

BEVERLY stood in the snow, hands clenched in the pockets of her coat, and waited, keeping her eyes upon the little balcony that ran along this side of the house. Earlier in the day she had discovered that a door in the hall, beside the suit of armor, gave access to this balcony and that the balcony itself ended at the door to Prince Einar's room. When she had first seen the mystery man on the balcony, the room here had been empty, but since then Miss Colfax had given it to Prince Einar.

Beverly grew suddenly tense as the light in True Torston's room was extinguished. In the silence she could hear the pounding of her own heart above the strains of music and gaiety coming from the house. In just a few minutes now. . . .

At first she thought her eyes were playing tricks on her. There wasn't much moonlight tonight and the balcony was in heavy shadow. She held her breath and strained her eyes to be sure. Someone had moved on the balcony, someone that melted into the blackness as if he were a part of it.

Instantly Beverly brought out her flashlight. She turned it on and off twice and ran toward the house. She used the back stairs and raced up to True's room. Once there, she opened the door slowly and slipped inside.

The room was in total darkness and it took a moment or two for Beverly's eyes to grow accustomed to it, before she could clearly distinguish the outlines of the furniture. There was no sign of True. The bed was empty. Beverly hoped Lenora had not failed her.

The minutes ticked away as she waited—waited she was not sure for what or for whom. The silence became oppressive. She began to imagine things: a stealthy footstep, a creaking door, eyes peering at her from the darkness.

At last the door opened slowly, and a second later there was another person in the darkened room with Beverly—someone who wore a long, black cape and a soft dark hat pulled low over a masked face. Noiselessly the newcomer discarded the hat, mask, and cape. A suitcase was dragged

from the closet and the garments flung into it. Then the case was locked and returned to the closet. Finally the one who had entered as silently as a shadow donned a robe and switched on the light.

“Hello,” Beverly said calmly.

True Torston, her face white, stared speechlessly at the other girl.

“A very interesting performance,” Beverly continued, “and very enlightening.”

“How did you get in here?” the dancer demanded.

“Like you,” Beverly returned, “through the door.”

“Well?” True asked. “What do you want?”

“I never knew a Jekyll and Hyde person,” Beverly murmured. “I am fascinated.”

“I suppose you are looking for a story for your paper,” True smiled.

“I am looking for the jewel thief,” Beverly replied.

“Oh?”

“And I think I’ve found him—or her,” she corrected, “but I don’t understand it. You are a dancer. You could have a brilliant career——”

“Perhaps some day,” True nodded, “but there are a great many things I want now.”

“Jewels, for instance,” Beverly murmured.

“You are merely guessing,” True returned calmly. “You can prove nothing.”

“Inspector Martin will arrive tomorrow,” Beverly said. “When I tell him you masquerade in a cape and mask—just like the mystery man he is looking for—I believe he will manage to prove something.”

“Ah, but you won’t tell him,” True said.

Beverly regarded her intently, knowing there was something behind her confidence.

“Why not?”

“If you do, you will probably never see your friend again.”

“What do you mean?”

“Lenora was too curious to just knock on the Prince’s door. She had to come in and surprise me——”

“What did you do?” Beverly demanded, grasping True’s arm. “Where is she?”

“When I am safely on a train going away from here I will tell you,” True smiled. She slipped into her coat and wound a turban about her hair. “Now you shall come with me. You can carry one of my bags. We mustn’t leave them behind,” she added. “They are rather precious.”

“I suppose you have the jewels in one of them,” Beverly said.

“Shall we go?” True asked. “There is a train in twenty minutes. I don’t want to miss it.” She paused at the door and regarded Beverly coldly. “If you have an impulse to scream and attract attention to us, just remember Lenora.”

“To think I liked you!” Beverly exclaimed in disgust.

“I like you, too,” the dancer returned amiably. “That is why I want your company on my drive to the station.”

It was a nightmare, Beverly thought as she picked up one of the bags. It must be a bad dream from which she would awaken at any moment! Was it possible that such a cold daring thief was a girl? It was. It was happening right before her very eyes.

Lenora! What of her? Beverly blamed herself for whatever had happened. She should never have gotten Lenora involved in the thing.

Thoughts whirling in her mind, trying to find some means of foiling True’s escape, Beverly followed the girl thief down the back stairs. She could hear someone singing. The entertainment had started and drawn everyone into a group. Even the servants were in the hall, peeping in on the party. There was no one to see them leave.

“We’ll take Miss Colfax’s coupé,” True said, putting her bags in. “You can drive it back.”

Perhaps there would yet be a way to stop her, Beverly thought longingly, and climbed into the car. True slid under the wheel and the tires crunched on the snow of the driveway as she headed the car toward the road.

“We’ll have to hurry,” True said, glancing at the clock on the dashboard, “it is getting late.”

The car increased its speed and with each turn of the wheels Beverly felt her hope diminishing. She was beside a thief, with fabulous gems in one of the suitcases behind them. What could she do?

The auto skidded around a curve, sending up a shower of snow as it tottered for a moment on the brink of a slope.

“That was close,” True said. “Are you frightened?”

“No,” Beverly answered. “I was thinking.”

“About Lenora? There is no harm in telling you now. We are away from the house and there is nothing you can do. She is locked in a closet with a pillowcase tied over her head. She is not harmed but I had to make her disappearance strong enough to frighten you. I counted on your being such good friends you would do anything to help her.”

Silently Beverly gave thanks for Lenora’s safety.

“And you have all the jewels with you,” she said aloud.

True flashed her a glance. “You needn’t think you can call the police and stop me now.”

“I can’t call the police,” Beverly agreed, “but I can stop you!”

In a flash she leaned over and twisted the wheel from True’s grasp. True struggled to regain it and the car careened wildly from one side of the road to the other, finally plowing through a snowbank against a wall of rock. It turned over on its side and lay silent, two wheels spinning in the air.

## CHAPTER XII

# *Escape*

---

BEVERLY felt a great weight pressing her down. It was an effort to open her eyes; her head ached unbearably. Slowly and with difficulty she struggled to a sitting position. The weight slid off her shoulders and she could see that the car was lying on its side.

“True!” she whispered. And again: “True!”

There was no reply—only silence and darkness and the smell of gasoline. It took several moments for Beverly to gather enough strength to crawl out onto the road. She stood upright, swaying a little, and looked around. The road, never heavily traveled at any time, was deserted. As far as she could see in both directions, there was nothing but the empty ribbon of highway between the snowbanks.

There was no sign of True anywhere. Her hat and handbag lay on the road beside the wreckage, and the suitcases were still in the car.

Beverly began to wonder how she would walk all the way back to the lodge when she saw two faint pinpricks of light in the distance. A car was approaching. Perhaps she could hail it and get a ride back. She walked toward the center of the road, amazed at how weak she felt. The car drew closer and when it stopped True jumped out.

“Beverly, are you hurt?”

True was disheveled and pale. Her coat was torn and her face dirty. Beverly wondered if she herself looked as bad.

“You went for help,” she heard herself saying.

“Yes,” True agreed. “Did you think I had run off and left you—like that? Beverly, what’s wrong? You look so strange.”

“My head aches,” Beverly said. “True—you’ve missed your train.”

“Yes.”

“You could have gone away without anyone knowing if you hadn’t stopped to get help for me.”

“I’ll still go away,” True returned. “There’s another train tonight.”

“Certainly is a mess,” observed the old man who had driven True to the scene and who had been investigating the wrecked car. “Here comes someone else.”

Another car was speeding toward them from the direction of Mountain View. The brakes screeched as Lenora leaned out and screamed:

“Beverly! Are you all right?”

Lenora, Terry, and Larry tumbled out and gathered around Beverly.

“He locked me in a closet,” Lenora explained breathlessly, “and by the time I was free you had gone. We noticed the car was gone and we’ve been driving around looking for you for an hour. Who was the mystery man, Bev?”

“Don’t ask questions now.” Larry put a supporting arm about Beverly. “You look as if you’ve had a rough time. We’ll take you back to the lodge.”

“I say!” Terry whistled. “The coupé is a wreck, isn’t it? Whose bags are in the back?”

“Put them in your car,” Beverly said, and looked about for True.

The dancer had drawn back out of the glare of the headlights and remained unnoticed. As Beverly turned, True climbed into the car of the man who had brought her back to the wreck. Beverly took a step in her direction but the car was already moving. With a sudden burst of noise the old car rolled down the road, its owner running after it shouting:

“Catch her somebody! She is stealing my car!”

“Who was it?” Terry asked.

“True Torston,” Beverly replied slowly. “She is probably going to the railroad station. We’ll take you there and you can get your car,” Beverly told the stranger.

“True!” Lenora exclaimed. “Bev, was she the mystery man?”

Beverly nodded. “You’ll find the stolen jewels in one of those suitcases.”

“We should try to catch her,” Lenora said excitedly.

“Inspector Martin will want to talk to her,” Larry added. “Get in the car, everybody.”

Terry drove and he did his best to catch up with True, but the road was slippery and he was forced to be cautious.

“Listen!” Lenora cried suddenly. “Do you hear a train?”

“She is going to get away,” Beverly murmured.

They pulled up at the tiny railroad station just as the train began to move. True stood on the observation platform and as they came into sight

she raised a hand in silent salute.

“Oh, well,” Terry comforted them, “we saved the jewels.”

True left the automobile she had taken at the entrance to the station and the owner went off happily with the money Larry slipped into his hand. The young people went back to Mountain View and caused a sensation when they arrived.

Beverly found she looked quite disheveled and she refused to join the party. She went to the girls' room, took a warm bath to ease her aching muscles, and crawled into bed. She thought of True, somewhere on a speeding train. She had given up the jewels and almost been caught because she came to help Beverly in the wrecked car. Tomorrow she, Beverly, would have to tell Inspector Martin what train True had taken but, she reflected, the girl would probably be safely hidden by the time he started to trace her.

Beverly thought, too, of her play in New York and told herself, “I want to go home. I want to be there while rehearsals are going on.” With that determination in mind she fell asleep and did not wake until morning when she felt something warm and wet and rough on her face. She pushed it away and was rewarded by a heavy paw descending on her mid-section. Opening one eye she saw Tip and Top sitting beside the bed. It had been Tip who tried to wash her face.

“Good morning, boys,” she yawned.

Two tails thumped the floor simultaneously and two brown bodies wriggled with joy at being noticed.

“Lenora, we have callers.”

“Huh?” Lenora rolled over. “How did they get in here?”

“They must have pushed the door open,” Beverly observed. “Let's get up and take them for a walk.”

“It is so early,” Lenora sighed.

“But we are going home tomorrow,” Beverly said.

“We are?” Lenora sat up in surprise. “I was afraid this would happen.”

“Don't you want to go home?”

“Yes and no,” Lenora replied. “Do you?”

“I want to go back to work,” Beverly nodded, “and we might as well go with Larry and Terry.”

“A good idea,” Lenora observed with a chuckle. “They can carry our bags. New York! New York!” She stretched her arms high above her head. “‘The time has come, the walrus said, to talk of many things—’ Getting me a job, for instance. That,” she prophesied, “will be something!”

## CHAPTER XIII

### *A Rival*

---

“I DON’T understand it,” Beverly frowned. “I was sure I was the first reporter there.”

“But you weren’t,” Lenora pointed out, “or the *Sun* would not have carried the story before the *Tribune*.”

Beverly consulted the newspaper on the table between them. In glaring headlines it proclaimed the news of a kidnaping.

“K. Merrill,” Beverly murmured. “I wonder who he is.”

The girls had been home from Mountain View for a week now. Miss Colfax had gone back to Florida, the police were still looking for True Torston, and Beverly was back to her duties on the *Tribune* while her play continued in rehearsal. This morning she had been sent hurrying crosstown to the home of a prominent lawyer whose little boy had been reported kidnaped. She had seen no other reporters there, yet the story appeared in the *Sun* before it did in the *Tribune*.

“How did you make out?” Beverly took her mind off her own thoughts long enough to smile at Lenora who had met her for lunch.

“I didn’t find a job I would like, if that’s what you mean,” Lenora replied with a sigh. “I have even talked to two employment agencies.” She laughed at the memory. “I’m afraid they never had anyone quite like me on their hands.”

“Come along with me this afternoon,” Beverly proposed. “I’m taking the train to Vernon.”

“Vernon College?” Lenora asked in surprise.

“Yes. They have been having so much rain the streams are threatening to overflow. You can take pictures.”

“I’ll have to go home for my camera first,” Lenora said.

Beverly glanced at her watch. “I’m going to stop at the theater for a few minutes. I’ll meet you there in an hour.”

“That’s plenty of time,” Lenora nodded.

While she walked crosstown Beverly thought again of the story which the *Sun* had printed before the *Tribune*. She felt chagrined to think Blaine had entrusted her to get the story and she had failed. She thought of the *Tribune's* slogan: "First with the news!" In this case they had been a bad second.

Beverly met Lenora at the appointed time and they hurried to the railroad station.

"Gosh," Lenora sighed. "I haven't been to Vernon for ages. I wonder if it has changed much."

"It hadn't changed the last time I was there," Beverly assured her.

"We'll have to see Ada and go to Weller's, and I want to stroll down College Avenue—" Lenora began.

"We are up here on business," Beverly reminded. "We must get our story and leave on the midnight train."

As the train approached Vernon they could see the turbulent flood waters under the bridges they crossed. Temporary dikes of sandbags had been hastily erected along the shore of the river that supplied the town of Vernon with electric power. The girls, in all their time at the school, had never seen this particular stream in such a rage. If the dam at the power company did not hold, the waters would descend on the town. The college buildings, fortunately, were located a distance from the town and on a slight elevation. That would be all that would save them from the flood.

"I never thought I would some day be coming back to write about a disaster," Beverly declared.

"Or I to take pictures of it," Lenora agreed gravely.

At last the girls left the train and from the station platform surveyed the town. Frightened townspeople turned grave faces northward from whence the waters would come. Many already were loading possessions into automobiles to escape while there was yet time. The air was charged with danger.

Beverly saw a boy crossing the street and beckoned to him. He came across to the girls, his raincoat streaked with mud.

"Is there any news about the dam?" Beverly asked.

"It might hold and it might not," he answered with a grin. "The people are sure scared."

"How about the college?" Lenora put in.

"That is all right. The teachers are helping to take the younger children up there."

“Ada is probably in the middle of it,” Lenora remarked. “Are we going up to see them, Bev?”

“You go and get some pictures of the rescue workers,” Beverly suggested. “I’m going to talk to the town librarian. Remember how gossipy she used to be? She can probably give me some news.”

“I’ll come back to the library,” Lenora nodded.

Beverly walked down the street to the white library building. It was growing dark and the lights had been turned on. They seemed to be defying the danger in the air. Beverly entered the library and approached the desk. Miss Folsom, the librarian, gray-haired, with a birdlike voice, was talking to another girl about Beverly’s age, a slender, blond, smartly dressed young woman with fair skin and large brown eyes.

“Miss Gray!” Miss Folsom exclaimed, reaching a hand across the desk. “This is a surprise. Did you come to see our flood?”

“Yes,” Beverly smiled. “Do you think the dam will hold?”

“I was just telling this young lady,” Miss Folsom said, “that I am sure it will. Some of the people are leaving town because they are afraid. I’m not. I’ve lived here for twenty years and that dam has always held the river back.”

Even as she spoke there came to their ears a dull, roaring sound ever increasing in volume. Beverly and the other girl ran to the door to see what was happening and could scarcely believe their eyes.

Rushing down the street was a great wall of water, sweeping everything before it.

“Lenora!” Beverly cried.

Lenora had loitered on her way to the school to look in Weller’s, the girls’ old haunt. Now, just crossing the street, she stood terrified in the path of the oncoming mountain of water. Instinctively Beverly started down the steps toward her friend. She heard Lenora shriek her name before she was caught up and plunged into the swirling green mass.

Fighting for breath, Beverly came to the surface and was promptly pushed under again. She fought to free herself of the tangling weight of her coat and at last shot up to the surface. There was another figure in the water off to her right. When a floating tree branch had passed, Beverly recognized Lenora and tried to call to her. A huge packing case was bearing down upon her and Beverly grasped at it but it rushed past. Little by little she and Lenora were being swept closer together and when a huge, wooden, raftlike affair came by, they both managed to catch hold of it and climb upon it.

Their craft went a little farther and stopped, caught between two trees, with a suddenness that almost plunged them back into the flood.

“Look!” Lenora cried, seizing Beverly’s arm. “There’s another girl.”

The half-submerged figure of the girl who Beverly had seen in the library was barely discernible in the dark rushing water. One glance was enough to tell them that she was in serious trouble. She was no longer attempting to fight the current.

Taking a deep breath Beverly plunged into the stream just as the girl came opposite her. It was almost impossible to swim against the force of the water, but Beverly managed to reach the girl just as she disappeared beneath the surface. Beverly dived and brought the other girl up with her, looking around desperately for something to cling to.

Coming downstream toward them was a dislodged roof of a small building. It evidently had been the roof of a chicken coop before the flood, for one of the chickens still clung to a perch on the very peak and the water around it was dotted with feathers. Beverly managed to catch hold with one hand while she held the girl up with the other. She was beginning to lose her grip on the roof when Lenora came gasping to the surface beside her. Between them they managed to get the unknown girl on the roof and then pulled themselves up beside her. Beverly began such artificial respiration as was possible to give under the circumstances.

“She must have knocked herself out on something,” Lenora commented. “There is a deep cut on her forehead.”

“She’ll be all right, I hope,” Beverly murmured. “If only she hasn’t swallowed too much water!”

The girls were cold and huddled together on the rooftop, their clothes wet and clinging. Their raft was swept along with the current and they had completely lost all sense of direction. They did not know where they were or where they were drifting.

“What are you thinking about?” Beverly asked Lenora who was staring at the white chicken which still clung stubbornly to his perch.

“The girls are probably having dinner now,” Lenora sighed. “If we could build a fire I’d cook him.”

“He would taste good,” Beverly agreed and shifted her weight a little to keep their raft from rocking.

The injured girl had not moved or spoken since her rescue, and all the other girls could do was hope for aid as soon as possible.

It was night now, black and cold. There was not a glimpse of light anywhere. The darkness was like an impenetrable curtain shutting them off from the rest of the world.

“Shall we try shouting some more?” Lenora wanted to know.

“Perhaps we should,” Beverly nodded.

They sent their voices ringing out into the darkness until they were hoarse and out of breath.

“It is no use,” Lenora said dejectedly. “The flood has swept us away from everyone else.”

“We are sure to be found before morning,” Beverly said hopefully.

“Morning!” Lenora echoed, and continued thoughtfully, “Do you remember, Bev, below Vernon there is nothing but open country for miles and miles. We are probably in the middle of nowhere.”

“This girl should have a doctor,” Beverly murmured.

“I could do with some hot soup myself,” Lenora sighed. “What do you suggest we do? It all seems so hopeless! I’m freezing!”

There was no rejoinder Beverly could make. She felt just as Lenora did—cold, hungry and frightened, but she felt no urge to give up. There must be something they could do!

Nameless black shapes floated past them in the darkness. Minutes seemed like hours. She had no idea how long they had been drifting before their raft came to an abrupt halt, obviously caught by something underneath, since they were still surrounded on all sides by water.

Beverly smothered a sneeze and stared vainly into the inky blackness. How far had they drifted? Where were they? How far away was help?

“Now I know what people mean when they say ‘Water, water everywhere, nor any drop to drink,’” Lenora giggled. “If only I were a duck!”

Beverly smiled and was suddenly very grateful for Lenora’s presence. The blond girl could be counted on to inject a vein of humor into any situation. This would have been a horrible predicament to be in alone. It was bad enough as it was.

“I’ll never forget this night,” Lenora groaned. “Why did I come to Vernon in the first place?”

“To help me report on the flood,” Beverly said gloomily. “By now all the newspapers have the story and Charlie Blaine is probably wondering what has become of me. A fine reporter I turned out to be.”

“You didn’t ask for the flood,” Lenora consoled her friend. “Besides, think of the story this will make. ‘A Night on the Roof of a Chicken House,’ ” she continued, “or ‘Adrift in the Dark.’ ”

“Lenora!” Beverly whispered tensely. “Look—over there!”

“A light!” Lenora murmured. “A real, honest-to-goodness light! Bev, we’re saved!” She let out a shriek of joy and moved so suddenly their raft tilted, almost dumping them overboard.

The girls called out in vain. The light remained distinct but remote, and there was no answer to any of their cries.

“So near and yet so far,” Lenora said ruefully.

“I’m going over there,” Beverly decided.

“You can’t,” Lenora gasped. “It is too dark to see what you are getting into.”

“I’ll make it,” Beverly answered grimly. “I’ve got to. We can’t stay here in the cold much longer.”

“It is too dangerous,” Lenora insisted. “It should be morning soon. Then someone will surely see us.”

“We don’t know if this girl can wait until morning,” Beverly said. “She hasn’t moved or spoken. She might be seriously injured. We must do something.”

“If you go, I’m going too,” Lenora said.

Beverly shook her head. “Someone should stay here with her.”

Without further argument Beverly lowered herself over the side. The water was an icy shock to her stiff muscles.

“Come back,” Lenora implored. “You’ll get lost and maybe drown.”

Beverly smiled briefly. It was quite possible to lose her way in the darkness, or to grow faint from exhaustion and exposure, but she dared not think of that.

She held herself up to look for that faint light. It still gleamed across the water like a beckoning, saving hand. It promised warmth and protection from the cold. She struck out determinedly toward it.

“Oooo, Beverly—” Lenora’s wail echoed in her ears.

From the first it was an effort to make her tired and stiff limbs respond to the demand she put upon them. The icy water was numbing her, making her movements more slow and difficult. There was the overpowering desire to give up, not to fight any more, but to yield to the weight dragging at her.

She couldn't be drowning, she told herself wryly. A dying person was supposed to see his whole life pass before him in those final moments, and all she could think of was how beautiful was her own warm room at home.

Various articles bumped against her in the darkness, and once she became tangled in a tree branch, but she continued, still fighting desperately. She tried to see the light toward which she had started, but it was gone. For a moment her courage failed her. Then she shook the water from her eyes and looked again. No, there it was! But in dismay she realized it seemed as far away as ever. Yet she must have come a good distance because she could no longer hear Lenora calling after her.

She tried to shake off that feeling of lethargy and plunge ahead with renewed strength. She could not go on much longer she knew. She was pierced through with cold and desperately tired. At last her limbs refused to move any more. The water closed over her head and her feet touched bottom. Some small voice whispered within her and she struggled a little longer, realizing instinctively that the water was growing more shallow and that she was almost safe upon dry ground.

Beverly opened one eye and peeped over the edge of the blanket. She was in a small room and the sun streamed in through an open window. It was cozy lying here, warm and quiet; but suddenly she remembered last night—the flood, the girls' journey on the rooftop, and her swim for help.

She sat up abruptly and looked around. Where was she? Last night's events were hazy. She remembered stumbling out of the water and up a narrow path to a small cottage on the hillside. After that there were only blurred impressions of a gray-haired man and his wife who were very kind. What had happened since then? Had Lenora and the unknown girl been rescued?

She threw aside the covers and leaped out of bed. Her clothes had been dried and pressed and were waiting for her. She dressed hastily, with trembling fingers, and went to the bedroom door. It opened onto a comfortably furnished sitting room. Lenora was in a chair before the fireplace, her back to Beverly. There was the delicious aroma of coffee in the air, and sounds of activity came from the kitchen.

Beverly advanced a step and Lenora leaped up.

"Beverly!" Lenora hugged her churn ecstatically. "Gosh, am I glad to see you! I was about to knock down the door to your room."

"Why didn't you call me?" Beverly wanted to know.

“I was being thoughtful and letting you rest after last night,” Lenora retorted.

“How about you?” Beverly asked. “Are you over the effects of last night?”

“I must have a few gray hairs,” Lenora frowned, “and my camera will never be the same.”

“You mean after all we went through you still have your camera?” Beverly demanded.

“I clung to that as though it were glued to my hand,” Lenora confessed. She held the camera up for Beverly’s inspection. “I’ve been trying to dry it off,” she said ruefully. “The film is completely gone, but I don’t think the lens is damaged. I’ll have it looked over by an expert when we get back to New York.”

“How about our friend?” Beverly asked.

“The unknown blond?” Lenora murmured. “She is sleeping in that other room.” She nodded toward a closed door beside the room from which Beverly had come.

“How did you get here?” Beverly asked, sinking into a deep chair. “I don’t remember a thing.”

“You were completely exhausted,” Lenora told her, “but you managed to tell Mr. Craig where we were and he came out to us in a rowboat. He and his wife were very kind to us.” Lenora shivered. “It was the most awful feeling when I saw you disappear in the water. It was even worse than jumping out of the airplane. I never want to see anything like it again.”

At that point Mrs. Craig, a pleasant, chubby little woman came into the room. She wore an apron over a gay print dress, and she beamed upon the girls.

“It is good to see you both looking so fine this morning,” she declared. “Breakfast will be ready in ten minutes.” With that she disappeared into the kitchen again.

“I tried to telephone to Vernon,” Lenora reported, “but the wires were down.”

“That means I can’t call Mr. Blaine either,” Beverly sighed. “I wonder how we can get back to Vernon if the trains aren’t running?”

Mrs. Craig summoned them to the breakfast table at that point and as they sat down, Lenora asked:

“What about the other girl?”

“Oh, I nearly forgot!” Mrs. Craig pulled an envelope from her apron pocket. “When she left she asked me to give you this.”

“Left!” Lenora exclaimed. “But how could she? Wasn’t she hurt?”

“She was a little shaky but she insisted on going,” Mrs. Craig replied. “She said something about a story. My husband drove her to Westfield, that is the next town, so she could get the first train.”

Beverly took the envelope her hostess held out. The note was short and Beverly read it with Lenora looking over her shoulder.

*“I am sorry I cannot wait to thank you in person, but please accept my gratitude for all you have done. Perhaps we will meet again soon.”*

*Sincerely,*  
K. MERRILL.”

“K. Merrill!” Lenora exclaimed. “K. Merrill! The reporter!”

“She has gone to turn in her story,” Beverly murmured. “The *Sun* will be ahead of the *Tribune* again.”

“We saved her and she steals our story!” Lenora said indignantly. “How do you like that? We should have left her out on the raft with the chicken!”

“Is something wrong?” Mrs. Craig asked.

“Is there any way at all that we can get to Vernon?” Beverly wanted to know.

“The roads aren’t open,” Mrs. Craig frowned, “and Mr. Craig isn’t here to take you in the rowboat——”

“We’ll row it,” Lenora proposed eagerly. “We’ve handled little boats before.”

“We will return it,” Beverly assured Mrs. Craig, “but we must get to the college.”

“Well——” their hostess considered the matter. “Eat your breakfast first, anyway.”

In borrowed sweaters, having lost their coats the night before, Beverly and Lenora climbed into the small rowboat owned by their host and started back upstream toward Vernon.

“Why do I suggest these things?” Lenora demanded a half-hour later, pausing to rest. “This is hard work.”

“It won’t be much farther,” Beverly said. “I can see a church steeple above the trees.”

“Bless that K. Merrill,” Lenora muttered, taking up her oar again. “She has probably turned in her story. Why don’t we just go home and forget the whole thing? We can’t possibly beat her.”

“She won’t be first with her story, either,” Beverly said with satisfaction. “Probably word went to every paper last night that the dam had broken. At least we can get some human interest stuff. You might even be able to borrow Ada’s camera.”

Lenora brightened at the thought. “I might get some good pictures and then Mr. Blaine would forgive all.”

They rowed up College Avenue, and uppermost in the minds of each was the memory of the many times they had strolled along this shady, quiet street in happier times.

Rescue squads were removing people stranded in their homes, and when the girls finally reached the college it was scarcely recognizable as the serene, dignified, quiet place of learning that they had loved.

There were people everywhere they looked. The gymnasium had been converted into a first-aid hospital. The dormitories housed evacuees from the village. Even the old, ivy-covered chapel had cots set up in its aisles, and the auditorium where the girls had staged their plays was now a huge dining room. That was where they found Ada. She was helping to feed a group of children.

Ada was another Alpha Delta member and for some time had been teaching at Vernon College.

“Look what the flood brought!” Ada exclaimed in amazement as Beverly and Lenora came up to her. “You are just in time to go to work.”

“What can we do?” Beverly asked.

As Lenora remarked to Beverly later, that was the wrong thing to ask, for tasks fairly poured upon them. There was work for every pair of willing hands. As Beverly moved about among the people, she gathered her story for the *Tribune*. It would not be one of blazing headlines. It was too late for that. Her story would be made up of small bits of heroism, sacrifices, and gallantry. It would be about people, young and old, rich and poor, humble and proud, and people who forgot themselves to help others in trouble. It would be a little bit about Vernon College, too—the stately, revered institution that threw wide its doors to help those in distress.

Lenora, meanwhile, had borrowed Ada’s camera and ventured into the town again to take pictures which would illustrate just how severe the flood

had been.

Beverly and Lenora slept on a cot in Ada's room that night, after Beverly had wired her story to New York. By the next morning train service was restored and the girls departed for New York. They went straight to the apartment to change their clothes, and there found Shirley and Lois waiting to hear the details of their trip.

"Your story in the *Tribune* made me want to cry," Shirley told Beverly. "It was so human and beautifully written."

"It made me glad I went to Vernon," added Lois.

"Did you happen to buy the *Sun* on the same day?" Lenora asked.

"Yes," Shirley replied. "Here it is."

Lenora grabbed the paper and went hastily through it.

"Ah! Listen!" she told Beverly. "'A *Sun* reporter narrowly escaped drowning in the flood waters that swept down upon the little town of Vernon.'" She flung the paper from her. "Our names aren't even mentioned."

"What are you talking about?" Lois wanted to know.

"The story Beverly should have written was the one about K. Merrill," Lenora grumbled. "We saved her life and she doesn't even say thank you."

"She left a note for us," Beverly reminded. "What was she supposed to do? I, for one, don't want any thanks."

"It might help us to understand if you told us what you are talking about," Lois said in a dry voice.

Beverly went down to the *Tribune* office while Lenora told the other girls about the rival reporter.

That afternoon Beverly went to the launching of a new luxury liner and when she left the office to go home that night, it was snowing. Light, fluffy bits of white lingered on her coat and dissolved into sparkling drops of water on her eyelashes.

"Are you going my way, lady?" Jim's gay voice hailed her.

"Ah, a chance to be rescued from the blizzard!" she exclaimed.

"I just came from a very unpleasant hour with my dentist," Jim told her. "I was hoping you would come out about now and cheer me up. What do you say to a steak dinner?"

"It would just hit the spot!" Beverly declared.

She felt cheered by Jim's lightness and the prospect of a good dinner.

“I know just the place,” he said, tucking her hand under his arm. “Hang on. We’ll be out of this in no time.”

The warm, rosy light of the restaurant was most pleasant after the swirling snow outside.

“Where is Larry tonight?” Jim asked.

“Working.”

“When are you two going to be married?”

“We haven’t set a definite date,” Beverly answered.

“You know,” Jim told her over their dessert, “this dinner is almost a farewell affair.”

“Farewell?” Beverly asked. “Where are you going?”

“To the wilds of Canada,” Jim replied, gesturing expansively with his hand. “Snow and ice and the Royal Canadian Mounties. You and Lenora gave such vivid descriptions of the woods I have decided to accompany a friend of mine on a hunting trip. I’ll send you a bear rug,” he added cheerfully.

“I’ll miss you,” Beverly said frankly. She enjoyed his firm friendship and gay companionship.

“I hope so,” he grinned, “because I shall miss you.”

They went out again into the snow and Jim took Beverly home. The next morning she rose with the determination that today Katharine Merrill should not be first with the news. Beverly was aware that there always had been rivalry between the two newspapers and she resolved to do her best to keep the *Tribune* two steps ahead of the *Sun*.

Despite her determination, Katharine Merrill continued to vie with her and every other reporter for the best stories, and very often she was triumphant over them all. It seemed that wherever Beverly went, Katharine Merrill went, too. They became known to each other but not on a friendly basis, and the rivalry between the newspapers became a personal thing between them.

Beverly and Larry went to the train with Jim when he and his friend departed for the north woods. Afterward, Larry went back to his office to finish some work and Beverly went home. She found Lois reading the evening paper while Lenora was developing some of her pictures in the darkened kitchen. Lenora was working hard at her photography these days, for she believed she had almost convinced Charlie Blaine that she could handle any assignment he gave her.

Beverly dropped into a convenient chair and helped herself to a piece of Lois' candy.

"I have been trying to drag Lenora out to see the new dancer at the City Theater," Lois complained, "but she won't budge."

"The City Theater," Beverly exclaimed. "That's where the masked dancer is. I know. I've been trying for two days to secure an interview."

"She is fast becoming the talk of the town," Lois continued. "My boss gave me three tickets for tonight, but no one will go with me."

"Never let it be said that I missed an opportunity like that," Beverly declared. "Get your hat. I'll get Lenora."

"Don't you dare open that door!" Lenora shouted as Beverly tapped on the kitchen door. "Go away! I'm working."

"I have a new assignment for you," Beverly called.

There was a clatter in the kitchen and a moment later Lenora stuck her head out.

"What's up?"

"I want a picture of the masked dancer—without the mask."

"She smashes any camera that comes within ten feet of her," Lenora reported, "and I'm not taking any chances."

"Charlie Blaine might hire you permanently if you got the picture," Beverly continued persuasively.

"He would?" Lenora was impressed. "Well——"

"Lois and I are going now to see her dance," Beverly added, slipping into her coat. "Want to come with us?"

"Well——" Lenora said again doubtfully. "Okay. Wait until I put my stuff away."

"I'll help you," Beverly offered generously.

Fifteen minutes later the girls were walking down Broadway on their way to the City Theater. There was a crowd in the lobby, and by the time the girls found their seats it was time for the curtain to go up.

It was the performance of a well-known ballet troupe, and one of the featured dancers wore a mask all during her number. The touch of mystery intrigued her audiences and during the ten days of the troupe's appearance, she had skyrocketed to fame. Billboards and newspapers exploited the grace and talent of the dancer, but her real identity, her private life, even her name remained a secret.

“She is good—whoever she is,” Lenora commented. “Are we going to wait for the finale or go backstage now?”

“We’ll go now,” Beverly decided, “and meet her when she comes off the stage.”

The girls succeeded in slipping past the stage door when the doorman wasn’t looking. They picked their way carefully through the groups of other dancers and discarded scenery to where they had a clear view of the stage.

When the orchestra gave its final, reverberating crash, the curtain came down and the dancers ran off the stage. Bows had to be taken, but finally it was all over and the masked dancer walked toward her dressing room.

Beverly started toward her but another figure stepped from behind a curtain fold directly into the dancer’s path.

Katharine Merrill!

“Look who is here!” Lenora exclaimed. “And she brought her camera!”

“Will you please pose for a photograph without your mask?” Katharine Merrill lifted her camera and focused it on the dancer.

“She shouldn’t wave the thing in front of her like that,” Lenora murmured. “See? I knew it!”

Without a word the dancer had reached out, snatched the camera, and hurled it to the floor before Katharine Merrill could move.

“Go to the window of her dressing room,” Beverly whispered to Lenora and moved after the dancer.

When the masked girl stepped into her dressing room Beverly crowded in behind her before she could close the door.

“I’d like to talk to you for a minute,” Beverly said.

The eyes behind the mask glittered. For a second the dancer faced Beverly and then turned away with a shrug.

“I’m from the *Tribune*,” Beverly continued, walking slowly to the window. Yes, Lenora was there—waiting, her camera on the window sill. “Your dance has excited so much interest that we would like to do a feature article for our Sunday supplement about your career—your past life—everything you care to tell us.”

There was no response. The dancer sat in silence before her dressing table. Her eyes, through the narrow slits of her mask, watched Beverly in the mirror.

“It would not, of course, be complete without a photograph.”

Again Beverly felt that scrutiny of the eyes behind the mask.

“I am not interested.” The dancer stood up, obviously waiting for Beverly to leave.

“The *Tribune* is willing to pay you a substantial amount for your signed story,” Beverly tried again.

“Please go.”

What could she do? Beverly had an impulse to snatch the mask from the dancer’s face. It seemed unlikely that the dancer would reveal her identity willingly.

Beverly took a step closer and stopped as a sweet, heady scent came to her. That perfume! Where had she come in contact with it before? Now she remembered! It was made in Europe and there was only one person she had ever met who used it—True Torston! True was here in this theater! In this very room! What Inspector Martin would give for that information!

## *Shirley Steps In*

---

BEVERLY moved toward the door, but swift as she was, True was there ahead of her. She stood with her back against the door, facing Beverly.

“You know, don’t you?” she demanded.

“Yes, True,” Beverly nodded. “It was your perfume.”

“Now you propose to tell the police,” True said. Beverly nodded again.

“Why?” True shot at her. “The jewels were returned. Why must the police continue to hunt me?”

“Perhaps they merely want to ask you some questions,” Beverly said reasonably.

“And perhaps they want to put me in prison,” True flung back at her. “Why must you do it, Beverly? I am doing no one any harm now. I am dancing—that is all. Next week I shall be gone. I shall not come back to New York. Why must you tell the police?”

“How do I know you are not up to your old tricks?” Beverly countered swiftly. “This might be just a pose.”

“Yes,” True agreed. “It might be—but it isn’t. You have made me honest, Beverly.”

“I?” Beverly exclaimed in amazement.

“Yes. When we were at Mountain View I watched you and Lenora. You are such good friends—I never had such a friend. There is something fine and clean about you both. When I talked to you I was ashamed for the first time. Even then I wanted to be like you—free of deceit and able to face everyone with my head up. I was unhappy, but I did not know exactly why. Now I know it was because I was a thief. Even you turned from me when you learned that, do you remember?”

Beverly nodded, unable to speak. This was a revelation. She had had no idea True had been watching her every action so intently.

“Then when we had the accident and I had an opportunity to escape with the jewels, I knew I couldn’t leave you—injured perhaps—alone— It wasn’t

what Lenora would have done.” She smiled. “Lenora jumped from an airplane to help a lot of people she didn’t know. She was so much better than I. Yet later, when your friends came, I ran away because I was afraid of what I had done. When I was safely on the train I decided to start over and be like you. I knew the police were looking for me, but I thought when the jewels were returned they would forget. I came to New York because I must dance to earn a living and this seemed the best place. I have worked hard and I am happy now. I will never be a thief again.” She moved away from the door. “That is all—except I beg you not to tell the police.”

Beverly felt her thoughts whirling around. True’s story was so simply told, so direct, Beverly could not find it in her heart to doubt its truthfulness. When she had first come to know True, in the hospital, the girl had been lonely. She had told Beverly then that she had been lonely all her life. Perhaps that had been what was wrong. Walking alone, she had taken the wrong path. Now she was sorry and wanted to do only what was right.

Beverly walked to the window and back again. In her mind she went over everything that had happened since she first met True: the disappearance of the little jade carving and her suspicion when True had recovered it; the stolen jewels; how True had saved Beverly from the ice slide; the suspicion again that had crowded her mind in the little wood carver’s hut; True’s daring escape from Mountain View; and then her concern for Beverly’s safety.

“Is it such a hard thing—what I am asking?” True murmured. “It is only that you keep silent about who I am.”

“Don’t you understand?” Beverly said. “By your own admission you are—were,” she corrected herself, “a thief. Perhaps you always will be,” she added with a frown.

“I have said I will not,” True reminded her. “I do not lie.”

“I want to believe you,” Beverly confessed. She smiled ruefully. “Even when I was suspicious of you I liked you. I could never understand why you were a thief.”

“Is it not enough that I am sorry?” True asked.

“It is easy to say you’re sorry,” Beverly told her frankly. “Especially if it will enable you to escape punishment.”

“But it is true!” The dancer was silent, apparently hurt and puzzled. Beverly tried to think of some way to deal with the problem. She liked True but there was her duty to Inspector Martin and the law.

What would Inspector Martin do if he were to discover True here? On the other hand, what would True do if she were allowed to go her own way?

“I don’t know what to do,” Beverly said. She held True’s happiness in her hand. What should she do? She might regret whichever choice she made.

“You risked your life to help me once,” True reminded her. “Won’t you help me again?”

Beverly faced True. The eyes behind the mask were dark with worry. Looking into her eyes, Beverly remembered True’s confession on the mountain of how much her dancing career meant to her. She recalled that mad drive with True to the station, the wreck, and then True’s appearance with help even at the risk of being caught herself. Finally, she thought of True’s magnificent performance a short while ago and her sincere plea to be allowed to continue her career. Did she have the right to change this girl’s life now that her dream of success was so near realization? Beverly stepped forward and put both her hands on True’s shoulders, holding the girl at arms’ length.

“Go quickly,” she said, “before I change my mind. I’ll take a chance that you are sincere in what you said. I hope you are, and remember that now you have a friend counting on you.”

“You will never regret it!”

True kissed Beverly impulsively, snatched up a coat, and ran out. Beverly stared unseeingly at the closed door. Perhaps some day she would know whether what she was doing was right or wrong. This chance might be all that True needed to build something fine with her life.

Lois and Lenora burst in noisily.

“What’s the idea? What’s the idea?” Lenora demanded. “You came for an interview and you got a kiss. What kind of a game is it?”

“I’ve just done something I hope I shall never regret,” Beverly sighed. “Perhaps I was wrong, but I have faith in her.”

“Have you forgotten you came here for a story?” Lois asked.

“No. I got a story,” Beverly said, eyes shining, “but you will never see it in print. Come, let’s go home.”

“You dragged me down here with the promise of a picture and now—” Lenora began grumblingly.

“You can take *my* picture,” Lois said brightly.

“Do you propose to tell us what your conversation with the masked wonder was all about?” Lenora asked, ignoring Lois.

“Perhaps I will some day,” Beverly murmured as they left the theater. “How about a sandwich? I’m hungry.”

“She brings up the subject of food to take my mind off the mystery,” Lenora said with a wink at Lois. “Okay, but you’ll be sorry tomorrow if Katharine Merrill has a story on the dancer and we haven’t.”

However, the *Sun* did not carry any story about the masked dancer and Beverly breathed easier.

Lenora accompanied Beverly to the *Tribune* office the next afternoon and presented herself before Charlie Blaine.

“Here I am again!”

“So I see,” he grinned. “Don’t you have a home?”

“I am devoted to my art,” Lenora returned. “Have you decided to let me become your star photographer?”

Charlie Blaine laughed. “Not exactly, though I do like those shots you took yesterday.” He threw down his pencil and leaned back in his chair. “I have something new for you and Beverly. How would you two like to be a permanent team?”

“Oh, boy!” Lenora exclaimed.

“Very much,” Beverly echoed.

“Your friend, Katharine Merrill, is teaming up with another girl to do a cross-country series. They are going to travel in a trailer, visit all the famous landmarks in the nation, and write feature articles on them.”

“We can think of something more spectacular than that!” Lenora scoffed.

“Good!” Blaine said. “Plan something and let me know what you decide.”

It was while Lenora and Beverly were talking to Charlie Blaine that Shirley came storming into the girls’ apartment with the news. She slammed the door behind her and threw her hat and gloves aside.

“Where’s Beverly?” she asked Lois.

“Out with Lenora, I suppose,” Lois replied. “I just came in. Look, here is a letter from Virginia. She is leaving the hospital and going home with her parents for a few weeks.”

“Good!” Shirley said.

“Now what’s wrong with you?” Lois asked.

“It isn’t me. It’s Beverly—or it will be,” Shirley sighed. “Why did this have to happen? She doesn’t deserve a thing like this!”

“Will you please tell me what you are talking about?” Lois demanded.

“*Angels Arise*. You know, her play.”

“Yes,” Lois murmured, suddenly alert. “Go on.”

“I don’t know how to tell her,” Shirley frowned, pacing up and down.

“Tell her what?” Lois asked patiently.

“The leading lady was hit by an automobile this afternoon,” Shirley continued. “She didn’t have an understudy. It probably means the thing will be called off.”

“Oh, no!” Lois exclaimed. “Not after Beverly has worked so hard.”

“It is too bad,” Shirley sighed.

“What will Beverly do?” Lois groaned.

“She was so close to what she has dreamed of ever since college days,” Shirley said.

The girls were silent, thinking of Beverly’s keen disappointment.

“I don’t suppose there is anything you could do,” Lois said at last.

“I?” Shirley said. “What could I do?”

“I mean, you couldn’t play the part or anything like that.”

“Could I?” Shirley murmured. “Maybe I could. *Lonesome Lady* closes tonight. I’m not going on tour with it, so I’ll be free——”

“There are just two weeks before the play is scheduled to open,” Lois reminded her, “but you played the part last summer in *Rosedale*——”

“Beverly has made changes in it since then,” Shirley murmured. “Fourteen days to learn the part.” She tossed her head. “I can do it—for Beverly.”

“Why don’t you telephone the theater and see if she is there?” Lois suggested.

Shirley dialed the theater and after a long wait Beverly’s voice came across the wire to her.

“Shirley! Have you heard?”

“Yes,” Shirley replied. “Look, Bev, Lois and I have been thinking. Would you let me do the lead? There are only two weeks left for rehearsals, but since I did play the role last summer, I am familiar with it and maybe——”

Beverly, at the other end, leaned weakly against the wall. This slender bit of telephone wire was a lifeline!

“Oh, Shirley, if you only would!”

“I’ll be at the theater in ten minutes,” Shirley said. “Tell Mr. Morgan you’ve hired another actress.”

This, Beverly thought, was something she had dreamed about—at Vernon College when she had laughingly prophesied that some day she would write a play and Shirley would act in it. Now it was to come true!

## *Opening Night*

---

THE days swept by alarmingly fast. Shirley undertook the lead in *Angels Arise* and everyone rallied to help her in any way they could. The other girls were thoughtfully absent from the apartment in the evenings, so that Shirley would not be disturbed as she paced the floor learning her lines, talking aloud, striving as hard as she could to give the words the right shade of meaning. Sometimes she would be confident that she could do it brilliantly, that she could not fail. At other times the thought of the short time for rehearsals would overwhelm her and she would be plunged into despair.

Beverly went through the two weeks in a mixture of emotions. She was delighted that Shirley was in the play, but, like her friend, she despaired at the brief time Shirley had for preparation.

“Think of the responsibility it places upon me,” Shirley confided to Lois once. “All those other plays—they were important to me, of course, but not like this one. This is Beverly’s play! If I’m no good it can ruin the play. I tell you, I’m petrified.”

“You will be good,” Lois maintained stoutly. “This part is right down your alley,” she added slangily. “You could do it with your eyes closed.”

“The faith of my friends,” Shirley sighed. “It is wonderful.”

On opening night the apartment of the Alpha Delta girls was in a frenzy of excitement.

“I’m scared,” Shirley declared. “Suppose I’m no good in the part? Suppose I let Beverly down?”

“You won’t,” Lois assured her, trying to be calm. “You just have a first-class case of jitters. They will disappear. I’ve seen you like this before.”

“I hope you are right,” Shirley declared.

“You are nearly dead from overwork,” Lois added sympathetically, “but tonight you and Beverly may reach the goal you both have been working for.”

“If only I don’t blow up my lines,” Shirley groaned.

Lenora emerged from the bedroom at that point.

“It is bad enough to live with an actress, but to have the playwright on our hands, too—” she sighed. “I shall be a nervous wreck.”

“What’s wrong?” Lois laughed.

“Beverly is convinced she should never have written a play, that no one could possibly like it——”

“Last-minute nerves,” Shirley smiled. “We all have them.”

Shirley went early, but the other girls waited until the very last minute before they departed for the theater. Beverly was sitting in the audience, too, rather than backstage. She felt Shirley might be less nervous if the author was not at her elbow every minute. From now on, it was Shirley’s show.

The first act went off well. It was the story of a modern Joan of Arc. Her motives for good misunderstood and distorted, her plans thwarted, she nevertheless carried on and brought happiness to those she loved. Perhaps her intimate knowledge of Beverly, her dreams and plans, and the idea behind the play, helped Shirley. At any rate she *was* the girl in the play. For two and a half hours she was another person—the girl Beverly had created—and she made the character live for the audience.

In the darkness during the third act Beverly slipped her hand into Larry’s:

“Let’s get out of here.”

He rose and followed her up the aisle.

“Don’t you want to wait for the end?”

“I can’t sit still another minute,” Beverly replied.

“Would you like to ride in the park?”

“Anything!” she sighed.

They hired a hansom cab and rode around the park for over an hour, not speaking, Beverly’s head on Larry’s shoulder, their hands locked on the robe across their knees. The clop, clop of the horse’s hoofs was the only sound.

Later they walked in the cold darkness, emerging at last onto Fifth Avenue. Larry looked at his watch and smiled.

“It has been over for hours, Beverly.”

“I suppose we should go home,” she murmured.

They walked back slowly through the city streets, emptying now of the throngs, past darkened deserted stores and theaters.

“You know,” Larry laughed, “I believe I am as nervous as you are. I so much want it to be a success for you.”

“If you knew how my knees shake when I even think of the critics’ notices—” Beverly shook her head. “Deep down inside of me I am petrified. Shirley was good, wasn’t she?”

“Yes, indeed!” Larry nodded. “She is always good. Why didn’t she ever go back to Hollywood?”

“She likes the theater more—the lights and the people and the sound of the audiences. At least that is what she told me.”

“There is a light in the apartment,” Larry reported, looking up at the brownstone building. “The girls are waiting for you.”

“Come up with me,” Beverly said, clasping his hand. “I’m still scared.”

“Like going to the dentist,” he grinned.

When Beverly hesitantly opened the door of the apartment, all she saw at first glance was a sea of newspapers. As the papers moved she perceived her friends behind them, and one glance at their faces told her all she wanted to know.

“You did it, Bev!” Lois cried.

“We bought every newspaper in town,” Lenora added. “The critics all say it is good.”

“Your future will be rosy from now on,” Lois declared.

It was a pleasant prediction that everyone hoped would come true, but in “Beverly Gray’s Adventure” we will find the Alpha Delta girls involved in more strange and surprising events.

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Beverly Gray's Problem* by Clarissa Mabel Blank (as Clair Blank)]