

FOUR GIRLS
and a RADIO

Betty Baxter Anderson

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and a
RADIO

A CAREER STORY FOR OLDER GIRLS

By

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Illustrated

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FOUR GIRLS AND A RADIO

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THE WHITE-HAIRED WOMAN LOOKED UP WITH A SMILE.
"WON'T YOU SIT DOWN, PLEASE?"

"Four Girls and a Radio"

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NO ROOM

IT WAS characteristic of Gayle Warren to look cool and fresh and assured, in spite of the melting heat of the August afternoon and the series of disappointments of the day.

Her lovely head of coppery curls was held high, her white pumps clicked briskly on the sidewalk of First Avenue. She sighed a little, as she glimpsed Susan and Linda Swift waiting outside Wiggins Drug Store. Why hadn't the idiots gone inside, where it was air-conditioned? So silly to wait in the bright sunlight. . . .

She waved, jauntily. "Any luck?"

The Swifts, drooping, didn't even answer. They just shook their heads dispiritedly.

"Why didn't you go in where it's cool? If you're as weary and warm as I am, you're ready for a soft chair and a cool soda!"

Susan, the taller of the sisters, managed a grin. "Maybe you can wave a magic wand. All River City has had the same idea. There's a line of about forty people waiting for a chance to sit down in there."

"Oh, golly!" Gayle's exclamation was a wail. "Well, let's draw straws to see who waits here to buy us sodas—and the other two will trot across the street to Mallory Park to sit in the shade. I'm exhausted and I've been waiting all summer for one of Wiggins giant chocolate sodas—"

Linda Swift chuckled. "I'll volunteer to stay. I'm always unlucky." She grinned impishly at her sister. "And you don't have to remind me again that the young should serve their elders. Scoot, both of you!"

Susan and Gayle crossed the street and found a park bench under a giant elm, facing the Mississippi. A chunky little tug boat pushed its brood of oil barges upstream, past the Mallory Mansion on the cliff.

"Whew!" Susan exclaimed luxuriously, as she tossed her broad-brimmed straw hat to the grass at

her feet. "I couldn't walk three more steps at this moment."

"Drat that Hitler!" Gayle exploded. "River City was really such a peaceful, quiet place until the shell-loading plant was built. Out of my list of twelve small apartments and light-housekeeping rooms, ten were rented by the time I got there. And the other two were just dark, dismal holes."

"Practically my same experience," Susan agreed. "But what do you say we don't discuss our troubles until Linda gets here with those sodas? I may be able to take a more cheerful view of the whole business."

Gayle nodded, and the two friends sat in a companionable silence for fifteen minutes. Linda appeared then, carefully juggling her white purse and three large cartons, three straws, three flat wooden spoons, and three paper napkins. "Here we are," she greeted them cheerfully. "You each owe me two bits. I blew ourselves to an extra scoop of ice cream each."

Gayle closed her eyes ecstatically when she took the long, first sip. "Umm . . ." she murmured.

"This tastes just as marvelous as I imagined it would, these last three months. . . ."

"I feel better." Susan tucked her napkin, straw and little spoon in the empty carton, and pressed the lid back on.

Gayle chuckled. "There's no president. This strictly non-profit corporation has no officers—only three equal partners."

"Would you mind putting that in writing?" Linda asked. "There may be times, in the coming months of the school year, when I may wish to remind my sister of that important fact."

"Quiet, small fry." Susan opened her purse and took out a typed list, with pencilled remarks scribbled on the margin. "I'll make my report first. Of the eleven addresses I investigated, eight had been rented. Two of the remaining were too small. We couldn't possibly crowd a single bed in with the double bed in the bedrooms. And our dream of a two-bedroom apartment is just that—a vague, rosy, impossible dream. The last one is twelve blocks from school; it's large enough and in a nice home. There's a huge bedroom with two double

beds; a small sitting room with a pullman kitchen at one end, concealed with a snappy Venetian blind-arrangement. But here's the catch—sixty dollars a month!”

Gayle said quietly, “That’s out. Our absolute maximum is fifteen each—and that will be tough.” She turned to Linda. “I’ve already told Susan that ten of the twelve places I went, had been rented. The other two were tiny, gloomy holes. What luck did you have?”

The irrepressible Linda giggled suddenly. “The only thing that sustained me during this horrible day was the hope that *I* might be the one to bring back the winning address, consequently putting you two superior seniors in the proper respectful attitude for the year. But no sale. I saw one place, but it doesn’t compare with Susan’s find. The bedroom is small, but there is a davenport-bed in the sitting room. And it is sixty-five dollars a month!”

“I did think of one possibility,” Gayle offered doubtfully. “On my way back to meet you, I passed an empty filling station with a ‘For Rent’ sign in the window. It’s weed-grown outside and

the windows were so dirty I could scarcely see inside. It would take a terrific amount of work to make it livable; we'd have to scare up furniture, curtains and a stove somewhere. It would be crowded, too, but it does have plumbing. . . ." her voice trailed off, hopelessly.

Susan and Linda received the suggestion without enthusiasm. "School starts next week," Susan objected. "It would be quite a job to get it ready."

"Even if we could rent it," Linda added, "there probably are city ordinances about living in a commercial spot, or something. It would be an awful nuisance to have to explain to motorists all day and half the night that we weren't selling oil and gas!"

"Well, it's only an idea," Gayle said wearily. "I'd rather live in an old, broken-down oil station than not get to finish high school this year. And that's the choice, my friends."

They sat in discouraged silence for a long moment. The setting sun was reflected in the numerous windows of the Mallory Mansion, on the lovely landscape hill overlooking the park and the river. Gayle stared at the magnificent home half-angrily.

"It just isn't right," she burst out, at last, "that one old woman should live in all that comfortable splendor up on the hill, when three students can't even find a single room."

Linda, impulsively, leaped to her feet. "You're right, Gayle. Absolutely right. I'm going up and tackle the old dowager. I'm going to ask her to rent us a room or two for the school year. Coming with?"

Her sister stared at her with open astonishment. "Linda! You wouldn't dare!"

The dark-haired girl looked down at the others. "I would dare. I'm going to. You can come with me or not, as you choose."

Gayle, unexpectedly, began to laugh. "I'm with you, Linda. What can we lose? Besides, I've always longed to see the inside of that palace."

Susan followed the other two more slowly, gathering up the empty soda cartons and putting them in a wire basket near by. She caught up with her sister and Gayle. "Look, girls. Fun's fun, but this is wild, really."

But Linda's eyes were sparkling, her attractive

face animated under the fringe of curly black bangs.

Gayle's brown eyes were bright with excitement, too. "This has to work!" she thought. "We have to find a place to live in River City!"

The Warren and Swift farm homes were fifteen miles away and the school buses for their section of the county were a war casualty. This discouraging day of apartment-hunting was the climax of an upsetting week. It had just been seven days ago that the girls had learned that transportation to the big high school in River City would not be available for another year.

Gayle Warren and Linda and Susan Swift were the only students in their district affected by the change. Their parents, after frenzied consultations, had decided to give each girl thirty dollars a month, which was to pay for living quarters and such food as couldn't be provided from the home kitchens.

Since May, however, River City had become a boom town. Part of the enormous shell-loading plant was already in production, the rest of it was being built in feverish haste.

The girls had been sure, even though they realized the little city was crowded, that they could find a small apartment or "light house-keeping rooms" for a maximum of forty-five dollars.

The day had been one of bitter disappointment for all three.

"You know," Susan said thoughtfully, as they entered the stone gate to the grounds of the Mal-lory Mansion, "I didn't honestly give up hope until we couldn't get in Wiggins Drug Store this afternoon. I was sure that I just had a bad list and that you two had chosen all the gems from the places advertised in the paper. But last year, even when the whole school seemed to go down to Wiggins in a body, there was always room to squeeze in."

"That's the way I felt, too," Gayle agreed. "Even though I had read that the population of the town had almost doubled—"

"School will be crowded, too," Linda said. "There'll be loads of new ones."

"This is a *beautiful* place!" Gayle exclaimed. The flagstone steps mounted the smooth, velvety lawn in a graceful curve. "It's just sheer wishful

thinking to imagine that we could possibly live here—”

Linda giggled. “Oh, I don’t know! Perhaps under that crusty exterior there beats a heart of pure gold.”

“I saw her once,” Susan said thoughtfully. “She’s really a dumpy little old lady, but she has an air—”

“She came to the Minneapolis Symphony Concert we had at school a couple of years ago,” Gayle added. “She returned from Florida earlier than usual that spring, and condescended to attend. She swished up in a huge black limousine. It was the only time in my life I’ve ever seen a chauffeur in uniform. She got out, dripping sables and jewels, and smiling and nodding at Mr. Sinclair and the Showers and all the local notables. It was really quite an act. I felt like asking for her autograph—”

“You still can’t scare me out,” Linda declared stoutly. “I’m just thinking—‘it’s this or no school.’”

The girls were quiet now as they reached the

wide stone steps leading to the enormous entrance.

Resolutely, Linda lifted and dropped the huge knocker. Gayle, with an effort, refrained from putting her hands over her ears. Goodness, what a clanging!

Almost at once the huge door swung open. A slightly-bald, middle-aged man, erect in his white coat, admitted them.

Linda gave him one of her most winning smiles and said, "Would it be possible for us to see Mrs. Mallory?"

The man was imperturbable. "What name shall I give, Miss?"

"Miss Warren and the Misses Swift," Linda replied coolly.

"Won't you please sit down?" He indicated chairs to the right of the huge door. "Mrs. Mallory is in the garden. Just a moment, please."

He bowed and disappeared through an arched doorway at the rear of the hall. The girls watched as he went down a few steps and out to the terrace. Beyond was the garden and the Mississippi.

Gayle glanced about appreciatively. The en-

trance hall was an overwhelming chamber. The lofty walls were of gleaming, highly-polished walnut. There were a half-dozen portraits in oils centering the panels, each with an individual light above. Other portraits flanked the huge window at the landing of the stairs. The floor was carpeted in a rich Burgundy, almost hidden by numerous Orientals. The furniture was dark, heavy, massive.

Gayle giggled, suddenly. "Can't you see us tripping in the front door, dropping galoshes and notebooks?"

"Hush!" Susan whispered. "He's coming back."

They watched silently as the butler returned. "Mrs. Mallory will see you in the garden. This way, please."

Gayle almost gasped. She had been so sure that the mysterious and remote Mrs. Mallory would refuse to see them—

The girls followed the tall man as he retraced his steps unhurriedly.

The terrace seemed dazzlingly bright in the glare of the setting sun, after the cool, gloomy darkness of the hall.

Mrs. Mallory was seated near a shady pool, knitting. She didn't look up from her work until the butler announced, "Miss Warren and the Misses Swift, Mrs. Mallory."

Gayle was reminded of pictures she had seen of Queen Mary of England. The white-haired woman looked up with a slight smile. "Won't you sit down, please?"

Susan and Gayle chose a settee; Linda a chair which was a bit closer to Mrs. Mallory. Linda leaned forward a little and began. "Mrs. Mallory, we've come to ask you a tremendous favor—"

Unexpectedly, the older woman chuckled. "My dear, I've heard hundreds of conversations that began in that manner."

Gayle held her breath. Linda was so impulsive! But Linda took the rebuff good-humoredly. "I've no doubt of that, Mrs. Mallory. But for sheer, outright boldness, I'll bet our request tops them all."

"Linda!" Susan gasped.

The dark-haired minx grinned at the two girls on the settee. "Well, it's true." She turned again to Mrs. Mallory. "You see, Gayle Warren, my

sister and I live fifteen miles from River City, but the nearest high school is here. Until now, we've commuted by school bus. This year, it is a war casualty—the bus is needed to transport war workers to the shell-loading plant.

“Gayle and Susan will be seniors this year and I'll be a junior. Our parents are giving us a monthly allowance, and we came to River City this morning to find an apartment or housekeeping rooms for the three of us. We're exhausted, Mrs. Mallory. We have combed the town, literally, and found nothing.” Linda's manner was at its most charming, now, and her smile would have won a Supreme Court decision. “You must realize now, Mrs. Mallory, why I claimed that our request is probably the boldest ever presented to you. We want to rent a room in your house for the school year. It's the only place in town that isn't crowded.”

REFUGEE'S LETTER

"YOU'RE QUITE right!" Mrs. Mallory managed to gasp. "That is quite the most outrageous demand I've ever heard!"

"We shouldn't have considered it for a moment," Gayle interposed, "if we weren't desperate. Mrs. Mallory, we've spent the day searching. We have looked at more than thirty places, and at least twenty-five were rented before we had a chance. The others are all too small and much too expensive."

It was Susan, now, who was daring. She was almost giggling as she broke in. "Yes, Linda should have explained to you that our absolute maximum for rent is fifteen dollars each. That is, forty-five dollars a month for the three of us. . . ."

Gayle rose, resolutely. "Come, Susan and Linda. We'll find out about that empty filling station. It will have to be that, or no school—" She had tried

to keep her voice level, but it trailed off, painfully.

There was a strange expression on the older woman's face. The anger had gone from her tones when she said, "You youngsters make me feel a little sheepish. But my husband and I worked hard in our youth to build a fortune and this home—for the privacy and comfort of our old age. I have enjoyed my privileges for too long, I fear. I am simply horrified at the idea of having my quiet way of life upset by three young—young—"

"Hoodlums?" Linda supplied, her eyes twinkling again. "I am, perhaps, but Susan and Gayle are really quite adult and respectable."

It was at that moment that Gayle caught a glimpse, through the trees, of the gabled roof of the large garage. "Mrs. Mallory!" she blurted. "Who lives upstairs in your garage?"

"No one." The white-haired woman looked a little startled. "It hasn't been used as living quarters since Mr. Mallory was alive and we still had horses. The trainer and stable boys used it, I believe." She sighed, then. "That has been all of thirty years ago—"

REFUGEE'S LETTER

"Could we rent it? The living quarters, I mean?"
Gayle insisted.

"My dear children! Of course you couldn't. It probably is horribly dirty. I'll be leaving by late October for my home in Florida and it will be necessary to close my home here this year. This miserable war! I have only a skeleton staff of servants now, and it is necessary to take the remaining ones with me. . . ."

Gayle stiffened, angry now. Miserable war, indeed! This wealthy old woman, so untouched, so unaware. She turned to Linda. "Susan and I are grateful to you for your courage. But it was really quite a hopeless errand. Let's make inquiries about that filling station. Surely, we won't disturb anyone there, if we can get it. . . ."

She marched away, blindly. She was dimly aware of the white-coated figure of the butler, hovering in the background.

Linda and Susan, after murmuring farewells, followed Gayle.

Mrs. Mallory acknowledged the girls' remarks with a stiff little nod. But she watched Gayle's

squared shoulders and erect carriage with grudging admiration. That girl had spunk! She watched until Benton had bowed them through the door. Then she reached for her knitting again. Her fingers were trembling . . . really, it had been a shattering experience!

The three girls were suddenly in a rush to get away. There was no sauntering as they crossed the great hall, no loitering to admire the pictures and rugs. Gayle almost overtook the butler in her rush.

But at the door the man paused a moment. His manner was diffident, almost pleading. "I overheard your conversation with Mrs. Mallory," he murmured. "Please do nothing further about—about your plans, until I can talk with you. I could get away for a few minutes at six o'clock. Would you girls please meet me in Mallory Park, at the far entrance, at that time?"

Gayle was startled. "You mean—you're planning to intercede for us? Please don't." She was really in a seething fury. "I'm sure we wouldn't care to live here if—if Mrs. Mallory would send us an engraved invitation!"

REFUGEE'S LETTER

"I have to go back now," the butler said, his whispering tones urgent. "But believe me, you won't regret it if you will withhold your decision for another hour."

Gayle hesitated only a moment. She was puzzled by the imperturbable expression of the man's face, belying his pleading tones. "Very well," she agreed slowly. "We'll meet you at six, at the far entrance of the park."

None of the three girls said a word until they had retraced their steps down the hill. Outside the gate, Linda exploded. "Well! That was an adventure. Sorry it turned out so badly, my friends. I'll try to quell any such impulses in the future—"

"What in the world do you suppose that Benton—wasn't that what she called the butler?—wants with us?" Gayle demanded. "He has such a completely expressionless face that I could scarcely believe that that plaintive voice I heard was coming from him!"

"Maybe we've stumbled on a dark, deep mystery," Susan offered. "Perhaps it is underneath his crusty exterior that there beats a heart of gold—"

“Solid ice would be more like it,” Linda interrupted. “No, whatever he has to suggest, it will be for the benefit of Benton.”

“He sounded so doggoned anxious,” Gayle said. She shrugged her shoulders. “Well, I am glad that we have an hour to rest before we find out. Let’s find a comfortable spot and relax.”

All three were weary and discouraged, and there was little conversation during the time they waited.

Promptly at six, the bald-headed man appeared at the park entrance. He approached the girls, who were sitting on a bench near by. He looked oddly different, now, in his neat dark Palm Beach suit and straw hat. He seemed alert and more confident. He was smiling.

He sat down, after removing his hat, on a bench facing them. “I regret that I couldn’t take the time from my duties when you were at Mallory House, to present this plan,” he began. “Thank you very much for waiting.”

He mopped the perspiration from his gleaming bald head with a fresh linen handkerchief, and then produced a letter from an inner coat pocket. “I

REFUGEE'S LETTER

shall read Miss Travis' letter and then you will understand my—uh—unusual behavior. First, I should explain, that I was formerly in service in London at the home of Miss Travis' parents. She was a charming child of five when I last saw her."

"Who is Miss Travis?" Linda voiced the question that all three were burning to ask.

"She is an English refugee in this country," the man answered. "She left London almost two years ago, September of 1940."

Gayle nodded. "During the blitz."

The girls could see the air mail and special delivery stamps on the dainty white envelope. Deliberately Benton drew out the folded sheets inside and read—

"Old Colony Inn

"Bell Landing, Maine

"August 20, 1942

"My dear Benton,

First of all, I want to tell you how grateful I've been during these eventful two years for your friendly letters. They have formed a definite link between my carefree childhood and the more excit-

ing—and trying—days of being a ‘friendly alien.’”

He looked up from the pages swiftly. “She isn’t complaining,” he said hastily. “The ‘friendly alien’ phrase is in quotation marks.”

Never had there been a more receptive audience. The three girls were unconsciously leaning forward, listening carefully to every word.

He went on. “Now, however, I am asking you to become a literal Rock of Gibraltar. I must make a decision within the next week and my problem is a serious one. As you know, the Stewarts couldn’t have been more kind to a daughter of their own than they have been to me. But Joseph applied several months ago for a commission as Lieutenant Commander in Naval Intelligence. He has just been accepted and will leave this week-end for duty in Boston. Adeline is assuming their joint editorship of the *Home Review*. She has been working this past year at a terrific pace and I really don’t see how she can handle the entire responsibility—but she’s courageous enough to try.

“You can appreciate my problem. She’s giving up their home in Forest Lake and taking an apart-

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ment in Philadelphia for the winter, so she won't have to waste time in commuting. She is the soul of hospitality, of course, and insists that I continue to make my home with her. But I know that my being a part of her household is an additional complication.

"I've tried all summer to convince Mother and Father that I want to come home and do my part toward Victory at once, but they do so want me to finish prep school here. They have given me a solemn vow that I may do as I wish, as soon as I have my 'high school' diploma, as they call it in this country. Frankly, I take a dim view of this, but I have agreed.

"Now, Benton, this is what I should like to know. If it is impossible, I am sure you will be honest enough to say so. I should like to come to River City and go to the local high school. Do you suppose you could find a room for me with some respectable family? I should promise to be a quiet, obedient student, and you could check on my welfare frequently enough to reassure my parents.

"Adeline will understand, I'm sure, and even be

a little grateful to me for clearing out. And I have the purely selfish wish to see a little more of this vast country—as long as the parents wish me to stay here for another year.

“Do wire me, if it is all right to come, and I’ll try to get there for the opening of school. We’re leaving here for Forest Lake today and Adeline will close the house next week, after Joseph goes to Boston.

“Oh, Benton—do say yes!

“Gratefully,

“Rosemary Travis”

The man folded the letter carefully and re-inserted it in the envelope before he looked up.

Gayle grinned. “The poor girl does have a problem, doesn’t she?”

Benton then took out a slim leather folder. “She sent me her picture, last Christmas.” There was an air of pride as he handed it to Linda, sitting nearest.

“Oh, she’s lovely!” Gayle exclaimed.

“What beautiful hair—blonde braids!” Susan added. She chuckled, then. “That’s what we

need. Linda's black hair, Gayle's red—I mean copper!—and my brown.”

Benton coughed. “That is what I wished to speak with you about. I heard you ask Mrs. Mallory about the living quarters over the garage. The chambers there are spacious. They have been un-lived in for a number of years and would need a bit of freshening. I quite realize that if you three, who have attended school in River City for a number of years, are unable to find rooms that it would be a hopeless task for me to try to find them for Miss Rosemary.”

“But—look!” Gayle exploded. “You heard Mrs. Mallory say that it was out of the question!”

“I believe I can persuade her to change her mind,” the man continued, “if you three girls will agree to look after Miss Rosemary.”

“Gosh!” Linda said. “Do you honestly think you can get the place for us? By—by hypnotism?”

He smiled at that. “No, I shall simply tell Mrs. Mallory that I have a duty and a responsibility here in River City this winter. And that if I can leave Miss Rosemary in your care, I will consider going

to Florida with her again this season. Otherwise, I shall remain here, get a position at the shell-loading plant, and look after the girl." He coughed, modestly. "I have been in service for Mrs. Mallory for the last twelve years, since coming to this country. During this year she has lost half her staff. I believe it will be rather a powerful argument in persuading her to let the four of you make your home in her apartment over the garage this winter."

WORTH'S OFFER

A BIT impatiently, Gayle went through her share of the farm chores the next morning. She milked a half dozen cows before breakfast; helped her mother serve the generous meal of berries, oatmeal, bacon and eggs; and manufactured duties that kept her close to the telephone.

It was agreed that Benton was to call Gayle as soon as he'd had his talk with Mrs. Mallory. The other girls would answer, too, when they heard the Warren ring of two longs and a short on the country telephone line.

At nine o'clock, the expected signal sounded. Gayle flew to answer.

"Miss Warren?" Benton's tone was non-committal.

"Yes!" Gayle had heard the clicks of at least three telephone receivers being removed.

"Would it be possible for you and the Misses Swift to come in this afternoon to view the apartment? Mrs. Mallory has agreed to our plan and I am to handle the arrangements."

"Oh, that's marvelous! Thank you. Of course, we'll be in. At two o'clock?"

"That hour will serve nicely. Good-by."

Gayle didn't hang up. She waited a split-second and then said, "Linda and Susan! Did you hear?"

"I did," Linda replied. "Susan's gone down to the gate to get the mail. Gosh, what a break for us!"

"Isn't it? I'll see if Uncle Dick will loan us his car and I'll pick you up a little after one. If not, I'll call you back."

"Fine. We'll be ready."

Gayle raced to the kitchen and hugged her slim, erect mother excitedly. Mrs. Warren must have looked very like Gayle in her own youth; she was still attractive, with a bright blue ribbon holding back her gray-flecked copper curls. "You got Mrs. Mallory's apartment!" she said.

"That's right. We're to see it this afternoon.

I'm going to run down to the east forty to ask Uncle Dick if we may borrow his car. He and Dad are cutting oats there this morning, aren't they?"

"Yes. Bring a jug from the pantry, Gayle, and I'll fill it with this fresh, cool buttermilk. I expect they're both warm and thirsty, by now."

Gayle grinned. "We call it buttering 'em up, mother. A subtle form of blackmail. I've just had an expert lesson in the art from Mrs. Mallory's butler. You see, if Uncle Dick says no, I'll not give him any buttermilk—"

"Gayle! I had no such idea! And what a way to talk. Uncle Dick has never refused you a favor since you were old enough to coax. What do you mean about Mrs. Mallory's butler?"

"I didn't want to tell you too much about it, for fear we'd both have our hopes too high," Gayle explained. "But Benton—that's the British butler—used to work for a family named Travis in London. A daughter, Rosemary, has been in this country two years as a refugee. She has a year of high school to finish and she wants Benton to arrange it so she can come to River City to live. He offered

to 'persuade' Mrs. Mallory to let us have the apartment, if we'd look after Miss Travis for him. The polite blackmail came in his method. He told Mrs. Mallory he'd take a job in the shell-loading plant, if she didn't let us have the apartment!"

"Gayle!" Mrs. Warren was shocked, but a moment later she smiled a little. "It seems a questionable method, but it appears the lesser of two evils. It would have been more wicked and selfish of Mrs. Mallory *not* to let you have the apartment." She looked at her daughter intently, over the crock of buttermilk. "But, Gayle—I want you to promise that you will do nothing to make Mrs. Mallory regret her decision."

It was Gayle's turn to look startled. "Why, Mother! That goes without saying!"

"Thank you, sweet. Now run along."

Mrs. Warren watched a moment as her daughter swung down the lane, jauntily swinging the jug, and whistling gaily. She had tied a straw hat over her curls with a blue scarf, which matched the blue of her denim slacks and jacket. She sighed a little,

thinking of how quiet it would be soon, when Gayle went off to school.

Gayle helped her mother with the dishes after lunch, and then dressed quickly in a white dotted Swiss frock. It was hot, now, and she pushed her curls high and fastened them with a pair of combs, disguised with white ribbon bows.

Susan and Linda were ready when Gayle drove into the Swift's graveled driveway. They were waiting on the neat screened porch.

"We look like a girls' trio, ready to burst into 'The Three Little Sisters!'" Linda exclaimed. She and Susan were wearing white, also. Linda was in a white linen suit, and Susan wore a white pique shirtwaist dress.

"It's an idea!" Gayle exclaimed. She led off the tune in her rich contralto, and the other two joined in harmony. They sang all the way to River City.

Promptly at two o'clock, Gayle turned her Uncle Dick's sedan into the wide curving drive of Mallory House, under the porte-cochere to the concrete parking space in front of the large garage.

"Gosh, do you suppose she actually owns six cars?" Linda asked, pointing to the half-dozen doors.

"Perhaps only four," Gayle suggested, grinning. "She'd have to have a couple, in case of guests."

Benton appeared then, coming out of a smaller door at the extreme right of the building. His white coat was wilted, and he was mopping his brow with a fresh white handkerchief. "He must have an unlimited supply of hankies," Linda whispered, as they got out of the car. "Every time I see him, he's using one to wipe his baldness."

"Sh—he'll hear you," Susan threatened.

"I've just gone up and opened the windows," Benton announced. "It's a bit musty and warm, I'm afraid."

"May we see it now?" Gayle asked eagerly.

"This way, please."

A small window, half-way up the stairs on a landing, illuminated the stairs. It was easy to trace Benton's footprints on the dusty wood. Benton sneezed, apologetically. "Mrs. Mallory has granted

permission for me to bring a few things from the attic of Mallory House," he told them. "I'm quite sure I can obtain a carpet for the stairs."

"Wouldn't you know all three of us would be wearing white?" Linda mused. "We should have had sense enough to bring some work clothes, so we could dig into this."

"I am afraid you girls will have to do most of the preparation of the apartment. I will do what I can, of course. But it will have to be in my free time. I think I explained to you that Mrs. Mallory is decidedly understaffed, at present."

A long hall passed several rooms, but the girls could see beyond an arched doorway into a large living room, with a high, beamed ceiling. A moment later they were standing in the center of the space. High above them was a quaint, glassed-in "look-out." "We'll hang one lantern there," Linda quipped. "We know the British are coming—one if by land and two if by sea."

Benton looked puzzled as the other two girls giggled. "Just overlook it," Susan said hastily to

the man. "It's a practically forgotten incident of American history, at the time of Paul Revere, when our two countries weren't such good friends."

"I see," Benton murmured vaguely. He crossed to the opposite side of the room and pulled the cords on an enormous pair of drapes. With the curtain open, the girls could see beyond into another, slightly smaller room. "There are roll-away beds behind those low doors," Benton explained, pointing to double doors to the right and left of the room. "It's really quite a clever arrangement. The tops of these bookshelves can serve as individual dressing tables. I noticed several mirrors in the store room and I'll bring as many as you require."

Gayle crossed the room and opened the low door. A three-quarter sized bed, on rollers, filled the space. She tugged on the metal footboard, and it moved smoothly out into the room. It was equipped with springs and mattress, but the mattress-cover was dusty. "Whew!" she exclaimed. "This is going to require airing and cleaning before it's ready for use."

"It's odd that it should be so dark—and sort of

gloomy—up here,” Susan remarked, “when there seem to be so many large windows.”

“It’s the color of the walls,” Gayle explained. “It’s unfortunate that such a dark green was chosen. This would really be attractive if all the walls were ivory or peach or yellow.”

“I thought about that,” Benton said. “If you girls are willing to do the work, I’ll furnish all the paint you need. I understand that new water paint is easy to use.”

“It is,” Gayle said. “I painted right over the wall-paper on my bedroom at home. It dries right away and isn’t at all unpleasant to smell—”

“The woodwork will have to be done with oil paint,” the man said, “and I’ll be glad to do it, right away. Would you prefer ivory or white?”

“White,” Linda replied at once. “White woodwork and peach walls. Doesn’t that sound yummy?”

“You go too fast, little sister!” Susan objected. “Perhaps Gayle would prefer some other color scheme.”

Gayle chuckled. “Sounds fine. I think any

light color would be a marvelous improvement.”

“I’ll get the paint and begin this afternoon. It’s one of my half days off,” Benton promised. “Now, would you like to see the rest of it?”

The girls nodded, and he led them to one of the doors that opened from the long, narrow hall. The nearest one entered into the compact little kitchen. There was an old-fashioned ice-box on the right, beyond which were cupboards well stocked with dishes and glasses. A small gas stove on the left, and a sink and work tables were under a small window at the end.

“You may have noticed the built-in table and benches at the front casement window,” Benton said. He pointed to a shelf between the ice-box and sink. “This is really quite a handy arrangement. A panel of the wall in the living room swings in, and the food can be served directly to the table. Soiled dishes can be returned to the kitchen in the same manner.”

“That is a slick idea,” Linda declared. “I have a distinct foreboding in my bones that it will mean most to me. Something warns me that I shall prob-

ably be on kitchen duty most of the time for the next nine months.”

“The bath is the next room to the right,” Benton pointed out. “The plumbing is old, but it seems to work properly. There is adequate closet space, too, for bathroom linens.”

Then he led the way across the hall to another room. It was a sleeping chamber, with two large closets and twin beds. “You see, the apartment is easily large enough to accommodate four girls. The ones who choose this will have to share a study desk, but the ones who live in the other bedroom, off the living room, will have room for two desks.”

Benton then led the way back to the living room. It had cooled off a little, for a pleasant breeze was coming from the river, which the girls could see from the casement window over the dining nook. “Now, there’s too much furniture in here. It makes the place look cluttered. If you will tell me which pieces you wish to remain, I’ll have the others removed.”

For the next half hour, the girls argued the merits and functions of each piece of the massive, dark

furniture; obviously all discarded from Mallory House long since. They chose to keep four of the smaller tables, two sofas and eight of the less unattractive chairs. Then Benton pointed out a heap of vari-colored materials in one corner. "I brought all these used slip-covers from the store room. They'll need rather a lot of renovating, but I thought perhaps you girls might like to use some of the cloth to fashion new slip-covers."

"That will be my project," Susan offered quickly. "I'll take them home with me, today, if you all agree. Then I can rip them up, launder them and have them ready to cut over the next time we come back."

"We'll have to come back and start work tomorrow," Gayle said. "This is Tuesday. That gives us four days to make the spot livable."

"I'll do all I can to help. I should like to have the place as nearly finished as possible by Sunday," Benton replied. He smiled. "I sent Miss Travis a night letter last night, and received the reply this morning. She will arrive Sunday evening."

Gayle gathered up an armful of the old slip-covers. "Let's each take a load to the car," she suggested. "Oh, yes—" She turned again to the butler. "Since you're handling the arrangements with Mrs. Mallory, how much rent are we to pay?"

"Ten dollars each per month," the man answered. "I thought I had told you. Of course, Miss Travis will pay her share of the rent and food. Mrs. Mallory will furnish light, heat, gas and water."

Gayle's face was radiant, above the bundle of materials. "Oh, that's generous of her! Thank you so much."

Linda grinned impishly. "Sometime when she is in a mellow mood, you might mention to her that we're extremely grateful."

The back seat of the sedan was piled high with the slip-covers. "Let's don't try Wiggins Drug Store, again," Linda said, "but if you'll stop at that root beer stand at the edge of town, just as we go on the highway, I'll treat you all to a root-beer float."

"It's a bargain," Gayle agreed. "Oh, gee, but

I think we're lucky. It's going to take a tremendous amount of work, but it will be a pleasant and comfortable place to live this winter."

"If we can just stay out of Mrs. Mallory's hair," the irrepressible Linda added. "I figured out a way that we can disappear from the grounds early in the morning, cutting toward school the back way. She may forget for days at a time that she has permanent trespassers."

Susan shook her head. "Something tells me that Miss Travis wouldn't take to skulking across back lots. Besides, we'll be paying rent. Reasonable as it is, however, we shall have no reason to sneak."

Gayle drove into the parking lot surrounding the orange-and-black root beer stand. A waitress appeared promptly to take their orders. When she'd turned away, Linda chuckled. "I suppose you're just going to pretend that it was accidental to park in this particular place? I seem to recall something vaguely familiar about that blue roadster, two cars to our left.

Gayle could feel the color mounting in her face. "Worth? Is Worth Collins here?"

Linda nodded. "He's just seen us. He's with Bill Rogers and they're on their way over."

Susan turned to smile at the approaching boys. Goodness, but Worth was tanned! And he looked even taller—and more handsome—than he had a couple of weeks ago—

"I thought you were hard at work these days," she greeted the boys.

"Just quit yesterday," Worth answered. "I thought I might drive out to see you this evening to break the good news. Dad and Mother decided that I'd been such a good laborer all summer that I might take a few days off, before school starts." He leaned against the car door at Gayle's side, and greeted the other girls. "What's all this in the back seat? Going to a rummage sale?"

Bill Rogers ambled on around the car and grinned at Susan. "Sorry you can't ask us in to sit down. You seem to be a little crowded."

"That's right," Linda spoke up. "You haven't heard the big news. We're adopting an English refugee and moving to Mallory House for the winter."

"Aw, go on!" Bill was frankly unconvinced.

"What's the story?" Worth demanded of Gayle.

"Well, Linda's exaggerating slightly. I think it would be more exact to say that an English refugee is adopting us. It's a long story, but a girl from London, named Rosemary Travis, is coming to finish high school in River City. Mrs. Mallory's butler formerly worked for her family in London, and she asked him to make arrangements for her here. He's planned for the four of us to live in the apartment over Mrs. Mallory's garage for the winter."

"You're moving to town?" Worth's quick smile and even teeth were a delight to see. "Yow—ee! That's wonderful." He tore off his battered white cap to toss in the air, to express his pleasure—and whirled into the waitress carrying a tray loaded with three top-heavy floats.

"Look, hey," he said quickly, before she could explode. "You run bring three more, just like the ones I spilled, and I'll pay for the lot of them. I'm feeling generous." And he gave the startled waitress one of his irresistible smiles. He gathered up the empty glasses from the ground before she had

a chance to say anything. A moment later, she was walking back to the stand smiling.

"I'm sorry, girls, that I was so awkward. I hope you're not consumed by thirst before she gets back. Gosh, I think it's swell. What's the apartment like?"

Linda made a face. "It's a touch on the musty and dark side, but if we work very hard, we'll have it all painted and refurnished by Sunday evening, when Rosemary Travis is scheduled to arrive."

"Well, Bill and I aren't doing anything, if you want some expert help."

Bill groaned. "Look here, Collins, how about that fishing expedition tomorrow?"

Worth shook his head and looked sorrowfully at the freckle-faced boy at the other window. "I never thought," he declared, "that you were heel enough to desert damsels in distress."

Gayle chuckled. "It must be the nearness of the Mississippi, but when you two go into your act, I'm always reminded of Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer. And consequently, I am reminded of a Tom Sawyer idea. Why don't you two go fishing

FOUR GIRLS AND A RADIO

tomorrow as planned? Then, Saturday, after Benton—he's the butler—has finished painting the woodwork and we've whipped up new slip covers out of this stuff in the back seat of the car, we'll have an all-day Tom Sawyer party. Benton is getting us some water paint and it is really fun to slap on. With a gang, we could do the whole apartment in one day. How about it?"

"It's a swell idea. I'll ask a mob for you, shall I? And I'll furnish the ice cream!"

TOM SAWYER PARTY

WHEN GAYLE stopped at the Swift home Saturday morning, she stared in amazement as the sisters came out laden with the freshly-laundered slip covers.

“Don’t tell me you’ve finished those!” she cried.

Susan grinned. “Oh, it wasn’t so much of a trick. It took me most of Thursday to pin and fit them, but Linda did yeoman service in ripping and laundering the day before. She helped with the stitching yesterday.”

“Dad said we really should have two sewing machines,” Linda added, “in case one got hot and jammed.”

“I was really disappointed that I couldn’t go to the apartment before, and do some of the preliminary scrubbing and digging,” Gayle declared. “But,

as you know—with threshers all day Thursday and Friday—I was needed at home. But believe it or not, I have two baskets completely full of cold fried chicken and potato salad for our picnic.”

“We’ll run back and get our baskets, now,” Susan said, after carefully placing the completed slip covers in the back seat of the sedan.

“Don’t forget dust cloths and a broom,” Gayle warned. “I’ve a box of scouring powder and soap and a mop in the trunk of the car.”

In ten minutes, the trip to town began. The rear seat was piled high with cleaning equipment and picnic baskets.

“I have a key,” Susan told them, as they arrived at Mallory House. “Benton gave it to me Thursday when I was here. He’s having three more made, so we can each have one.”

The girls had been working for over an hour when Worth arrived.

“Hi, you early birds!” he called in greeting. He took the stairs two at a time, and stopped in amazement at the door of the living room. He looked at the girls in their shabby painting outfits. “This

is a scoop! The worms have eaten the early birds.”

Linda shook a paint brush at him. “Look at the pretty boy!” she said scornfully. “I thought you were going to *help* us!”

Gayle had spread newspapers over the floor, to protect the wood from the spattering of paint. Worth wandered around the apartment, exploring. “This is going to be all right,” he observed, as he approached Gayle’s stepladder. “But do you really think you’re going to finish by tonight?”

“We’ve got to,” she said determinedly. “The worst is over. Benton painted all the woodwork and Susan and Linda have finished the new slip-covers. With lots of good help we should be able to finish painting by mid-afternoon—”

“Or did you invite the other working guests to a tea party?” Linda broke in. “If they’re all coming dressed up pretty as you, we won’t have a chance.”

Worth flashed her an impudent grin. “You won’t give me a speck of credit, will you? I have my painters’ garb, three brushes and two gallons of ice cream in the car. The other cheap help is due at nine o’clock.”

"We could do with more action and less chatter," Linda replied.

Worth shook his head at Susan sadly. "Why didn't the Swift family drop her on her head when she was an infant? Or did they?"

He fled, then. For once, someone had had the last word with Linda. . . .

Bill Rogers arrived next with Lee Hawkins, a slender, tall boy. Both wore old clothes and brandished paint brushes. Lee looked over the painting critically, then offered to mix the batch for the side-walls. "It should be a shade darker than that on the ceiling. Did you use about half-white with that mixture?"

Gayle nodded. "Is it too dark?" Lee was art editor of the *Blue and Grey*, and the prize student of the art department.

"No. This water paint dries a couple of shades lighter," he explained. "I like your choice of colors for this room. Wish it were mine," he went on meditatively. "What a studio this would make . . . good North light. . . ."

"I never," Linda complained bitterly, "saw such

laziness. All the boys stand around conversationally, watching the gals work. Here we're practically through the hardest part—the ceiling—and I have yet to see Hawkins, Rogers or Collins pick up a brush." She paused a moment and wiped her wrist with a paint cloth. "Doggoned stuff insists on running down my arm."

Paulette Showers tripped up the stairs at that moment. She was a vision in a violet-and-white pinafore frock and a violet ribbon in her blonde curls.

"What a love of a place!" she exclaimed in her usual breathlessness. She giggled. "Ooooh! Gayle! You and the Swifts look so-oo funny!"

"Do we?" Gayle answered coolly, but it took a tremendous amount of self-control to keep from dumping the bucket of paint on that dainty loveliness. . . . Why, oh, why had Worth asked her?

Linda paused and looked down. "Good gracious, Paulette! You weren't actually planning to join us, were you? We're all going to slap this paint around, you know."

Paulette was amused. "Oh, Worth said you

were going to paint and scrub, when he invited me. But I volunteered to fix lunch for the more powerful workers. Won't that be helpful?" She fluttered long lashes at Worth, who had carried her baskets up the stairs. "I made some sweet little individual desserts—"

"Oh—oh, there goes my chocolate cake!" Susan groaned. "And it has that gooey white frosting that Bill and Worth like. Worth begged me to bring it, to go with his ice cream."

Paulette frowned. "Oh, dear! I do believe he mentioned that— Oh, well. We can have mine for tea, this afternoon." She looked about. "Perhaps the place can be straightened up by that time."

"Oh, I just thought of something," Linda said. Her eyes twinkled impishly. "I have a smock out in the car, and I'd be glad to loan it to you, Paulette. It might be a little big for you, but it would cover your pretty frock completely while you paint."

"Oh, that's sweet of you!" Paulette cooed. But the look she gave Linda belied the honeyed words. "I'll just wait and see if you need me."

Dorothy Barnes bounced breathlessly up the

stairs. "Golly, kids, I'm sorry I'm late. But I'll work fast to make up for it." She looked eagerly around the large room. "Weren't you lucky to get this place? Mother and Dad just simply wouldn't believe me when I told them about it. What's come over our haughty society leader, anyhow?"

"She just couldn't resist our charms," Linda answered, grinning.

"Well, let me at a brush. I just love to toss that paint around. I've changed my color scheme twice this last year in my room at home, since I discovered what fun it was to use it." She pointed at her paint-splotched denims. "See—it was this pale green first. It's this yellow now."

"I'll give you half my mix," Susan offered. "There's a brush and a kitchen stepladder in the corner. You can work on the sloping part of the ceiling, where it isn't so hard to reach—"

"Thanks." Dorothy looked sturdy and competent as she went to work.

Worth retired to the bedroom, and came out in a stained and patched slack suit. Lee, who had

spread newspapers on the dining nook table for his work, approached Gayle. He held out a flat wooden stick. "How does this shade suit you?"

"It looks a little dark, but it will probably be just right when it dries."

"Okay. I'll mix the rest of it. One bucket is ready."

Worth smiled up at Gayle. "Let us take over the ceiling work now," he suggested, "and you girls can start on the sidewalls."

"I'm willing," Gayle replied. "My arm is getting tired."

"At least, I can steady the ladder for you, Worth," Paulette offered sweetly. "I think you're wonderful to be able to paint ceilings," she added, turning to Gayle. "I'm terrified of ladders."

"It's fairly steady," Gayle replied coolly. "But perhaps Worth will appreciate your help." She was seething inside, but her sense of humor came to her rescue. Paulette wouldn't look so pretty if she stood near the ladder—that paint was bound to drop on her!

It was really amazing how much the seven paint-

ers accomplished by noon. Paulette started unpacking the picnic baskets and preparing the lunch about eleven. Gayle was secretly delighted, when she called from the kitchen, "Worth! These baskets are frightfully heavy! Could you help me with 'em?"

"Get Bill," Worth answered shortly. "I've just got a little corner up here to finish and Bill's closer to the kitchen."

The lunch was fun. Paulette spread a cloth in the center of the big room and placed the heaping platters of chicken, the bowl of potato salad, and plates of sliced tomatoes, rolls and butter in the center. She had brought paper plates and napkins.

"What are we going to do for a hang-out this winter?" Linda demanded, brandishing a drum stick. "We couldn't get inside of Wiggins Drug Store Monday afternoon. Has it been that bad all summer?"

"There just isn't going to be a spot for us," Worth said. "It hasn't been so bad this summer. We could always find part of the gang out at the root-beer stand. But there's quite a lot of talk

about gas-rationing, and then that will be out. Besides, it will close up, toward the last of September.”

Paulette shrugged dainty shoulders. “It really just isn’t any fun to go anywhere. The movies have regular queues of those war workers. They come right from work, in those messy drab outfits. And the stores! It just makes mother and me *ill* to try to shop. We went to Chicago last week, just so I could get a few simple frocks and sweaters and skirts to wear to school.”

“*C’est la Guerre!*” Linda observed with a questionable accent and an air of mock sympathy. “The things one must go through because of that miserable Hitler and that dishonorable Hirohito.”

“School will be crowded, too,” Gayle observed. “There’ll be lots of strangers, in addition to our refugee.”

Paulette looked startled. “Refugee?”

“Didn’t Worth tell you?” Gayle answered. “It’s all we’ve been able to think about.” She told the others, then, about the blonde and lovely English girl who would share the apartment with them.

Paulette, obviously, was not pleased. “It isn’t

enough," she complained, "that we have to put up with all these trailer families. We have to have the overflow from England, too! Clear out here in River City. Dad even thinks it's silly to scatter all these defense plants all over the country. Says it just makes it tougher for the railroads."

"But, Paulette, it was absolutely necessary." Worth looked shocked. "As it is, there's too much concentration of labor in places like Detroit and Pittsburgh."

"Besides, if we had all our plants in two or three spots," Gayle objected, "our enemies would really send over suicide bombing expeditions. And it would be much simpler for the saboteurs."

"Oh, saboteurs!" Paulette was scornful. "All the talk about sabotage is just plain silly. There's much more danger in just simple accidents. It's impossible for a place like the shell-loading plant not to have a few mishaps. It's really amazing that some clumsy worker hasn't set off a few bombs."

"They're pretty careful, I guess. I was talking to a man who works out there," Bill Rogers added, "and he said that there are tremendous piles of

earth between each building. It not only helps to prevent the spreading of fires, but breaks the force of concussion."

"How about the ice cream and cake?" Linda inquired. "I'm ready for dessert, any time now."

"I'll dish it out," Worth said, scrambling to his feet. "Will you cut your cake, Susan?"

"I'll help Paulette with putting the food away," Dorothy offered. "It's grand to have the ice-box all set up. Who was the smart gal who thought of having it filled?"

"Benton, Mrs. Mallory's butler, had the kitchen all ready for us when we got here this morning," Gayle said. "He'd even polished the silverware and washed all the dishes."

"That was sweet of him," Paulette observed. There was eager curiosity in her face. "You girls must be paying a wallop huge rent for all that service and this big apartment."

"It's not too bad," Gayle replied noncommittally. "He really has been quite helpful."

Susan's chocolate cake was a beauty and the dessert was enjoyed to the last morsel. "Now,"

Bill groaned, as he scraped the last bit from his plate, "does anyone mind if I just curl up in some quiet corner for a nap?"

"Indeed we do!" Linda exclaimed. "We still have the bedroom and part of the wall beyond the curtains to finish. Up, up! Sluggards!"

The transformation of the apartment was completed before five o'clock. The young decorators were justly proud of their handiwork. The freshly-laundered glass curtains and clean drapes swayed gently in the breeze from the river. The spotlessly bright walls and woodwork; the well-tailored slip-covers; the polished old furniture were part of the pleasant picture.

Paulette, still pert in her pinafore, served iced tea and her cherry tarts, as soon as everything was in place.

"Tell you what," Worth exclaimed. "I'll go home and get my portable victrola and my records. This floor is waxed to perfection and it's a swell place for a dance. How about it?"

"Oh, good!" "What an elegant idea!" Everyone approved.

While the boys were gone, the girls bathed and changed to fresh frocks. "About eight o'clock, we can have another lunch," Dorothy suggested. "There's loads of food."

When Worth, Bob and Lee returned, they had two more seniors from River City high with them. Jeff Byron and Steve Sidwell were inseparable companions, who had just completed their summer jobs at the canning factory. "It was a break running into Worth when we did," Jeff told the girls. "Steve and I were all set to celebrate the end of our hard labors. All dressed up and no place to go. We couldn't even get in a movie," he said, disgustedly.

Steve whistled appreciatively. "Snazzy place you kids wangled here. How'd you do it?"

"Oh, influence," Linda replied airily. "And cooperative elbow grease. Did Worth tell you how we'd worked?"

Worth plugged in the Victrola, and the clear, sweet strains of Harry James' trumpet, in the opening bars of "You're a Long, Long Way from Home," moved the group into action.

Paulette had managed neatly to be near the phonograph, and Worth started dancing with her. The others found partners. The floor was perfect and the music was lovely—

Gayle saw her first.

Mrs. Mallory stood at the entrance of the room, glaring at the dancers.

“Miss Warren!” The old woman had a powerful voice when she was angry.

Linda was nearest the phonograph and she snapped it off.

“Yes, Mrs. Mallory?” Gayle’s voice was even, but her face was pale.

“I consented, Miss Warren, much against my better judgment, to allow you and the Misses Swift to live in this apartment while attending school in River City. You appealed to me on the grounds that it would be impossible for you to complete your high school educations if you could not find a place to live. Certainly your high school education does not include the necessity for staging noisy brawls on the Mallory estate. I will not have it.” She turned and walked majestically down the hall.

Five boys and five girls stood in stunned silence for several seconds. Finally Linda managed a weak chuckle. "We look as if we had been playing 'Statue' and couldn't decide who is 'It.'"

There was malicious triumph in Paulette's voice as she said, "Well, that doesn't mean we can't have our party. Let's go on over to our house. Pack up your machine and your records, Worth, and we'll have a progressive party."

Gayle's weary voice admitted defeat. "I'm sorry, every one. I should have thought to ask permission—."

"It was swell of you all to help," Linda spoke up, "but if you don't mind, I think I'll skip the rest of the dance. My pore ol' bones jist won't take it, no more, no more."

"We are truly grateful," Susan added. "The place is handsome, thanks to all of you . . . but I feel I'd better trot home and tuck my little sister in bed."

"We have to finish moving in, tomorrow," Gayle added. "Some other time, perhaps, Paulette."

"Oh, that's all right." Paulette's smile was bril-

liant. “My word, Dorothy, we’re going to have five men! In Washington, they say it’s eight girls to a man. . . . I do hope they don’t all come to River City, don’t you?”

Dorothy managed an outrageous wink at Linda. “Yes, it looks like a gay evening. But we’d better hurry, between here and your place. If I know Worth, he’ll take his time and ask six more girls and another fellow on the way, and then where will we be?”

ROSEMARY'S CHOICE

"WE SHOULD let Rosemary choose," Gayle suggested, the next afternoon when the three girls arrived at the apartment. "She is the newcomer—and the guest, you might say, so she should have first choice of quarters. We might draw straws for roommates—"

"Um-hmmm," Linda objected.

"Oh, no!" Susan exclaimed at the same time. The sisters looked at one another, grinning.

"You see," Linda pointed out, "she might choose you. Then where would the Swift sisters be? Right where they've been all their lives."

"In that case," Gayle answered, with a twinkle, "why don't you two flip a coin to decide which room the winner wants? I'm perfectly willing to have either of you—and if I am, Rosemary should

be. Isn't that logical? At least, you can know where to put your luggage, without waiting until Rosemary arrives."

"That's right." Linda smiled at Gayle, all flippancy gone from her manner. "And thanks for the vote of confidence, Gayle. I'm grateful that you're willing to live with me, in case Susan's charms sway our English cousin."

The knocker sounded below, and Linda flew to answer. She returned to the living room a moment later with Benton. He was wearing his neat blue suit and was actually smiling. "I came up last evening to admire the transformation," he told them. "You really worked wonders in a short time."

"Thank you," the girls chorused.

"We're going to let Rosemary choose which bedroom she wants," Linda told him. "But either way, she's going to draw a Swift for a roommate, because we sisters crave a change."

"That will be kind of you," Benton noticed the packing cases filled with canned fruit, vegetables and meat. "My word, did you bring all this with you?"

"It's all our own pack," Gayle assured him.

"Four-H Club," Linda explained. "Gayle and I went in for canning and Susan for sewing. That's why she drew the job of making the slip-covers."

"I see. May I help you unpack the food?" Benton offered.

It was his suggestion, after he'd placed the jars of canned food on the upper cupboard shelves, that Rosemary pay for the potatoes, fresh fruit, vegetables and meat they would require. "I know she has an adequate allowance," he told them, "and she will be more than desirous of paying her share of the expenses. That was one of the reasons that she was a bit unhappy at the Stewarts. She's a sensitive person, and her host and hostess were almost too kind. Wouldn't let her pay for anything, I mean."

"I think I understand," Gayle answered slowly. "After all, we are the ones who benefit in this arrangement. We wouldn't have had this lovely apartment if it weren't for the fact that she wanted to come to River City to school. I think we should make that completely clear to her." She paused a

moment, and then said, "We're awfully sorry about what happened last evening. It was a stupid thing to do."

The man looked puzzled. "What do you mean?"

"Didn't Mrs. Mallory tell you?" Linda demanded. "We were having an impromptu dance, to celebrate finishing the work, and Mrs. Mallory came up and told us to stop. I think the exact words were something like this—'Certainly your high school education does not include the necessity for staging noisy brawls on the Mallory estate. I will not have it.'" Linda was a gifted mimic and she brought back the ghastly memory for the other girls too vividly.

The butler whistled. "That is too bad. It must have been frightfully embarrassing for you and your friends."

"It was," Gayle answered simply. "But it won't happen again."

"Strange, too," Benton went on. "She very kindly suggested this morning that I meet Miss Travis in the station wagon. Really very generous

of her.” He glanced at his wrist watch. “I’ll run along now. The train is due in half an hour, and I shouldn’t like to have her arrive and find that no one had come to welcome her.”

It was a long hour the girls waited. Linda fidgeted, Susan went about straightening books and pictures, Gayle tried to read. Finally she burst out, “I wish we had a radio. That’s what I’m going to ask for, for Christmas. I’ll have to start hinting right away. I saw a darling little white one at Peder-sen’s, the other day. It was the last small one they had in stock, and there’ll be no more available.”

“It would be grand to have one—” Linda was saying. She broke off abruptly and raced to the casement window overlooking the entrance to the garage. “He’s back!” she called.

Susan and Gayle peered over her shoulders.

“Gosh, what a handsome suit!” Susan exclaimed. “I suppose that’s a real British tweed. . . .”

“That soft gray-blue is lovely with her blonde braids,” Gayle added. “Let’s go down to the door to welcome her. . . .”

"And help with that luggage," Susan added. "Even Benton would be staggered with that amount of equipment . . . two trunks, four bags, two hat-boxes. . . ."

A moment later, the three girls were all jabbering at once, in gay greetings to the English girl. There was no chance for Benton to murmur introductions.

Rosemary smiled, a little uncertainly. "Now, let me get it correctly," she begged. "You two are Susan and Linda? The sisters Swift?"

Linda and Susan, giggling, nodded in unison. "Then you're Gayle Warren? Benton has been telling me about you, as we came from the station."

The girls bustled about, helping the protesting Benton with the luggage. "What's this huge thing?" Linda burst out impulsively. "I can't even lift it!"

"Oh, that?" Rosemary noted the gray-leather case Linda had tried to lift from the back seat. "I'd rather Benton moved it, if you don't mind. It's my radio."

"How simply elegant!" Linda shouted at the other two girls, who were half-way up the stairs. "Rosemary has a radio!" She turned delightedly to the English girl. "Gayle was just saying, not ten minutes ago, that she was going to start hinting for one, for Christmas."

"Oh?" Rosemary's voice was noncommittal, her manner cool. "This is rather a special one. Short-wave and all that."

Linda felt strangely rebuffed.

When Rosemary joined the other two girls in the living room, Gayle announced, "We're waiting to let you have your choice of the two bed-rooms. You will have one of the Swifts for your roommate, since they don't yearn to live with a sister. Susan chose this room off the living room. It's larger, and has two desks, but isn't quite as private as the other. Linda is going to be in the bedroom."

"Oh, I see." Rosemary was openly disappointed. "I was hoping that we might each have a room."

"I'm sorry, Miss Rosemary," Benton said, an

anxious frown creasing his brow. "But you see, River City is a boom town. Frightfully overcrowded. These young ladies had combed the residential districts and could find nothing."

"War plants?" Rosemary asked eagerly.

"Oh, yes. A tremendous shell-loading project. Covers hundreds of acres, near town."

"It really is huge," Linda interposed. "A bus driver told me that it is nine miles he has to drive to leave the workers, after he gets inside the gate, to deliver all of them to the various buildings. There's just one main entrance. Thousands are employed there—no one seems to know exactly how many."

"I see."

Gayle drew the curtains that separated the one bedroom from the living room. "This is where Susan will be. The bedroom is to the right of the entrance hall." She led the way, Rosemary following. "And Linda will be your roommate, if you choose this room."

"I scarcely know which to choose," Rosemary

said. "It would be an advantage to have one's own desk . . . yet this room is more private, and closer to the bathroom. . . ." She seemed uncertain, unable to decide.

Benton coughed discreetly. "Miss Rosemary, you might flip a coin. . . ."

Unsmilingly, Rosemary accepted the suggestion. Gravely she unfastened her handsome alligator purse and selected a dime from the coin case within. "Heads it will be Linda; tails it will be Susan. . . ."

The girls watched with eager curiosity. The coin rolled to Linda's feet, wavered and fell. "Heads!" she cried. "You will be pleased to know that I sleep quietly and never fidget until the alarm goes off."

"That's true," Susan added, in confirmation. "She doesn't walk or talk in her sleep. But you will have to be firm with her about infringing on your drawer space. Luckily, you will have two dressing tables, so she won't be mistaking your powder puff for her own—"

"What a memory!" Linda groaned. "Once, just

once, in the summer of 1940, I used hers by mistake!"

"Wouldn't you like something to eat?" Gayle said quickly. "I should think you would be hungry after your long trip."

"I should enjoy a spot of tea," Rosemary admitted.

"Wee!" Linda was overjoyed. "That's the first time you've sounded British. "I was afraid you were going to let us down."

Rosemary smiled a little, but her tone was sad. "I'm almost completely Americanized, you know. Next month, I will have been in this country two years."

Susan turned to Benton, who was carrying Rosemary's luggage into the bedroom. "You'll join us, won't you, please?"

Benton sent an uncertain glance at the English girl. "Oh, no. I'd best be running along, after I have Miss Rosemary settled. If you'll just point out her section of the wardrobe and the chest. . . ."

For the first time, Rosemary's voice sounded

FOUR GIRLS AND A RADIO

warm and genuine. “Oh, don’t be a fuddy-duddy, Benton. Didn’t you hear me say that I’m almost completely Americanized? Linda and I can settle the international disputes over boundary lines later this evening and you can help Gayle or Susan with the tea.”

“A SPOT OF OUR OWN”

GAYLE ENJOYED school and was an excellent student. She had a quick grasp of the fundamentals and a dependable memory. But more than the classes, she enjoyed people. She was stimulated, exhilarated always, on the first day of school. The summer days, full of activity on the farm, were fun, but she missed seeing her River City friends.

She was thinking of this, the next morning, as she started breakfast. As she measured coffee into the percolator, she hummed absent-mindedly, “It’s So Peaceful in the Country.” She opened a quart of Linda’s tomato juice, placed in the ice-box the night before to chill. After pouring four generous servings and placing them on the serving ledge, she went to the door of the bedroom and rapped on it smartly. “Up! Up!” she called cheerfully. “The

coffee's perking and breakfast is started. How about poached eggs on toast?"

Linda flung the door open wrathfully. "Are you always so doggoned gay in the mornings? If so, I'm glad I didn't get you for a roommate. . . ."

Susan crossed the living room, wearing a gaily-flowered housecoat. "Come, come, sister. You'll feel better after a shower. Don't be a lazy bones. We've showered, and I've made our beds, and rolled them away, while Gayle started breakfast. Don't you want to see your darling teachers and your sweet classmates?"

Linda didn't answer, but a moment later, she was whistling in the shower.

There was still no sound from Rosemary's bed.

"A cup of cold water?" Susan asked.

"No. We'll try more persuasion. Something gentle at first. Like pulling off the covers—"

They needn't have worried about waking Rosemary. No one could have slept through the tornado that was Linda, dressing after her bath.

Even so, Rosemary was late to breakfast. "I put your plate in the oven," Gayle told her, when she

finally strolled into the living room. “I was afraid your poached egg would congeal completely.”

“Oh,” the girl replied, frowning. “You’re breakfasting in your dressing gowns. I should have thought of that. I’m all ready for school.” Her blonde braids were neatly in place. She was wearing a lovely frock of sheer blue wool with a Navy blue jacket.

“We should have suggested it to you,” Gayle said quickly. “We decided to wear these washable house-coats in the morning, while we’re preparing breakfast, washing dishes and straightening the apartment. It seemed simpler than getting all dressed, first, and wearing aprons or smocks.”

“I see.” Rosemary sat down and drank the chilled tomato juice.

“Could you bring some more toast when you get your breakfast from the oven?” Gayle asked. “I fixed some more on a plate. It’s all buttered.”

“Oh—of course.” Rosemary looked a little startled, but she followed the suggestion.

“We’ll have to make out a schedule,” Linda said, after she’d finished breakfast. “What do you say

that Rosemary and I do the dishes this week, and you two get the meals, since it's started that way?"

Gayle and Susan nodded in agreement. "We'll take care of our own rooms, of course," Gayle added. "While you two are doing dishes, Susan and I can straighten the living room, hall and bath. The kitchen will be your responsibility. We'll just trade off duties, alternate weeks."

Rosemary had said nothing concerning the plans, until all had finished and were clearing the table. Then she asked abruptly, "What about finances? Benton said the rent was to be ten dollars a month, but how do we manage the marketing and all that?"

"Oh, didn't he tell you?" Gayle asked. "It was really his idea. You see, we process most of the fruit and vegetables and meat we need, and we brought quite a supply with us. Benton suggested that you buy the fresh bread, vegetables, flour, and things like that, which we have to buy in town. We'll all contribute our own ration of sugar, of course."

Rosemary smiled. "That sounds like a sensible

idea.” She turned to Gayle. “Perhaps I’m wrong in assuming that you’re the manager?”

Gayle colored, a little, and laughed. “I’ve never been called ‘bossy’ in such an inoffensive manner. Yes, I suppose I am. Although this is really supposed to be a nonprofit organization with four members on the board of directors, and no officers.”

It was Rosemary’s turn to be embarrassed. “Oh, I am sorry! All I meant was that if you or someone would give me a list of the things you want from the shops, I’ll be glad to purchase them.”

“We have plenty of everything for a couple of days,” Susan replied. “We could have a meeting of the board of directors after dinner tonight, and get everything settled. Right now, we’d better hop to our duties. It would never do to be late on the first day of school.”

“Gayle, why don’t you take Rosemary on to school?” Susan suggested. “I’ll help Linda with the dishes this morning, and she really should be there early in order to register.”

“To register?”

Susan explained, "We did, last week. The first day of school we have short classes, only a half hour long. The teacher uses it to become acquainted with her new class, to tell us something about the work we'll take up, to make assignments and to give us a list of equipment and books we'll need. Then after lunch—by the way, we'll be taking it at the school cafeteria, after today—we all go down town and purchase our supplies. Classes will start in earnest, tomorrow."

"We have one of the simplest schedules in the state," Gayle added. "We have four one-hour periods in the day for classes, plus an hour study period in our home rooms. I suppose you have your requirements of science, languages and math, all behind you, since you will be a senior, too. Susan and I did that, so we could have some easier things, with less outside study, this last year. We're both taking advanced sewing and beginning typing. Typing is a longer class—we have to go back to school at one, instead of one-thirty—but it is all classroom work."

"I won't really know until I consult your faculty,"

Rosemary told them. “You see, my credits are all mixed up. My first year of high school, as you call it, I had in a girls’ school at home. My second and third years were also in a girls’ school here. But I have my credits all ready to present. I should like typing and sewing, too, if I have the time for them.”

“Run along, you two, and get prettied for school,” Linda ordered. “And you look simply lovely, Rosemary. The faculty will give you anything you desire and by noon, half the senior boys will have tried to get dates with you.”

Rosemary paled. “You’re—you’re just joking?”

“Not a bit!” Linda looked surprised. “Don’t you want it that way?”

Rosemary shook her head and looked utterly miserable. “I’m—I’m frightfully self-conscious, anyway. And I’ve always been to girls’ schools. Actually, I’m terrified at the prospect.”

“Well, I’m flabbergasted.” Linda sank back on the bench, still holding two breakfast plates she had been removing from the table. “And I’ve been envying you. Wishing, just once, I might go to a school full of strangers and be a sensation. Why,

I've even been counting on a little reflected glory in the romantic prospects. Seniors stopping me in the halls to inquire breathlessly about the lovely English girl we have stopping with us—" She sighed eloquently, and even Rosemary joined in the laughter.

"I'll run interference for you," Gayle promised, still chuckling. "They're bound to be curious, of course, but I don't think anyone will be rude."

When Rosemary was in her room, getting her purse, gloves and hat, Gayle told the others, "I hadn't realized how sensitive she is. And how lonely she must have been these two years. We'll have to be bumpers, for her. . . ."

"I'm willing," Linda said cheerfully, replacing clean plates on the shelves. "But I wouldn't be human if I weren't just a little miffed because she hasn't said a single word about the apartment. Nor expressed a bit of gratitude for our preparations for her."

"She just doesn't know how to tell us," Gayle said wisely.

“A SPOT OF OUR OWN”

“Now, me, I’m different,” Linda said expansively. “I believe in coming right out and telling you how handsome you look in your new green sweater and your handsome brown skirt. I’ll even go further. I have a pair of plaid green and brown bows on combs, that would complete your ensemble. You’ll find them in my box of ribbons, right hand corner, upper drawer.”

“Thank you,” Gayle twinkled. “I enjoy a bit of Irish blarney, American version, as much as anyone. And I’ll help myself to your bows.”

She walked into the bedroom, where Rosemary was adding a last-minute touch to rose-pink lipstick. “I’m borrowing a pair of hair-bows from Linda,” she explained.

“Am I overdressed for your school?” Rosemary inquired anxiously. “I wore sweaters and skirts all last year, but the girls there told me that at co-educational schools, it was necessary to dress up a bit more.”

“We don’t usually wear hats and carry purses to school,” Gayle told her frankly, “but it’s quite all

right. It won't make you feel queer to do it, of course. But the majority of girls wear the uniform—sweaters, skirts, socks and saddle pumps.”

“Should I change?”

“My word, no! You look lovely! And your dress is tailored and correct,” Gayle said reassuringly.

Rosemary sighed. “I'd feel uncomfortable without a hat—if I carry a purse. And I've got to carry my purse. I have all my credentials stowed in it. And if I carry a purse, I simply have to have gloves.”

“Let's run along,” Gayle urged. “We'll have to see Mr. Sinclair—he's the principal. If we're early enough, we'll have our choice of lockers in the senior room, too.”

Rosemary gave herself a last-minute inspection in the mirror. “I—I'm excited, really,” she confessed. “I hope I'm not anticipating too much.”

“I'm excited, too,” Gayle said, smiling. “And it will be my fourth year at River City high. It's so much fun to see everyone again.”

It was only a few minutes after eight when Gayle took Rosemary down the main corridor of River

City high, after the four-block walk from the apartment. “Mr. Sinclair’s office is right here,” Gayle announced, opening the first door to the right. “We’re really early. Only the teachers are about.”

She greeted several instructors in the outer office, and then asked Mr. Sinclair’s secretary, sitting at a desk inside a railed enclosure, if the principal were busy.

“He is, of course,” the secretary smiled. “The first day of school is always a hub-bub. But you may go on in.”

Mr. Sinclair was sitting back of a desk, talking to a tall youth. “Take this card to Room 310,” he was saying, “at nine o’clock. It will admit you to advanced chemistry. We’ll have the rest of your schedule arranged during the first period and my secretary will bring it to you then.”

“Thank you.”

When the older man at the desk saw Gayle he rose cordially, extending his hand. “Good morning, Gayle! It’s pleasant seeing all of you again. Miss Warren, this is Mr. Hackett—Ed Hackett. He’s a classmate, transferred from Detroit.”

"How do you do," Gayle murmured. The tall boy straightened, returning her smile.

"I'm beginning to like River City high already," he said coolly.

Fresh, Gayle thought. No shy stranger, this Ed Hackett.

"Miss Travis," she said aloud, "this is Mr. Sinclair, the principal. And Miss Travis, Mr. Hackett."

Rosemary acknowledged the introductions with a smile. Then Gayle went on, "Mr. Sinclair, Miss Travis is a transfer to the senior class from Miss Willoughby's, a private school in Philadelphia." She paused, and looked at Ed Hackett pointedly.

"Yes." Mr. Sinclair looked at the boy, too. "If you'll just mention my suggestion to Miss Wilson, my secretary, in the outer office—"

"Yes, sir." The boy grinned at the two girls and went out.

Gayle turned to Rosemary, as soon as the door was closed. "I forgot to ask, Rosemary. It was stupid of me—perhaps you'd rather the other students just knew that you transferred from Philadelphia?"

Mr. Sinclair looked puzzled. “What do you mean, Gayle?”

“Rosemary’s home is in London,” Gayle explained simply. “She has gone to school in Philadelphia for two years, since the time of the blitz. I just simply forgot to find out from her whether she wanted it generally known. You, of course, would have to know it, because of her credentials. And we’ve already told some of our friends.”

“That was thoughtful of you, Gayle,” Rosemary said. “I suppose it would cause less comment if the others didn’t find it out, right away. But it really doesn’t make any difference. And I’d rather not hide it.” She chuckled, a little. “I’m not completely Americanized, and it would cause a great deal of comment if it were suspected that I was trying to keep my past dark.”

“I think that’s wise.” Mr. Sinclair replaced his Oxford glasses. “Now, if I may just take a look at your credits . . .”

Rosemary opened her purse and brought out a heavy envelope. “Everything’s there, I believe.”

Mr. Sinclair studied the papers carefully.

"You've rather majored in the languages, I see," he commented once. He figured on a pad on his desk. "You'll have to take the English reading course, along with all seniors. You lack two science credits for a degree from River City high, so you may choose between chemistry and physics."

"Chemistry," Rosemary answered, quickly.

"I don't believe our language courses would be beneficial to you," he said. "They would be a bit elementary, I should judge."

"My father is a linguist and we used to travel during the long holiday on the continent," Rosemary answered. "I speak and read French, German and Italian, and understand a little Spanish."

Mr. Sinclair looked impressed and Gayle was astounded. "I see," he murmured. "You need four more semester credits in the selectives. There's typing, short-hand, cooking, sewing, art—"

"Typing and cooking," Rosemary announced, as he paused for breath. "Beginning courses in each."

"Right." Mr. Sinclair scribbled on his pad, tore off the sheet and handed it to Rosemary. "Just give this to my secretary, and she will make out your

schedule. You can fill out the registration card at her desk, also.”

“Thank you.”

“We’re delighted to have you join us,” he added.

Gayle waited until Rosemary had consulted Miss Wilson, and then led Rosemary to the Senior Girls’ locker room on the floor above.

The halls were beginning to fill now, and Gayle responded to many greetings.

There were a half dozen girls in the locker room and Gayle introduced Rosemary to all of them.

“The lockers nearest the door are in utmost demand,” Gayle explained. “Let’s take these two.”

“Right-O.”

Worth was waiting in the hall, as Gayle started to take Rosemary to her first class. He was friendly to the stranger, but said, “Gayle, could I see you a moment? After you take Rosemary to chemistry class?”

“Of course. Wait here?”

He nodded.

“That’s a handsome boy,” Rosemary observed, as they walked down the hall.

"Yes, isn't he?" Gayle replied, non-committally.

"I've been a little worried, meeting so many people all at once, that I would forget both names and faces," Rosemary added, unusual warmth in her tones, "but I shan't have any trouble remembering *him*. Worth Collins, Worth Collins."

Gayle restrained herself in time from saying, "But he's mine!"

She was silent and troubled, during the rest of the brief trip to Room 310, where she introduced Rosemary and Mr. Phillips, the chemistry instructor. "We'll meet you in the locker room," she told Rosemary in parting, "after our schedule of classes. Just ask anyone the directions to your next classes."

"I'll be seeing you in typing class, won't I?"

"To be sure!" Gayle managed a grin. "Cheerio!"

"Okay." Rosemary's eyes were twinkling. "You know, we really never say 'Pip! Pip!' as we're supposed to."

"Our Rosemary is a clever girl, and I think she's going to be fun, when we really know her," Gayle thought, on her way to Worth. "I hope she isn't

too interested in Worth. . . . Paulette Showers is enough to fret about. . . .”

But she was reassured a moment later. “Gayle, it’s only two minutes until the last bell, so I’ll have to ask you in a hurry. How’s about a movie, this afternoon, since we won’t have classes?”

“Fine,” Gayle agreed. “I’d like it.”

“I’ll pick you up at the apartment at one, and we can buy our books before we go. Be seein’ you.”

“What’s your first class?”

“English, with Miss Robinson.”

“So’s mine!” They chuckled and hurried off to Room 208 together.

The morning went swiftly, and the four girls strolled back to the apartment at noon, discussing the new teachers and new students.

“Are you ready for a statement, Rosemary, or is it all too new and confusing?” Linda asked.

“I think I’m going to like it, very much,” the girl answered. “It is new and a bit confusing. I suppose it’s rather unladylike to say so, but isn’t it fun to have boys, right in the same class? We never

saw them at Miss Willoughby's except on weekends and then quite rarely."

Linda giggled. "It will take about a week for the novelty to wear off. Pussonally, my classes are full of dopes."

"Ed Hackett, the chap from Detroit whom we met in Mr. Sinclair's office," Rosemary said to Gayle, "is in my chemistry class. He moved over by me, and is going to be my partner for experiments. He said he thought that the strangers should stick together. Seemed a friendly sort."

"That's good," Gayle murmured. Why was she being so reserved with Rosemary? She had thought the Hackett boy fresh and impudent. . . .

The girls lunched on sandwiches and fruit salad, with cocoa. "Let's go book-purchasing as soon as Rosemary and I have finished the dishes," Linda suggested. "I have a shopping list a yard long."

"Worth asked me to go with him," Gayle said, carefully not looking at Rosemary. "But we can all ride down town with him. He's calling for me at one o'clock."

"That's a queer thing to have a date for." Linda

observed with amusement. “It must be getting serious.”

“We’re going to a movie afterwards,” Gayle explained.

“You’ll enjoy meeting Worth,” Linda went on, to Rosemary. “He’s a very bright boy—editor of the *Blue and Grey*, our high school paper. His only flaw is that he seems to enjoy Gayle’s companionship.”

“I met him this morning,” Rosemary said, in her usual cool tones. “He appeared a good type. I say, are there any house or school rules about dating? Ed Hackett asked me to a movie this evening, and I didn’t know what to say. In Philadelphia, of course, I went out only with someone the Stewarts knew, and then very rarely.”

“No, there aren’t any real rules,” Susan answered slowly. “We just don’t date much during the week, except for a school play or a concert, something like that. Fridays and Saturdays are all right, of course. But after we really get into the swing of class work, there’s a lot of home work—reading and notebooks and studying.”

“But there would be no point in not going to a movie tonight, if you wanted to,” Linda said. “After all, assignments for the first classes aren’t too heavy. It’s a good idea to be in by ten, or ten-thirty, however. We’ll have to be up by seven in the morning, at the latest, to get through our chores.”

“Thank you,” Rosemary answered. “Please do feel free to tell me if I’m doing things incorrectly. This is all strange to me. First off, Linda, you’ll have to tell me the dish-washing procedure. You see, I never have had any domestic science. . . .”

Linda stared. “Do you mean to say that you’ve never washed dishes?”

Rosemary’s fair skin colored. “I knew I’d have to confess, sooner or later. But it is awkward, you know. That’s why I’m taking a course in cooking at school. . . .”

Linda shook her head, marveling. “Imagine, getting to be a senior in high school before you’ve washed a dish. Ah, the British!”

Gayle came to the rescue. “Now, see here, Linda. Don’t feel too superior. Rosemary admit-

ted this morning to Mr. Sinclair that she not only reads, but speaks French, German, and Italian. You might get her to correct your accent—Linda’s on her third-year French—if you’re not too brutal about your dish-washing instructions.”

“If we’re going to catch a ride with Worth and Gayle,” Susan said, “you two should start making with the soapsuds. He’s due in ten minutes.”

The book store was jammed with high school students, waving lists of required books. It was after two when Gayle and Worth completed their shopping and left the others to go to the movie.

“Rosemary seems like a nice gal,” Worth observed.

“She is,” Gayle replied, almost too quickly. “I think she’s very clever, too. It may be a difficult adjustment for her, living in an apartment and going to a public school. She’s a little shy and very sensitive.” She chuckled a little. “I think it’s going to be mutually beneficial for her and Linda to room together. Linda is so completely outspoken and irrepressible—and Rosemary may succeed in calming her down a bit.”

The movie was crowded, too. Gayle and Worth had to join a queue out on the sidewalk, before he could buy the tickets. "This is unusual, in the afternoon," Gayle remarked.

"It has been this way all summer," Worth sighed.

"Oh bother!" Gayle said, unexpectedly. "It's too nice a day to go to a movie, anyway. Let's go sit in Mallory Park and watch the river."

"That suits me," Worth said. "I thought it might be a treat for you to go to a movie, for a change."

They sat on the grass, leaning against the trunk of a huge elm tree, idly talking and watching the traffic on the river.

"The park is fine, as long as the weather is so pleasant," Gayle observed. "But what in the world are we going to do for a 'hang-out' this winter? Certainly we can't go to taverns, even if we wanted to. They're crowded with the war workers. And even good old Wiggins is no longer a high-school spot."

“I don’t know. I wish we had a spot of our own,” Worth answered.

Gayle sat up suddenly, inspired. “Worth! Why don’t we? Why don’t we have a club of our own? Just for high school students? You could campaign for it, in the *Blue and Grey!*”

“That’s a marvelous idea!” Worth was almost shouting in his excitement. “We could have a milk bar—serve sodas and sundaes and cokes—and have a juke box and a dance floor! Wouldn’t it be the nuts, no fooling!” He thought a moment and then sighed. “Gosh, but where would we have it?”

“Surely, there must be some place,” Gayle persisted. “Even if it’s nothing but an old garage. It would be fun to fix it up. I’ll bet if you talked to Mr. Sinclair, he’d approve of the idea and even be able to suggest a spot—”

“I’ll bet he would, too!” Worth was excited again. “He came to see me this morning, at the *Blue and Grey* office. Said he was perturbed about the rapid rise in the rate of ‘juvenile delinquency,’ as he called it. Said I would be startled if I knew how

many boys and even girls had been paroled to him in the last six months by the juvenile court. So many mothers are working at the shell-loading plant and there's not much of a home for the kids. He said there were even a few door-key kids in River City!"

"Door-key kids?"

"That's what they call 'em in the big cities. Even little tykes have door-keys on strings around their necks. Nobody at home, so they're supposed to let themselves in and out. No place to go to, really, but into trouble."

"If you wrote a good, strong, front-page editorial, I'll bet some of the parents would back us," Gayle urged. "If we had the Parent-Teachers Association and perhaps one of the men's luncheon clubs to help, it really could be done."

"Dad's a Kiwanis and we know Mr. Marple, the president, very well," Worth said, with mounting excitement. "You know what you've just done, gal? You've just talked yourself out of a date. I'll take you home and run right over to high school and write the editorial. And talk to Mr. Sinclair.

SHORT WAVE

SUSAN AND Linda were reading in the living room of the apartment when Gayle returned, alone.

“So soon?” Linda inquired, looking up from her book in surprise. “Didn’t you like the movie?”

Gayle dropped to the davenport gracefully. “We didn’t go. Got discouraged by the length of the queue. Where’s Rosemary?”

“She ran into that Hackett person in the bookstore,” Susan replied, “and he asked her to go to the movie right away and to have dinner with him down town.”

Linda dropped her book to the floor and leaned forward eagerly. “This is our chance,” she whispered in a conspiring manner. “Frankly, what is your reaction to our Rosemary?”

Gayle giggled. “Linda, you’re priceless! I think she’s lively.”

“So do I,” Susan said. “But I can’t say that I am as enthusiastic about the Detroit addition to the senior class. To coin an old phrase, Detroit’s gain was our loss when he moved here.”

Linda shook her head. “Susan, you’re born to make a career of being the demon chaperone. I am amazed that you let Gayle see Worth.”

“The Hackett lad did seem a little fresh and overly sure of himself,” Gayle said. “But Rosemary isn’t stupid. If he’s too brash, she’ll not see him.”

“I don’t know.” Susan sighed. “It seems to me that girls who have always gone to girls’ schools and who don’t have any brothers, just don’t seem to have any judgment about boys. They all seem mysterious and romantic and attractive.”

“Well, let us not be too harsh with Hackett,” Linda suggested, “until we sound out some of the fellows about him. Worth and Bob and Lee will size the newcomer up in a hurry—just as Dorothy Barnes and Paulette Showers will help us form our ideas about Rosemary.” She was thoughtful and silent for a moment. “One thing sure, our Rosemary is a complete flop at home-making. Do you

know she hasn't yet made her bed? And she scarcely knows a hand towel from a dish cloth."

"Speaking of home-making—has anyone thought of a dinner menu?" Susan asked. "We brought half a ham from home. How would you feel about ham and gravy and biscuits? And a pear-and-cheese salad?"

"Good!" Gayle opened one of the packages she had brought from the book store. "Let's make out menus for the week, right now. Then we can give Rosemary a grocery shopping list."

"We'll just have four more breakfasts and dinners to plan," Susan said. She sat up abruptly. "Say! What are we going to do about Rosemary on the weekends?"

"Gosh!" Linda's eyes widened in dismay. "We can't leave her here alone—she'd starve."

"Besides, it would be frightfully lonely," Gayle added. "Weren't we stupid not to think of it before? And I'll bet it hasn't occurred to Benton, either."

"We could take turns, staying with her weekends," Susan suggested.

Gayle nodded. "Good idea. Then perhaps every fourth weekend she could go home with us, alternating between the Swifts and the Warrens."

"Having a refugee is quite a responsibility, isn't it?" Linda inquired brightly. "Now, if she will just agree with our plan . . ."

The girls had just finished dinner and washing the dishes when Rosemary returned.

"How was the movie?" Linda asked.

"Very amusing," Rosemary replied quietly.

"We hadn't expected to see you back so soon," Linda went on, "but we do have several things to talk over with you."

"That is what I had hoped," Rosemary said, smiling faintly. "I never like to fib and that is the excuse I gave Mr. Hackett." She hesitated a moment, then went on in a rush. "He wanted to go to a road-house or pub or night club—whatever you call those places—across the river in Illinois. It didn't sound very attractive and I know that it must be unlawful for minors to be in such spots—isn't it?"

Gayle nodded. "You were wise to refuse, Rosemary. We promised Mr. Benton to look out for you, you know, and I'm afraid he would feel that we were failing you and him. One of the things we wanted to talk with you about, Rosemary—you see, we plan to go home on weekends. It's only fifteen miles. And we've decided to take turns staying in with you. And then on the fourth Friday night, if you like, we'd love to take turns having you come to our homes."

Unexpectedly, Rosemary started to cry.

Gayle moved swiftly to her side and put a comforting arm around her shoulders. "Homesick?" she murmured. "Go ahead and weep and you'll feel loads better. . . ."

Linda and Susan watched in sympathetic dismay. Rosemary cried heart-brokenly, her head on Gayle's shoulder. Finally she managed to whisper, "Everyone's so kind to me—but I just thought—only fifteen miles from home—and I'm almost four thousand miles from mine—and I don't know when I can ever return your hospitality—"

Gayle patted the shaking shoulders. "Don't give that another thought! I'll bet your house is full of American soldiers and it's a heck of a lot more important for them to receive the hospitality than for us!"

Finally, the girl controlled her sobs and she gave the serious-faced trio a shaky smile. "There! That's over! I have to break down about once every six months, but I don't usually manage to do it so—so publicly."

"This isn't publicly!" Linda objected. "This is at home!"

Rosemary sank into a chair, dabbing at her eyes with a linen handkerchief. "Once, it was even worse. I had been here only about four months when the Stewarts wangled a chance for me to talk to Mum and Daddy over short-wave telephone. There were about a half-dozen of us refugees, and I was the oldest." She shuddered, remembering. "Mum sounded so gay and natural and—and brave, that I just wailed. In their letters afterwards they just pretended that the static was pretty bad and

that it was difficult to hear me. And all the little tiny refugees had done so well. But it was queer. I was never so homesick or—or weepy, after that. I just couldn't be."

"Say, how about your short-wave radio?" Linda demanded. "I'm dying to hear it. I never have heard any of the short-wave programs."

"Haven't you, really?" Rosemary brightened. "If you'll help me carry it into the living room, I'll set it up."

"There's a double-wall plug over by this sofa," Gayle suggested. "I'm so glad Benton thought to have them put in. Lighting would have been quite a problem for us, with the old-fashioned fixtures."

"It will take a rather sturdy table," Rosemary said. "How about this one with the magazines? Oh, no—better yet. The window seat! We can just hang the aerial out the window and ground it on the heater pipe below."

Linda helped set the radio up, according to Rosemary's directions. A moment later, rich, soft music filled the living room. Linda waltzed a few steps

and then paused. "I don't recognize the tune but the organ background to the orchestra is lovely, isn't it?"

Rosemary smiled, wryly. She adjusted one of the knobs carefully. "If the Germans had just been content to concentrate on music, instead of planes—"

A woman's voice announced, "This is Germany calling. You will hear the news in English, followed by a commentary by Fred Scheuers."

"He's an Iowan from Waterloo," Rosemary whispered. "Lord Haw Haw is one of his other names."

"An Iowan!" Linda exclaimed.

Rosemary shrugged. "There are British traitors, broadcasting from Berlin, too. Only Lord Hee Haw, the most famous, has been revealed as a renegade Irishman."

A flat, nasal voice was reading, now. "From the Leader's Headquarters, the German High Command reads as follows: "Two Russian counter attacks from the stronghold at Stalingrad were repulsed with great loss of life to the enemy. Two

hundred tanks, sixty heavy guns and one hundred sixty-eight Bolshevik planes were destroyed in the day's action.

"From Afrika Corps Headquarters in Egypt it is reported that seven small British patrols were destroyed by Field Marshal Rommel's infantry and two dive-bombing attacks were carried out against enemy tank concentrations. The returning flyers reported that twelve General Sherman tanks were destroyed and that great fires were started in ammunition dumps and in petrol storage tanks.

"News item: Recently when our superior forces cut off and captured several American tanks in the African desert, it was discovered that the tanks were manned by American Indians. When the Yanks came up against the stiff fire of our powerful 88-mm. guns, they quickly turned their duties over to the Indians."

Linda howled. "Why, the stupid liars! Do they really think that will fool any American listeners? Why, I'll bet we don't have fifty redskins in all of Africa!"

Rosemary turned the volume down. She was

smiling. "Sometimes it is pretty silly. But you'd be surprised how effective their propaganda is, at times. I've kept notes on the times they have urged American housewives to buy soap, coffee, clothing, shoes and the like, because those things were to be rationed soon. And the next week, various places would report runs on those items in the stores."

"Why do you listen?" Gayle asked in an inquiring manner.

Rosemary carefully adjusted the dials and soft violin music floated from the loud-speaker. "This is Italy," she explained. "The news in English comes from there on the half-hour and from Germany on the hour. Why, I think it is necessary to listen to the enemy in order to judge the stories in our own papers. Of course, the news in their own languages is much more revealing. And I like to listen to the United Nations' broadcasts to Europe. I think how comforting it must be to listen to the truth in the occupied countries. You know, the British and the Americans broadcast in thirty or more different languages. The underground listens, when they dare, and then publish the real

news and pass it around among the loyal natives, right under the noses of the Germans.”

Linda chuckled. “I know—I read just last week about how the Nazis had ordered a Dutch editor to say that in the terror raid on the Dutch town, the night before, that only a cow had been hit. He did say that in the paper, but he added that the cow had burned three days!”

“What’s going on up here?” Worth demanded, from the door of the living room. “I banged three times!”

Gayle explained their absorption in Rosemary’s radio. “Gosh, that’s interesting! How soon will there be another broadcast?”

Rosemary glanced at her wrist watch. “In about one minute. This is Italy—”

“This is the Voice of Italy, Cradle of World Civilization,” echoed the radio. “We will have the news in English now for our North American listeners.”

The news was much the same as they had heard from the Berlin station, except the news from Africa was read first.

When the communique was finished, Linda exclaimed, "Why, that was almost the same as the one from Germany!"

Rosemary nodded. "I don't think there is any question that the Nazis control the Rome radio as much as they do the Paris one. The Italians must realize that they are little better off than their conquered French neighbors."

She adjusted the dials once more and smiled. "This is my favorite," she told them. "The good old B.B.C."

A program of dance records, many of familiar tunes, was being broadcast. They listened for a few minutes, and then Gayle turned to ask Worth, "Did you talk to Mr. Sinclair?"

Worth flashed his delightful, quick smile. "He was enthusiastic about your idea, Gayle. Want to see the editorial?"

"It was your idea, too, Worth! Let's go in to my desk. I want to read it carefully."

FIRST ENDORSEMENT

GAYLE WAS filled with an inner excitement during the following week; Worth's editorial was bound to stimulate great enthusiasm. But she felt that it would be disloyal to discuss the project before the first *Blue and Grey* was published, the second week of school.

But fortunately, life in the apartment was new and interesting to all four of the girls so that no one seemed to notice Gayle's preoccupation.

Rosemary was adjusting to the change in her life more rapidly than Gayle had dared to hope. She no longer seemed shy or self-conscious when she asked about some simple household task. And once she learned the correct way to make a bed or dry a dish, she followed the routine carefully.

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school's scholastic standing will improve? We saw Worth Collins and Bill someone at the library. Said there was nothing else to do or no where else to go."

Gayle longed to say, "All that will be changed."

Susan observed, "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy."

"That's right," Linda agreed. "You know, this really would be a tough year if it weren't so much fun here at the apartment."

The first edition for the year of the *Blue and Grey* was scheduled for Tuesday afternoon, and Gayle was tense with anticipation during the day's classes. Ten minutes before the last bell of the day, the papers were distributed.

Worth's editorial was featured in the center of the front page, set in bold-face, twelve-point type.

Gayle read it again, eagerly.

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marked to Gayle, when they rode home for the weekend, "is that horrible obsession she has for listening to short-wave. The Germans and the Italians just put out repetitions, boring lies, night after night. And just because they talk in Italian or German sometimes, doesn't make the discoloration of their news any different. Besides, it's tough on our homework!"

Gayle sighed. "I know. I am almost glad Linda drew this weekend to stay in town with her. I have to do some outside reading for English, and it's hard to concentrate on the slow parts of 'Tom Jones' while the radio is blating away."

"It does make her an interesting person," Susan observed. "She's up on current affairs better than any one I know. Besides, she is equally interested in the River City war effort. She embarrassed me no end, last night after dinner, asking me about the shell-loading plant. I didn't know anything about it, really."

"We aren't supposed to," Gayle assured her. "It's pretty hush-hush, for being such a huge plant."

When Susan and Gayle returned to the apart-

ment, Sunday evening, they found Rosemary and Linda reading in the living room. "See what we brought!" Susan called to them. "Fresh apple pie and a whole box of cookies and a crock of cottage cheese."

"Not to mention some cold fried chicken and a loaf of mother's homemade bread for our snack tonight.

Linda grinned. "See," she said triumphantly to Rosemary.

Rosemary dropped her book. "I'm starved. I wanted a dinner this noon, but Linda put me off with a sandwich and a glass of milk. Said you'd be bringing back a packet of food with you."

"What went on in River City this weekend?" Gayle asked. "It was quiet and peaceful down on the farm."

"It was quiet and peaceful here, too," Linda assured them. "We didn't even go to a movie. Rosemary and I spent most of the day yesterday at the library, reading and studying. Something tells me this is going to be a good year for Linda's grades."

Rosemary yawned. "Wonder if the entire

school's scholastic standing will improve? We saw Worth Collins and Bill someone at the library. Said there was nothing else to do or no where else to go."

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crowded with the older men and women, and the newcomers who have been brought to River City for war work.

"The *Blue and Grey* is not just bemoaning the fact that high school students have no recreational center. The paper wishes to present an idea.

"With the help of our parents and other community-minded, public-spirited citizens, could not a solution to our problem be possible?

"Why can't River City high school have its own club?"

"How does it look?" Worth had come up, just as she finished reading the editorial.

"It looks wonderful and it reads even more forcefully, in print," Gayle replied.

"It has already brought results," Worth said, with his quick smile. "Mr. Sinclair took copies of the paper to his Kiwanis club meeting this noon. President Marple asked him to bring four students, one from each class, to appear before the luncheon club next Tuesday, and present our plea. I'm to go, too, and would you be the senior class representative?"

“Gosh, Worth! This is pretty abrupt. And I’m not too happy in public speaking—”

“Don’t give me that stuff,” he objected derisively. “I’ve heard you in action. And besides, we’re to be limited to three minutes each. Please, Gayle!”

Gayle chuckled. “I believe in the project wholeheartedly, and it wouldn’t be exactly cricket, as Rosemary says, if I didn’t even give it lip service. Of course, I will, Worth.”

“Swell. I’ve got to dash. Things are breaking pretty fast for us. Mr. Sinclair is really a go-getter when he’s after something he wants.”

“Keep me posted!”

“I will,” Worth promised.

But during the exciting days which followed the publication of Worth’s editorial suggesting the new club, Gayle realized that Worth was bursting with a secret he felt obligated to keep.

All the talk, between classes and before and after school, centered on the new project. The high school students were overwhelmingly in favor of it,

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and later in the week, the *River City Gazette* reprinted Worth's editorial.

Gayle dressed carefully on Tuesday morning. She wore her best sheer brown wool, with the alligator pumps and handbag that Uncle Dick had brought her from Chicago, the last time he'd gone in to sell cattle. Her smart little hat with the perky green quill set off the ensemble.

She had memorized her speech and practiced on the other girls at breakfast. She was letter-perfect, and sincere in her delivery, because her portion of the plea was concerned with the necessity of providing a wholesome outlet for the students' free time. She had pointed out the ugly fact that many boys and girls came from unpleasantly crowded homes, due to the influx of outside labor in River City. She quoted a few authorities from other cities, who were becoming increasingly alarmed over the rapid growth in juvenile delinquency in recent months. Many cities were attempting to meet the problem by offering supervised playgrounds in the summer, but no one had hit on the

River City solution, apparently. "I predict that if our project is successfully carried out, we will become nationally recognized. I can assure you that if the students of River City high school are supported in this effort, that the students of River City high school will continue to maintain their present excellent reputation," Gayle promised, in conclusion.

Rosemary, Susan and Linda burst into applause. "I wish we could hear you this noon," Linda said wistfully.

"Worth will be proud of you," Susan added. "And are we ever proud of him! Did you all hear that yesterday's Register carried part of his editorial? You know, you may not be far off in your prediction, Gayle."

"Oh, we have so many hurdles to get over first," Gayle objected. "I'm trying all the time to keep from becoming too optimistic. We don't have a place yet; we don't really have any assurance that the Kiwanis club is going to help us; and most important of all, it is going to be expensive."

But Worth's secret was out, that noon. He was

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the final one of the five students to speak, following the Kiwanis club luncheon at noon. The hotel dining room was hushed; Gayle had been delighted with the respectful attention the business men had given their young guests.

“You have heard,” he began, “of the need for a club for the students of River City high school. But, being keen and conservative business men, I know you will want to hear of more than just the idea.

“In the last week, we have discovered these concrete facts. There is an unused, so-called ‘attic’ on the third floor of the Y.M.C.A. building. It is unfinished, but can be heated easily. It could be finished with non-essential, second-hand materials, by volunteer help from the school. And we can get it for the reasonable rental of fifty dollars a month, heat furnished.

“We have had the generous offer of an old soda fountain for our ‘milk bar.’ It needs only a coat of paint. We would have to rent or buy a ‘juke box’ and records, but it could easily pay for itself in a few months. One of the most expensive im-

provements, for which we would have to pay, would be the laying of a hard-wood dance floor. Booths, tables and chairs can be built in our own manual training classes.

“We would have to hire a woman to manage the fountain and serve as chaperone when our parents aren’t available as volunteers. We would use student help, at a reasonable hourly wage.

“Other details are yet to be worked out, of course. But roughly the plan is this. Each student of River City high school could become a member of the club by paying fifty cents for a membership card. The age limits will be fourteen to twenty-one.” He grinned—his irresistible, quick smile—“Discipline will be simple, I assure you, and self-administered. Anyone misbehaving will be warned once. Anyone misbehaving a second time will have his membership taken away.”

Worth’s speech concluded the formal program and the applause was encouraging and hearty.

Mr. Showers, Paulette’s father, rose and addressed the chair, when it was quiet once more. He

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was a lawyer, and his courtroom manner was evident. He tapped his glasses pontifically into the palm of one hand as he spoke. "Mr. President," he boomed, "I have just one question. How much is all this going to cost and who is going to underwrite the project?"

Mr. Marple, at the center of the speaker's table, rose to reply. "Mr. Sinclair estimates that the maximum cost will be \$2500.00. This seems rather a large sum, but my personal reaction is that it is actually a small amount, in the benefits which will accrue to the community from such an insurance policy. Do I hear a motion?"

Mr. Rogers—Bill's father—got up instantly. "Mr. President, I move that the Kiwanis club endorse the project proposed by these young people." He paused, and grinned at Worth. "Moreover, I suggest that the Kiwanis club sponsor a week's drive to raise the money to pay for such a project."

Over the murmur of discussion that broke out among the members, came two or three hearty cries of "Second!"

FOUR GIRLS AND A RADIO

President Marple pounded on the table with his gavel. He called for a vote, and the motion was carried. "I will appoint committees this week and plans will be announced at the next meeting. Time, I gather, is the essence."

ONLY ONE INVITATION

THE NEXT morning, in English class, Gayle received a note from the principal's office. She was to report to Mr. Sinclair at 12 o'clock, after her final morning class.

The principal greeted her by saying, "Gayle, the Senior High Parent-Teachers Association is meeting in the school auditorium at four. I've asked them for fifteen minutes of their time, and I've been wondering if you could present the idea of our club to them? I had planned to speak myself, but I have been called to Des Moines for a meeting concerning the problem of basketball team transportation for this winter. I have to leave on the two o'clock train."

"Couldn't Worth do it better?" Gayle asked.

"No, I think it would be better for you to present

the students' views," the principal answered. "Most of the mothers will have seen Worth's editorial, I believe. You could simply amplify your speech of yesterday." He grinned encouragingly. "I think you will find the audience even more receptive—and certainly the Kiwanis group was friendly. I'm sorry it is such short notice."

"Yes, I'll be glad to," Gayle said, at last. She returned his grin. "Besides, I'm almost glad it is so soon. I'll have much less time to regret my being such a softie."

"Comes the night of our opening dance," Mr. Sinclair predicted, "and there won't be a happier, gayer girl on the floor. Isn't that so?"

"That is true," Gayle agreed, "and if I can do anything to help, you know I will."

Perhaps the success of the speeches before the Kiwanis club, and Mr. Sinclair's confidence in her, Gayle decided later, had led her to expect a similar reception from the P.T.A.

But Gayle had forgotten one important fact.

Paulette Showers' mother was president of the River City High School Parent-Teacher Association.

Mrs. Showers was a tall, thin woman, with iron-grey hair, an erect figure, and a firm, precise manner of speaking.

Gayle entered the assembly room just as Mrs. Showers called the meeting to order. There were about two hundred women—including most of the instructors—sitting in the room. Gayle found a place in the front row, just in time to hear Mrs. Showers say, “I regret to have to announce that Mr. Sinclair will be unable to be present. He had asked for fifteen minutes of our time, before we take up the regular business of the meeting. In his place he has sent a member of the senior class—” she referred ostensibly to a slip of paper in her hand—“A Miss Gayle Warren. Miss Warren.”

It was as abrupt as that.

Somehow, Gayle managed to get to the side of the stage and up on the platform. There was a polite spatter of applause—and a blurred sea of faces staring up at her.

Gayle took a deep breath, smiled bravely and began speaking. “I am sure all of you can guess why I’m pinch-hitting for Mr. Sinclair,” she said.

“First off, I should like to know how many of you have read the editorial in our *Blue and Grey*, or in the River City paper, about the students’ need for a recreational center, a club of our own?”

Almost every person in the room raised her hand.

“Good! That’s fine,” Gayle said. “We have been delighted with the response to the idea. Yesterday, the Kiwanis club voted to endorse the idea and Mr. Marple, the president, is appointing a committee to help with a drive for funds. It will take about twenty-five hundred dollars, even with almost all student labor, to prepare our own spot. Memberships, open only to those between fourteen and twenty-one years of age, will cost fifty cents.

“The soda fountain, which has been donated, will be self-supporting, as will the juke-box. But it will take fifty dollars a month to rent the third floor of the Y.M.C.A. building. And the rest of it will be needed to furnish materials for the dance floor, the built-in booths, and tables. We must be able to have an emergency fund. We must have enough to assure the student help—and the full-time woman manager of the fountain, regular wages.

“But I don’t want to talk to you about the financial problems. I am speaking to you to ask for your—your moral support and encouragement. You will be in demand, too, as chaperones. The tentative plan is to have the club open every afternoon from 3:30 to 5:30 o’clock. It will be open one week night—probably Monday—from 7:30 to 10 P.M. On Friday and Saturday nights, it will be open from 7:30 to 11. We hope to have a pool table, ping pong, checkers and the like. As Mr. Sinclair and Mr. Marple said yesterday, it will be patterned on the more select downtown clubs, with the exceptions that there will be no slot machines, no beer and no smoking.” She smiled, suddenly. “There will be no more wondering where we are and what we are doing, because you will be free to come and see us at play.”

There was hearty applause, because Gayle had managed to project her pleasant personality into her brief talk. It continued until she had left the stage, but before she had reached her place in the auditorium, Mrs. Showers had rapped smartly for order. “I am sure we are grateful to Miss—Miss

Warren for telling us of the night club project," she said.

"However, I regret that Mr. Sinclair was not able to be present, because I had intended telling him, ever since I first heard of the proposed night club, that I feel it is a little unnecessary. I know most of you mothers will agree with me in that I am *always delighted*—in fact, really *thrilled* to have Paulette bring her charming contemporaries to our home. After all, one need have no worries about a youngster who can feel that her home is her own to share."

There were murmurs of approval and Gayle felt completely dashed. She could scarcely keep from shuddering violently—it was as if she'd walked unsuspectingly into an icy shower—

Mrs. Showers rapped again, smiling a little triumphantly. "Do you care for further discussion?"

A tiny little woman, dressed in a neat gingham frock and looking much older than the other mothers, rose. She was near the rear of the room, and Gayle had difficulty seeing and hearing her.

"Speak louder, please," Mrs. Showers ordered.

It was quieter now, and the timid voice of the woman could be heard. "I believe in the idea," the older lady was saying. "We just came to River City this summer and the only house we could find is much too small for our big family. I have three sons working at the shell-loading plant and there just doesn't seem to be room for us all, at home. I have worried a great deal about my younger children. In our little home town, there was always plenty to do to keep the children out of mischief. Each one took a pride in caring for his own room and helping with the mutual work of cleaning, cooking, washing and ironing. But now, we all seem to be in one another's way. My children have always been good children. I want them to stay that way, and I think a club of their own would be a great help."

The woman was obviously so brave in confessing her own difficulties, in spite of her timidity, that her little speech rang with great sincerity.

Mrs. Rogers—Bill's mother—who was a pretty, plump and cheerful woman, stood up at once. "Madame President," she said, "I think us old set-

tlers in River City, going on comfortably in much the same routine we have always known, are likely to forget that our little city is struggling through abnormal times. So many worthy newcomers are having to camp in trailers and in crowded apartments! Don't you think it would be a good idea to table the discussion for today, to give us all time to think it over? I move that we have a special meeting a week from today."

Mrs. Showers frowned, as she heard the numerous approving "seconds." The vote was overwhelmingly in favor of Mrs. Rogers' motion.

Gayle slipped from the room.

She walked home alone, her mind busy with the events of the last hour. "It is no wonder that Paullette is so selfish and so self-sufficient," she thought bitterly. "I wonder who the little woman is, who dared to speak up against Mrs. Showers? If I knew, I'd like to make friends with her children. . . . Wasn't it wonderful of Mrs. Rogers to twist the whole meeting around like that? If there had been a vote, immediately after Mrs. Showers' remarks—

my talk would have been a dismal failure. Poor Mr. Sinclair would have been slapped down, without a chance. . . .”

She decided to say nothing to her roommates about the meeting. And whatever happened, she must not say anything to Worth. She hadn't seen Mrs. Collins at the meeting. Wonder if Worth would hear how Mrs. Showers had tried to ruin the chances for a club? “Night club, indeed!” Gayle kicked angrily at an unoffending pebble on the drive.

Gayle realized that Mrs. Showers hadn't given up her struggle the following day. At dinner, Rosemary inquired, “What are you all wearing to Paulette Showers' party after the football game tomorrow afternoon? Are sports' clothes correct?”

Susan looked up in surprise. “Why, I haven't been asked to any party.”

“Nor I!” Linda and Gayle chorused.

Rosemary colored faintly. “That's odd. I supposed we were all asked. Paulette invited several girls—all of the ones who happened to be in the

senior room this morning after English class. Don't you suppose she just didn't happen to see you, and will invite you later?"

Linda giggled. "Darling, don't be upset. Miss Paulette is up to something, and she *intended* not to ask us. Some of her plots may be a little deep, but sooner or later, the purpose pops out."

"We're not answering Rosemary's question," Gayle said. "I think that blue frock you wore the first day of school would be lovely. It isn't too dressed-up for the game, and it isn't too informal for the party. Unless you'd like to wear something no one has seen before."

"But I don't think I should go, if the rest of you aren't—"

"Don't be a goon!" Linda exploded. "Of course, you'll go!"

Susan giggled. "How are we going to discover what goes on, if you don't? It's your duty, you know. I don't at all mind missing one of Paulette's parties, but I should expire of sheer curiosity if I didn't hear all about it."

It was Gayle's turn to stay in the apartment with Rosemary, over the weekend, and she found it difficult to remain cheerful when Rosemary told her, as she dressed for the supper party, that Worth Collins was to call for her. "I take it," Rosemary added, "that we aren't actually paired off for the evening. Paulette explained in detail that she had it arranged in that manner, so that I would be assured of an escort, to and from the frolic."

Rosemary wasn't quite ready when the knocker sounded, so Gayle went to the door. She was still wearing the brown sweater and skirt she'd worn to the game. "Aren't you changing for the party?" Worth blurted.

"I'm not going," Gayle answered. She couldn't keep her voice from trembling. "Didn't you realize that you were calling for Rosemary?"

"No—I supposed I was to take all of you," Worth answered. "Paulette just asked me if I minded running a taxi for this address."

"Rosemary isn't quite ready," Gayle said, feeling better. "Won't you come up to wait?"

“I came early on purpose,” Worth replied. “I wanted you to see the rough plans we’ve worked out for the club.”

Before he unrolled his papers, however, he said, “What the heck is the idea of Paulette not asking you and Susan and Linda?”

Gayle shrugged. It took tremendous will power to keep from blurting out the obvious retort—“She simply didn’t want us!”

Worth cleared a couple of text books from a table and spread out the blue prints. “Mr. Cronin, the manual training instructor, has been burning the midnight oil on these. I think they look slick.”

“You’re pretty confident, aren’t you, that the project will go through?” she asked softly.

“Of course!” He looked at her in amazement. “We can’t flop. Not with all the faculty and Mr. Sinclair and the Kiwanis club and our parents all backing us.”

“But all the parents aren’t in favor,” Gayle told him. “I wasn’t going to tell you, but I really feel you should know. If it hadn’t been for a little strange woman and Bill Rogers’ mother, I’m sure

the P.T.A. would have turned it down. I made my little speech the other afternoon, and Mrs. Showers, the president, said she felt there was no need for a night club. Said she and all the mothers she knew were delighted to have their children bring their friends home."

"Why—why, the old—old saboteur!" Worth gasped. He sat back in his chair, staring at Gayle. "Great Scott, Gayle! That's why Paulette's having this party tonight, isn't it?"

"I shouldn't be surprised." Gayle smiled. "And I have no doubt that that is the reason why Rosemary is the only one who rated—"

"Did I hear my name?" Rosemary strolled down the hall, lovely in a rich blue velvet frock, cut on princess lines, with a sweetheart neckline filled with soft lace.

"What a beautiful frock!" Gayle exclaimed. "You look like visiting royalty!"

Rosemary frowned. "Do I, really? Is it too fancy?"

"No, of course not! It's just right. When I suggested the blue wool, I thought you were going di-

rectly to the party from the game. I hadn't realized that it was a dinner party."

"I dislike intensely being overdressed," Rosemary replied. "But if you really think it is all right—"

"What kind of stuff is that?" Worth asked. "I like it."

"It's velvet," Rosemary answered, laughing a little. "It was a Christmas present last year from Adeline Stewart. A model had worn it for a photograph for the magazine she edits." She glanced at her wrist watch. "Do we go to parties on time in River City? Or do we go late? It's almost 6:30. Should I get my wrap?"

"I suppose we'd better." Worth sighed a little. When Rosemary turned back to her room, he said fiercely to Gayle, "If she weren't practically a stranger, I'd pull out on this deal, Gayle. I think it's a pretty skunky trick on Paulette's part not to have asked you."

Gayle managed a grin. "Don't be too hard on Paulette. Perhaps it was her mother's idea."

Rosemary came back, wearing a brief white fur jacket over her frock, and a tiny cap of blue velvet.

After the handsome couple had left, Gayle resolutely went through her pattern for the evening. She was determined not to feel depressed and left out. . . .

She took a luxurious and lazy bubble bath and donned her best green silk pajamas. Over it she wore a tailored robe of green wool. She brushed her coppery curls until they shone and then tied them back with a narrow green ribbon.

It was almost eight o'clock when she had prepared her supper tray to her satisfaction; a generous Denver sandwich, sliced tomatoes, a pot of tea. She placed it on the low table in front of the sofa, tuned in some dance music on the radio, and turned out all the lights. The firelight flickered in the fireplace, and she was cozy, warm, comfortable. But not quite happy.

Rosemary had looked so pretty, and so gay. . . .

Gayle had finished her sandwich and was sipping at the second cup of tea when the knocker sounded.

UNEXPECTED CALLER

GAYLE, STARTLED, cried out, "Who is it, please?"

"Mrs. Mallory. Is Miss Travis in?"

Hastily, Gayle snapped on the table lamps at either end of the sofa, and went down to open the door.

"I'm all alone this evening," she explained. "Won't you please come in?"

Mrs. Mallory peered at Gayle uncertainly. In the bright moonlight, the girl could note the rich mink cape, the soft scarf over the older woman's white hair.

"I have been intending to call on Miss Travis for several days," the older woman said. "Ever since Benton spoke to me of her."

"She has gone to a party at Paulette Showers' home," Gayle explained. "I was just having a cup of tea. Won't you join me?"

Mrs. Mallory hesitated. "Why—yes. I will, thank you. You're Miss Warren, aren't you? Where are the others?"

"Linda and Susan went home for the weekend. We're taking turns, staying with Rosemary," Gayle explained, as she led the way up the stairs.

While Gayle carried the tray back to the tiny kitchen to remove her sandwich and salad plates, and to refill the tea pot, Mrs. Mallory stood in the center of the large living room, silently surveying it.

"You children have really made quite a pleasant spot of this," Mrs. Mallory remarked, when Gayle returned.

The girl snapped off the radio and replied. "Thank you. We're quite comfortable. Please sit down. Sugar and cream in your tea? I'm sorry, we haven't any lemon. . . ."

"Nothing, thank you."

There was a brief silence, and then the older woman said abruptly, "How do you like her?"

"Rosemary? She's lovely! I do wish you could have seen her as she left for the party. She was wearing a beautiful princess-style frock made of

deep blue velvet and it was a knockout with her blonde hair.”

“Hmmp. Doesn’t sound like a refugee.”

“We scarcely think of her as one,” Gayle replied quickly. “After all, she has been here almost two years. And the frock was a gift.”

“I see.” Mrs. Mallory sipped her tea. “How does it happen that you and the other two aren’t at the party?”

For a flashing moment, Gayle almost lost her temper. But she sensed quickly that Mrs. Mallory was actually a lonely old lady, burning with curiosity about these four strange tenants. . . .

She chuckled, replacing her cup on the tray and curling up comfortably in her chair. “Do you really want to know? It’s rather a long story.”

Mrs. Mallory returned the grin and said, “Indeed I do want to know. With details.”

Suddenly, Gayle was spilling the entire story. Her ancient rivalry with Paulette, particularly where Worth Collins was concerned. Worth’s enthusiasm for the student club, and Mrs. Showers’ attempts to squelch the project. . . .

"I know just how you feel, my dear!" Mrs. Mallory was leaning forward eagerly, listening to every word. "If you could have known what I went through with that woman when I was foolish enough to accept the presidency of the Garden Club a few years back. She is a shrewd, scheming female and a dangerous opponent. And she opposes every idea that doesn't spring from her own brain!"

"And those are the reasons," Gayle concluded, "why the Swifts and I aren't included in the party tonight. Paulette sent Worth to take Rosemary to the party, and he brought the blue prints for the club. Would you like to see them?"

"Very much—"

Just as Gayle rose, the floor shook a little under her feet and the lamps on the end tables rocked. A tiny vase in a corner whatnot fell and crashed on the floor. At the same moment, the air was filled with a deep, reverberating roar.

"Good heavens!" Mrs. Mallory had jumped up, her face pale. "What is that horrible noise? It sounded like an explosion!"

Shrill and closer, now, they could hear the hideous scream of fire sirens—

“The shell-loading plant!” Gayle exclaimed. “There has been an explosion—”

As she spoke, the floor shook again, and the roar of sound intensified.

“Get dressed,” Mrs. Mallory ordered. “I’ll call Jacobs on the garage telephone downstairs and have him take us out. We might be able to do something—”

Gayle darted through the curtains to her room. Somehow she managed to change to a sweater and skirt and low shoes. In three minutes she raced down the stairs, still struggling into her coat.

Mrs. Mallory called from her sedan. “Over here, Miss Warren. Jacobs will be right out.”

The explosions were still sounding, louder and horribly threatening through the darkness. There was no mistaking that the sound came from the direction of the war plant.

NIGHT DRIVE

IT SEEMED hours before Jacobs appeared, unruffled and neat in his uniform.

Actually, it was only a few minutes. And the explosions were still sounding.

Apparently, all River City had had the same idea. The streets leading to the highway were jammed with cars.

Jacobs pulled alongside an ancient sedan. A woman was driving and Gayle was appalled to see that she was sobbing silently.

The chauffeur was a clever driver and he jockeyed adroitly so that they were soon in the stream of cars on the highway. Now they could see the glare of the fire reflected in the night sky—

Soon, however, the long line of cars was halted. Gayle rolled down her window and peered ahead.

"I can see a policeman," she reported. "He's turning the cars back."

Mrs. Mallory, too, had lowered the window on her side. She leaned out and called to a shadowy figure, leaning against a tree on the nearby parking. "My good man," she said, "could you tell us what has happened?"

"Explosion. Twelve men killed. Yah might as well go home. They ain't lettin' nobody by the barrier, except the ambulances and cops."

"I haven't heard any more explosions, for about five minutes," Gayle remarked. "They must have it under control."

"That ghastly noise!" Mrs. Mallory sighed. "That must be what a bombing raid sounds like."

"Poor Rosemary! She must have thought the German planes were after her, again—"

"That poor child! We must get back to the apartment!" Mrs. Mallory exclaimed. "Jacobs, we'll go home."

It took a bit of maneuvering to turn the big limousine in the packed line of cars, but Jacobs managed.

NIGHT DRIVE

"She will be horribly upset to come home and find an empty place," Mrs. Mallory continued. "Particularly, after those upsetting noises. It was foolish, I suppose, to feel that we could do anything, anyway—"

"I keep expecting to hear those tremendous booms again," Gayle said. "But I have heard that the buildings are scattered, with earth barriers between, so that an explosion in one place won't cause a number of buildings to go."

"One can't help but wonder if it is sabotage," Mrs. Mallory said absently. "There was so much of it before, in the last war. . . ."

Away from the crowded highway, Jacobs was able to drive more swiftly, and they were going up the drive of Mallory Mansion a few minutes later. Jacobs rolled the car to a stop at the side door. "No! No! I'll go on to the garage, Jacobs," the older woman ordered. "I want to see if Miss Travis has come in."

"I think she's here," Gayle said. "I can see a light in her bedroom. I don't believe I left that light burning."

"Poor thing, she must be wild, expecting you to be here," Mrs. Mallory murmured.

She was ahead of Gayle when she reached the lower door.

A man's voice, strident and harsh, greeted their ears as she pushed the door open.

"German! Who could be speaking German here?" Mrs. Mallory cried. She rushed up the stairs before Gayle could explain.

Rosemary was sitting on the floor in front of the radio, listening intently.

She looked over her shoulder on hearing footsteps and stood up. She colored a little, when she saw the older woman. "You must be—be Mrs. Mallory!" she stammered.

The German broadcast continued.

"Why in the world are you listening to that program?" the older woman demanded.

Rosemary turned off the program hastily. "Oh, I listen to short wave all the time," she said. "I like to listen to the Italian and German news casts and commentaries, just to check up on their lies."

"She really does." Gayle felt she must come to

Rosemary's defense. "It's amazing how many of our rumors and ration scares come from those broadcasts. Rosemary has been checking up for a long time."

"I see." Mrs. Mallory sounded a bit mollified, but she was still suspicious. "I suppose you heard the explosion?"

Rosemary nodded. "It was terrifying," she said simply. "All the others insisted on going out to see it, but I asked Worth to bring me home. After all, I've seen all I ever want to see of explosions and fire and destruction—"

MRS. MALLORY'S GIFT

THE TRAGEDY of the explosion at the shell-loading plant was the only topic of conversation at school on Monday.

The newspaper stories were strangely reticent. There were whispers of sabotage and a committee from Congress in Washington and a group of ordnance officers were coming to investigate. The Federal Bureau of Investigation was believed to have men on the job. Even the number of dead was not definite—some sources declared ten men were victims; but the Associated Press dispatches claimed a dozen men had been killed. It was difficult to unearth the bodies from the shambles. . . .

It was learned, however, that the men had been loading bombs on the two-ton bomb production line. And that it had been such dangerous work that no women were employed for the task.

Rosemary had begged Gayle not to talk about it, when they were alone in the apartment on Sunday. She said she had studying to do, and withdrew to her room when Gayle started to tell Susan and Linda about it, when they arrived.

The same thing happened on Monday at school. Gayle saw Rosemary twice during the day, withdrawn, alone and silent. Her face looked white; her fingers trembled among the papers of her notebook. The rest of the student body was buzzing excitedly in every free moment, about the accident. A brother of one of the new juniors and a father of a freshman girl had been among the victims. . . .

Gayle made it a point to dash to the senior room after school on Monday, but Rosemary's locker padlock was closed. She had already left.

Nor was she in the apartment.

The English girl didn't return until almost dinner time, and then she appeared more cheerful. The color had returned to her pale cheeks. Wisely, Gayle decided not to question her about where she had been. "Looks as if she had been for a long hike," she whispered to Susan, as they took the roast

and baked potatoes from the oven. "Remember, don't say anything about the explosion."

Susan sighed. "I'm willing. I've heard about nothing else all day. Paulette Showers was holding forth in the senior girls' room for a good half hour, after school was out. She declared that any idiot could see that it was nothing but carelessness. All that unskilled labor. And it was ridiculous for everyone to go around hinting mysteriously of sabotage. But gosh, I just said I wasn't going to talk about it!"

The next day, Worth told Gayle that he was attending the special meeting of the Parent-Teachers Association after school. "Oh, be sure to let me know what happens," Gayle demanded.

"It's a promise. If the meeting doesn't last too long, I'll come over to the apartment and report."

It was a day of suspense for Gayle. She felt confident that if the group voted to support the high school club, that the project would be a success. And if Mrs. Showers succeeded in having it voted down, that it would be dropped, firmly and quietly. . . .

But Worth's grin told the entire story, when he arrived at the apartment, a little after four.

"It went through!" Gayle exclaimed.

"That's right. But it was a narrow squeak."

"Have some tea and tell us all about it," Linda urged. "Rosemary has converted us to the old British custom, and if I do say so, she brews a fine spot of same."

The blonde girl colored faintly. "Thanks, Linda. Wait until I get far enough along in cooking to turn out some scones. But these ice-box cookies you brought from home last weekend really do very nicely."

"Until the real thing comes along," Linda caroled, a bit off key.

"Such a lot of idle chatter," Gayle burst out. "I'm dying of curiosity, Worth. If you shout a bit, at least I can hear your tale. . . ."

"Well, Mr. Sinclair was there, of course. And just after Mrs. Showers called the meeting to order, he arose and announced that Mrs. Mallory had given five hundred bucks toward the cause!"

"No! Our Mrs. Mallory?" Gayle gasped.

"None other. Mrs. Showers looked like a thunder cloud. But she didn't even call for further discussion. She simply put it to a vote, and the approval of the plan was unanimous. Then they started in haggling about who was going to be on the chaperone committee and all that stuff, so I slipped away. I had to tell someone the good news or burst."

"I'm floored," Linda said. "Are you sure it was Mrs. Mallory? There must be an error."

"No. Mr. Sinclair said it distinctly. No question about it."

"I still can't believe it," Gayle said, looking dazed.

"Nor I," Susan added. "You don't suppose our gay young voices have mellowed her—oh, no. It couldn't be."

"I am not surprised," Rosemary broke in unexpectedly, with her clipped, clear speech. "She did take rather a dim view of it, until I explained how all the women in England had become active in the nursery schools and in club activities for young people. She knows some of mother's friends and she was simply speechless when she discovered they

were all working eight and ten and twelve hours a day in community kitchens and nurseries. In fact, she told me finally that she would contribute generously, but she didn't quite feel that she could bring herself to take an active part."

"You knew it?" Gayle managed to gasp. "You talked to her about the club?"

Rosemary nodded. "I was a bit upset yesterday and went for a stroll down to the river. Mrs. Mallory was out in the garden, superintending the removal of her gladioli bulbs. She saw me and asked me in for tea. We talked about school and I told her about the proposed club. I really can't understand why you talk about her mellowing. I think she's a very gracious lady."

The three girls sat, stunned into silence.

"Golly, Rosemary," Worth said, his voice admiring, "it was certainly a lucky break for River City when you decided to come here for school."

PAULETTE'S BASKET

THERE WAS more than a hint of winter in the clear October day and Gayle wore her new three-piece dark green, gabardine suit and coat, with her brown pumps and perky brown calotte.

Worth was waiting, after school, when she left the senior girls' room. "I've been wanting to tell you all day that I like your new suit," he greeted her.

Paulette started to brush by Gayle and saw Worth. "Oh, there you are!" she called delightedly. "I was just going to run down to the *Blue and Grey* office to see if I could find you. Mother gave me a very important list for you . . . oh, hello, Gayle. Nice suit. No matter how many of those green gabardines I see, I do like them. Sort of the uniform for River City high this winter, aren't they?"

"Thanks," Gayle replied dryly. "See you around, Worth. Good-bye. I'll see you again tomorrow."

"Hey! Wait a minute! I wanted to talk to you. Tell you what—I'll stand treat to both of you to cokes—oh, heck. We couldn't get near Wiggins. But I could get some and we could drink 'em in my car—"

"Sorry. This is my night to get dinner and I thought I'd whip up some creamed chicken and hot biscuits."

She waved, smiling, and strolled down the hall. Worth watched, until Paulette gave a possessive little tug on his arm. She fluttered her long lashes at him and murmured, "Wouldn't you like to see this list? Mother spent all evening working on it. It's the committees for the club and the names of the members of the P.T.A. who will be willing to work on the drive for funds, later this week."

"Sure. Come along to the *Blue and Grey* office," Worth said. "I'll type off a few copies for Mr. Sinclair and Mr. Marple, of the Kiwanis club."

"I'm so sorry I didn't take typing, so I could be of

some use to you," Paulette murmured. "P'raps I could read the names to you, h'mmm?"

"I can do it better directly from the list," Worth said, a little exasperated. "Thanks, anyway."

"I'll be as quiet as a mouse," Paulette promised, with a pout. "But I must report to mother if you approve or disapprove her selections."

But Worth was silent. As he typed, his thoughts were with Gayle.

That young lady had walked swiftly home from school, her mind bitter and filled with the scathing remarks she wished she had been quick enough to say to Paulette. Green gabardine the winter uniform, indeed! There hadn't been another suit like it at school, all season.

Back in the apartment, she changed to a becoming house dress of blue and white print and started measuring the ingredients for her hot biscuits. She liked to mix them ahead of time and put them in the ice box until she was ready for them . . . how fortunate they were, to have all that wonderful canned chicken from home. It was so good creamed. . . .

Rosemary was in the living room, listening to the

short wave. She had the Free French station at Brazzaville in the heart of Africa. Gayle wished that she had taken more French. She could understand only an isolated word or two in the rapid speech. . . .

Rosemary and Linda had just finished the dinner dishes when the knocker sounded.

Susan went to the door and admitted Worth. "I've come for volunteers," he announced breezily. "I'd like to have Gayle, Susan and Rosemary to help us check in the drive funds at the *Blue and Grey* office every night from seven to eight this week. And I want Linda to take charge of the big floor show we're planning for opening night."

Linda dropped a cup in sheer excitement. "Gosh, Worth! Do you mean it?"

Worth grinned. "That's not all. Opening night is practically set. Three weeks from Saturday. The drive will be over this weekend, and we'll know for sure then if we can make it."

"Between seven and eight, every evening?" Rosemary queried.

"That's right."

"I'd really like to, Worth, but I do have a rather strenuous week. Lots of studying, you know. But I'll do what I can to help otherwise, and I'll contribute ten dollars to the cause, right now. I came out very well on my allowance last month."

"Gosh, that's swell," Worth said. "There will be plenty of other chores. You can help us out later, if we get in a jam."

"Thanks."

The Kiwanis club did its work well and enthusiastically. It was Mr. Marple's idea, and he persuaded the *River City Gazette* to sponsor a contest for naming the club. A fifty-dollar war bond was offered for the one who suggested the best name, open to all students and former students of River City high school.

Rosemary wanted to call it the "Public School Pub," but the others persuaded her to send another suggestion. She finally submitted "The Silver Slipper." Linda wanted to call it the "Spider Web," and she tried to explain it in an obscure way by saying she knew she would feel like a social butterfly when she danced there. Susan wanted to call

it "The Eagle's Nest" and Gayle was torn between "Sixth Period," denoting the after school hour, and "The Annex." Linda scoffed at both, declaring the names lacked glamor.

Susan and Gayle, working every evening at the school on checking in the drive funds, were delighted with the wholehearted support the community was giving the new project. The success of the drive was assured as early as Friday night, when the grand total stood at \$2870.00.

But Gayle was a little disturbed, each evening, upon returning to the apartment, to find that Rosemary hadn't been studying. On the contrary, she seemed more than ever absorbed in listening to German broadcasts.

It was the weekend for Rosemary to visit Gayle's home. But she made more excuses about her heavy schedule; insisted that she wasn't afraid to stay in the apartment alone. Gayle concealed her true feelings, but she was deeply hurt. Her mother had looked forward to the visit of the charming young English girl. And Gayle had anticipated showing the refugee a typical Iowa farm home. . . .

Rosemary greeted them with such good news, when the three girls returned late Sunday evening, that Gayle's disappointment was all forgotten. The drive had been more than successful, according to the *Sunday River City Gazette*. The drive was oversubscribed by a thousand dollars. The new club, named "Pastime," was to open in three weeks.

There were terrific arguments about the new name, each contestant holding forth in favor of his own suggestion, but the winner was actually a popular choice. Cadet Ted Swain, formerly football captain at River City high, and now a member of the Naval Pre-Flight Training School in Iowa City, had been the originator of the name.

"Well, it looks as if the studies might suffer, the next three weeks," Linda mused. "I wonder if Mr. Sinclair will let me use the assembly room after school for rehearsals."

"Have you much talent lined up?" Susan asked.

"There have been lots of suggestions," Linda pushed back her bangs with a weary gesture. "Mrs. Showers was positively coy when she confided that Paulette had a 'beguiling new costume we picked

up in Chicago. Red, white and blue, and just perfect for her darling military-tap routine.' ”

“You’ll have to ask her, of course,” Susan said bluntly. “We don’t dare offend the president of the P.T.A.”

“That’s the thing I resent,” Linda retorted. “Mrs. Showers is perfectly aware of that fact, too.” She grinned, a little wickedly. “The only thing, as I pointed out at the time, is that I’m having a terrific struggle to find accompanists. And it would scarcely be fair to ask Paulette to go on cold, without previous rehearsal with the dance band.”

“Any accordion players?” Rosemary inquired.

“No. I wish there were. Tillie Marshall is going to play and sing a couple of new ballads, but she doesn’t like to play accompaniments for any one else. Huck Willoughby and Bill Rogers and some of the other boys are working up a hill-billy musical act with washboards and cow-bells and all that stuff. But Paulette would be insulted if I asked her to dance to that background music.”

The knocker sounded.

All the girls were a little astonished when Linda

returned from the door with Paulette Showers. She was carrying a basket. "Hello, hello, hello, darlings!" she caroled from the doorway. "Mother baked a simply heavenly, huge ham yesterday and we both thought what a wonderful idea if she made up sandwiches and some of her pet hot potato salad for your snack tonight. So I ran over to bring it to you."

Linda, still standing back of Paulette, winked audaciously at Gayle as she said, "My word, but that's thoughtful of you. You know, we were just talking about you."

"Were you, really?" Paulette was all smiles.

"Yes. Rosemary was giving us the good news about the club," Linda went on smoothly, "and I immediately began stewing about the floor show for the opening night. Your mother told me about your new patriotic costume—"

"She did? Why, the naughty girl!"

"Um-hmm. And I was just telling the others how upset I am not to find the proper accompaniment for you. Huck's hill-billy band is going to be

PAULETTE'S BASKET

a bit on the corny side, and Tillie Marshall plays only the sweet tunes.”

“Oh, I see.” Paulette’s manner was instantly chilled.

Rosemary stepped forward. “Can’t I relieve you of the basket?” she said. “I was just going to tell Linda, as you came in, that if she would like, I’ll send to Philadelphia for my accordion. I’m a little out of practice, but not too much so. I didn’t bring it, because I played it so much last year that it was a little bad for the study schedule.”

Linda rallied swiftly. “That would be generous of you, Rosemary. Isn’t it silly? Here I’ve roomed with you almost a month, and I never thought to ask if you were a musician.”

OPENING SHOW

ROSEMARY, ABSORBED in listening to a German newscast at nine o'clock, didn't appear to notice that the other three girls had gone into the bedroom and shut the door. Linda stretched out on the bed, reading by the bedlamp. Gayle and Susan studied at the desk.

It had been quiet in the room for almost an hour when Linda shut her book with a bang. "Anyone else want to take time out for an apple?"

"Thanks, sister. I'm still filled with ham sandwiches and potato salad. I must admit that when Mrs. Showers attempts to do a bit of buttering up, she does a delicious job." Gayle yawned. "I'll join you, Linda. I guess I've absorbed as much of these English notes as I'll be able to retain until morning, anyhow."

OPENING SHOW

Linda returned with two bright, shiny apples. "Rosemary's still at it. She was so wrapped up in that gibberish that I didn't even attract her attention by dangling an apple in front of her."

"She pulled a whizzer with that accordion offer, didn't she?" Susan grinned at her sister.

Linda shrugged. "Oh, I knew Paulette would find someone to play for her dancing. It was a little startling to have her find a solution to her problem among us."

"I don't want to be unfair," Gayle blurted, "but it really looked disloyal. Rosemary must have gathered how we all feel about Paulette—"

"Why, Gayle!" Susan exclaimed in astonishment. "I am amazed! I thought you were the one girl I knew who never made nasty remarks about anyone!"

Gayle colored. "I'll take it back. I was too hasty."

"Now, girls, don't be too alarmed." Linda grinned as she admired the apple. "After all, we haven't heard Rosemary play her accordion. Could be, she can't swing it at all. And if Paulette dis-

covers that Rosemary is on the mediocre side, she will give forth with one of her famous explosions, and you will need have no fears about Rosemary's loyalties."

Gayle smothered another yawn. "I'm afraid I'm too sleepy to figure out the possibilities. I'm going to sleep and forget everything—except that River City will soon have its 'Pastime.' Good-night, all."

Susan began gathering papers from Rosemary's desk. "Count me in on the shut-eye, chum. It's our week to get up early and start breakfast. Sweet dreams, Linda."

Rosemary sent a telegram before school the next morning, to Adeline Stewart in Philadelphia. The accordion arrived Thursday. She played for an hour, after dinner, the girls enthusiastically requesting their favorites. And she could play anything, from South American sambas to New Orleans jive tunes.

The girls were delighted, but she refused to play after eight. "I've already missed the first news from Italy and Germany," she declared.

"We're having a rehearsal after school tomorrow,

OPENING SHOW

in assembly," Linda told her. "I'll help you lug the accordion to school."

"Thanks. It is a bit heavy," Rosemary replied.

The acts for Linda's opening-night show were still a little rough, and the dark-haired girl was an exacting director. But she could find no fault with Paulette's dancing nor with Rosemary's accompaniment. And Paulette was bubbling with delight. "It was so sweet of you to wire all the way to Philadelphia for your instrument," she cried, after the first number. "And the rhythm is simply wonderful. How could you bear to leave your accordion so far away?"

"I like it too much, I fancy," Rosemary answered. "I really spent too much time at it, last year. I was so determined to learn your different styles of music, and there were several good piano players at Miss Willoughby's. We spent all our spare time having jam sessions."

Paulette had the time of her life. The other entertainers called for encore after encore, and no matter what the tune requested, Rosemary knew it. Paulette, flushed and happy, finally begged off

dancing again. And then Rosemary would play no more.

Linda stormed and raged wrathfully, in traditional short-tempered "director" style, during the next two weeks, whenever anyone mentioned the floor show. But actually, she was cheerful. Gayle noticed, several times, that Linda was smiling to herself. Obviously, she knew some good news which she could scarcely keep.

The entire school was absorbed in the plans for the opening night. The excitement about the explosions at the shell-loading plant was completely forgotten. The manual training classes, under Mr. Cronin, were working early in the mornings and until ten every evening, remodeling the club's quarters on the third floor of the Y.M.C.A. building.

On Thursday before the big opening night on Saturday, Gayle and Linda were alone in the apartment. Susan had to go to the public library to consult some reference books; Rosemary—and her accordion—had been invited to the Showers' home for dinner.

The two girls were studying in the living room.

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Linda broke a long silence by saying, "My word, I'm so used to hearing that short-wave stuff, I can scarcely concentrate in this heavenly quiet."

Gayle looked up from her book smiling. "Linda, how about letting me in on your secret? You've been going around with a canary-that-swallowed-the-cat look on your sweet little puss for over a week."

Linda looked shocked. "Haven't I really covered up any better than that?"

Gayle's answer was an amused chuckle.

Linda laughed, too. "Well, I can't let you in on the secret. But I can give you a strong hint. Remember, you were upset because you thought Rosemary hadn't been loyal?"

"I'm still embarrassed at my outburst," Gayle answered gravely.

"Well, you needn't have worried," Linda answered cryptically. And she refused to tell more.

Dress rehearsal took place Friday evening at the just-completed club.

Gayle and Susan remained awake, dressed in pajamas and robes, until the other two girls re-

turned. "How did it go?" Susan asked. "We thought you'd be exhausted and hungry, so we made some sandwiches and cocoa—"

"We couldn't possibly absorb another calorie," Linda objected, giggling. "Bill Rogers was trying out the soda fountain his father donated to the cause, and we're bursting with banana splits and milk shakes. I'm glad that the parents are going to help out with the milk bar tomorrow night. I shudder to think what would happen to the self-supporting idea that Worth discusses so glibly—"

"You still haven't told us how the dress rehearsal went!" Susan insisted.

Rosemary and Linda looked at each other and started to laugh. They howled with glee. Rosemary sank to the davenport, holding her sides helplessly. Linda finally managed to sputter, "Sorry. Can't tell you the joke. You'll have to wait until tomorrow."

"It really wasn't a complete dress rehearsal," Rosemary gasped. "You see—the dress I'm going to wear is white and there's a lot of fresh red, white

and blue paint about—" She started to laugh again.

"Gosh, Rosemary! You scared me then!" Linda cried, still giggling. "I thought you were going to give the whole thing away."

"These idiots disgust me," Susan said primly to Gayle. "Won't you please have a sandwich? We'll just ignore them—"

"I'm not only annoyed, I'm burned up—with curiosity," Gayle confessed. "And I'm so angry with myself for promising Worth I wouldn't go to the club until tomorrow night. I can't even see if those cute seersucker drapes we made in sewing class, look all right at the windows. . . ."

"It's really very attractive," Linda said, her eyes still twinkling. "And it's going to be loads of fun. Come, Rosemary. To bed with you. I can't have a sleepy entertainer tomorrow night. . . ."

Worth called for Gayle early Saturday evening. She was to assist him, until nine o'clock, with selling membership tickets at the door. The student body had bought its fifty-cent cards at school, but

there were a lot of recent River City high school graduates expected to take advantage of the "to twenty-one years of age" sale at the door.

But first, Worth proudly showed the club to Gayle.

It was a gay and cheerful spot, with its papered ceiling of rich blue and silver stars; its white walls and scarlet seersucker drapes. The art department had furnished mounted water colors and oils for the wall decorations; these were to be changed once a month.

There was a small raised platform with a piano and space for five or six musicians. It was flanked by an ornate juke box, which would furnish the music for dancing on most occasions.

"We won't have all these tables and chairs around the sides of the dance floor, ordinarily," Worth explained. "We'll have seating capacity for eighty in the booths. We're going to have Chinese checkers, monopoly, and other games available. And we'll have a few davenports and lounge chairs and magazines in that far corner. Mr. Marple has donated two ping-pong tables and equip-

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ment, which we'll set up along that side where there are the most windows."

"It's really wonderful," Gayle told him sincerely. "It's hard to believe that this was just an idea, five weeks ago."

"I'm glad you like it," Worth replied, gazing at her steadily. "I know we're going to have grand times here together."

"I—I hope so, too," Gayle smiled. "But just now, hadn't we better get on duty?"

"That's right. We know there's going to be an enormous crowd, so I asked Lee Hawkins to call for Susan early. They'll save a table for us, so we can see the floor show. It's going to be at nine-thirty."

Even selling membership tickets was great fun, Gayle discovered. She saw many friends from last year's graduating class, whom she hadn't seen for months. And everyone was delighted with the club. Worth was showered with congratulations and Gayle had never seen that self-possessed young gentleman so near embarrassment.

Just as Dorothy Barnes and Jeff Byron came to

relieve Gayle and Worth, at nine o'clock, there was a flurry down the steps.

Gayle stared unbelievably. Mrs. Mallory, in a handsome gown of wine velvet and bedecked with diamonds, was slowly mounting the stairs.

"Mrs. Mallory!" she exclaimed, "I'm so glad you could come for our opening night."

The old lady was breathing heavily from the long climb. "If I had realized," she gasped, "that you youngsters were going to have to mount these steps every day, I should have insisted on Mr. Sinclair's finding a better spot—"

"Oh, we won't mind!" Gayle objected quickly. "We think it's perfect."

"My dear, would you point out Mr. Sinclair's table—"

At that moment, the principal rushed forward and greeted Mrs. Mallory. "You're just in time for the entertainment," he said in greeting. "Come right over to our table."

Worth and Gayle were turning to join Susan and Lee, when a noisy, laughing crew came up the

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stairs. It was Cadet Ted Swain, with six fellow students from the Navy pre-flight school, in Iowa City. Ted joyfully introduced Gayle and Worth to his companions, and accepted their congratulations for his winning name for the club. Ted soon was surrounded by other old friends. . . .

Suddenly, it was time for the floor show. The small orchestra played a tremendous fanfare, the lights were dimmed, and a bright spotlight played on Linda as she walked to the center of the little stage. She looked stunning in a handsome black satin evening dress, glittering with sequins. Gayle gasped. "Susan! Where did she get that knock-out dress?"

Susan chuckled. "I'll tell you later . . ."

Linda bowed to the noisy applause, and held up one graceful hand in a signal for silence. She paused easily, until there was no sound in the room. "Ladies and gentlemen," she began, in her rich, throaty tones, "our first number will be a noisy one, I'm afraid, from 'Huck's Comin'-Round-the-Mountain Blue Blowers.' "

She waved toward the stage, the spotlight widened and Huck Willoughby led off with his trumpet on the first strains of "She'll be Comin' Round the Mountain." The audience chuckled, then burst into roars of laughter as they noted the costumes and the home-made instruments of the other musicians. There were washboards, cigar-box banjos, cow bells, triangles. Bill Rogers was pounding out chords on the piano with more enthusiasm than accuracy.

The audience liked it. After two encores, Linda announced the next number. Four sophomore boys gave an exhibition of tumbling. Then Linda introduced Tillie Marshall, a pretty blonde, who sang and played her own accompaniment for "Sleepy Lagoon" and "Somebody Loves Me."

"Linda should be delighted," Gayle whispered to Susan, when the applause finally faded. "The audience is so pleased."

Linda strolled back into the spotlight. "The next number will be 'Yankee Doodle Boy,' interpreted as a military tap by Miss Paulette Showers.

Her accompaniment will be played on the accordion by Miss Rosemary Travis, loaned but not leased by London. . . .”

The lights went out completely, to flash on seconds later. Paulette was stunning, Gayle thought, in her gleaming satin “Uncle Sam” suit. Her trousers were scarlet, the tail-coat a rich blue, and vest, boots and high hat of white.

It was lively entertainment, and Rosemary’s accompaniment had an irresistible beat. On the second chorus, the spotlight widened, and Rosemary took a tiny step forward.

“Why, she’s beautiful!” Gayle gasped, involuntarily. Rosemary’s hair fell softly about her shoulders, a spun-gold frame for her animated face. She was wearing a white chiffon evening dress with a tight bodice and lovely draped ruffles, outlined in gold sequins. Even the handsome instrument, in pearl-white and gold, was a part of the picture.

As the light widened to include her, she started to sing. There was something irresistible in her clear contralto, her perfect diction, her definite

rhythm, as she sang the words to the typically American song.

Gayle's alert eyes, in spite of her surprise at this stunning unknown talent of the English girl, caught the faltering misstep that Paulette made. And she saw, too, that Paulette forgot to smile momentarily.

"Paulette *didn't* know Rosemary was going to share her star act," Gayle realized. "That's why Linda assured me that Rosemary hadn't been disloyal to us. . . ."

The crowd really went wild, when the girls finished.

Linda finally stepped in and held up her hand. "While Paulette changes costumes for her next number, Rosemary will play Tschaikowsky's "Concerto in B Flat Minor."

It was magnificent. The huge room was filled with rich tone as Rosemary played, organ-like notes swelling and falling in liquid melody. The audience was hushed, respectful in attention. Subtly, then, the rhythm changed and Rosemary smiled as she started to sing the same melody in dance

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rhythm, her toe in silver slippers tapping as the lyric of "Tonight We Love" carried through the room.

Paulette's second number was an anti-climax. She looked lovely in her blue ballet costume and she was graceful and pretty as she floated to the strains of "Stardust." As she finished the first chorus, cries of "Sing some more!" "Let's have more Rosemary!" came from all parts of the room.

Rosemary obliged, as the spotlight widened again.

This time, it was quite apparent that Paulette was annoyed. She didn't bother to smile.

But few noticed.

Rosemary had stolen the show.

Paulette flounced from the floor, when Rosemary played the final chords. Rosemary turned to follow, but the crowd refused to let her go.

Linda drew her to the center of the floor. "How would you like to hear Rosemary's imitation of Gracie Fields singing, 'Shall I Be an Old Man's Darling—Or a Young Man's Slave?'"

The answer was unmistakable.

In addition to her charming voice, Rosemary had the true and rare comedienne's gift of sensitive timing. The crowd howled with laughter as she sang the amusing old song. Still they refused to let her go. Then she sang "There'll Always Be an England," with such obvious sincerity and depth of feeling, that it brought tears to Gayle's eyes.

Rosemary bowed again and again to the applause, but she refused to sing and play any more.

The dance orchestra returned to the stage and Linda announced "A broom tag" for the next number. "Everybody dance!" she cried.

Immediately she was surrounded by students and parents who congratulated her on the success of the floor show. As Worth and Gayle crowded close, they overheard Cadet Swain saying, "Linda! How would you like to perform a patriotic duty?"

"What do you mean?" Linda was flushed and smiling with happiness.

"I'm chairman of the entertainment committee for a cadet dance at the Iowa Memorial Union, two

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weeks from tonight. My worries would be over if you'd bring this same floor show to Iowa City for it. I'll arrange transportation and everything. Say yes, Linda, please!"

"Of course! I'm certain everyone would be thrilled at the chance, Ted!"

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THERE WAS no doubt about it.

“Pastime” was a tremendous success.

Monday, after school, the place was nearly as crowded as it had been on Saturday evening. Linda, Susan and Gayle strolled down to the club after their last class. “Why isn’t Rosemary coming?” Susan asked. “I heard more talk about her talent at school today than I did about the club, itself.”

Linda shrugged. “I asked her to join us, but she said she had to study.”

“Probably some short-wave program she wanted to pick up, I suppose,” Gayle suggested. “Besides, in spite of her marvelous poise Saturday night in the show, I think she’s a little shy. She is gracious in accepting congratulations, but she always man-

ages to change the subject when anyone talks about it.”

Susan chuckled suddenly. “Did you notice how Paulette cut her cold this morning in the senior room?”

“I could have told you that,” Linda said. “Paulette refused to talk to her Saturday night—after the show. And when I told Paulette that Ted Swain wanted us to give the show at Iowa City, she gave me a curdling look and went out without answering.”

“By the way, Linda,” Gayle said, “I’ve heard more comment about how stunning you looked in that black frock. And all the girls were doing raves about Rosemary’s white and gold dream dress—”

“Yes. It was sweet of Rosemary to let me wear it. When Rosemary wired to Adeline Stewart for her accordion, she told why she wanted it. And Mrs. Stewart sent four knockout evening numbers along, saying that she didn’t have much excuse for wearing them, now that her husband has gone away to the Navy.”

The girls found a booth at the “Pastime” and or-

dered lemonades from the freckled and grinning freshman boy who was serving their section. Mrs. Cash, a white-haired and jovial matron, was presiding at the milk bar and having the time of her life, laughing and joking with the club members and the student help who clustered around.

The new ping-pong tables had been set up, and doubles games were going on at both, while about ten boys and girls sat on the bench alongside, cheering and jeering while they waited their turns.

The club was in full swing.

Someone put a nickel in the juke box, and Bing Crosby's voice, singing "Pale Moon" set every one's toes tapping. Huck Willoughby, Lee Hawkins and Jeff Byron asked Susan, Linda and Gayle to dance. Jeff said to Gayle, as they glided across the floor, "I'll have to get in a few steps before Worth appears. Where is he, by the way? I supposed he'd be here every minute the club's open, the way he plugged for it."

Gayle laughed. "I think he'd like to be . . . but he's still editor of the *Blue and Grey*. He's busy copy-reading and editing the next issue."

When the girls returned home, they discovered Rosemary absorbed, as was her custom, in short-wave programs. But she had remembered to put the roast and potatoes in the oven.

"Mrs. Mallory came to call this afternoon, shortly after I got home," Rosemary told the others, as the program ended. "She enjoyed the opening of the club Saturday night, and wanted to tell all of us. I assured her that I would relay the message."

"I'm so glad she came," Gayle said sincerely. "I can scarcely believe, even yet, that she gave five hundred dollars to the cause. She was so—so chilly toward us, that afternoon we first went to ask about rooms."

"Benton told me yesterday," Rosemary added, "that she's considering staying in River City this winter. She's almost decided to open her home, once a week, for sewing for the Red Cross."

"Why—why, that would be wonderful! It would be packed," Linda said with a grin, "and not entirely for patriotic reasons. Mrs. Mallory rarely entertains local guests. . . ."

"Don't forget, Linda," Susan reminded her sister,

“that we were all curious to see the inside of Mal-lory Mansion, not two months ago.”

Linda shrugged good-naturedly, and then turned to Rosemary. “What shall we wear when we go to Iowa City to improve the morale of the pre-flight cadets?”

Rosemary colored. “Oh, must we go, Linda?”

“Don’t you want to? After being the star of the show?”

“Well—if I have to. But I dislike intensely hav-ing people angry with me, and Paulette hasn’t spoken to me since Saturday night. I just thought if I didn’t go to Iowa City, she might. . . .”

“Oh, Rosemary!” Linda blurted. “Must you British always be such top-hole sports? Let her pout!”

The fair-haired girl still objected. “But, really, I didn’t know I would be stealing the top of the show from Paulette. I just thought I would be sharing the spot with her. . . .”

“Forget her,” Linda urged. “She has flatly re-fused to go to Iowa City. And Ted made it unmis-takably clear that he wanted you above all the

others." She grinned again. "Remember, you are our Ally. Mr. Cordell Hull would not like your reluctance, and I shudder to think what Mr. Winston Churchill would say."

Rosemary laughed, too. "It is my duty, I suppose."

"It's your duty, too," Gayle said, "to wear that heavenly white frock. With Linda in the black number, the morale of the cadets should shoot up twenty points."

"I'll go, of course," Rosemary declared.

But many times, during the next two weeks, Gayle noticed that Rosemary looked troubled and unhappy. Not once did she join the others at "Pastime." And for four days in a row, she failed to know the answer for the oral quiz period in English class. . . .

"Rosemary is much too absorbed in that dratted radio," Gayle told the other two, one afternoon as they met at the club. "If she doesn't perk up in her studies, she's not going to earn passing grades. And it isn't because she's stupid. She's brilliant, really."

"It's because she does everything that way," Linda remarked sagely. "Remember? She didn't want to send for her accordion because she had spent too much time practicing on it last year. She seems to concentrate on one thing to the exclusion of all else. Ed Hackett asked me yesterday if she ever dated. It seems she's turned him down for movie and dinner invitations a half dozen times. And I know Bill and Jeff have asked her to come here to the Club a couple of times. She's always sweet about refusing, but I know it's simply because she would rather spend the time listening to the short-wave programs."

"I think we should have a heart-to-heart talk with her next week," Susan suggested, "after the Iowa City expedition. We can't have one of our quartet failing in school."

"Do you think we should talk to Benton? Or to Mrs. Mallory?" Linda asked.

"Not until we try Susan's plan," Gayle said. "She isn't dangerously behind in her notebooks or grades, as yet. But she could be, easily."

On the Friday before Linda's floor show was to

be given in Iowa City, Worth stopped Gayle outside English class. "Mr. Sinclair is chaperoning the group for the cadet's dinner dance," he told her, grinning. "He and Mrs. Sinclair have asked me to go along. He also thoughtfully pointed out that Ted had said it was all right for me to bring a partner, and I've been racking my brain for twenty seconds trying to think whom I should ask. All of a sudden it came to me, just now. Maybe you would go!"

Gayle giggled. "As long as we would be going with the principal and his wife, I believe Dad and Mother would give their consent. Thank you for thinking of me!"

Huck Willoughby's father owned a bus line, set up for the purpose of bringing war workers from nearby towns to the shell-loading plant in River City. He loaned one of the relief buses and a driver for the Iowa City trip, so the expedition was even more fun than originally planned.

The Sinclairs were well-liked by all the students, and the trip was gay. Huck had brought his portable radio and they listened to the résumé of foot-

ball scores. Then Mrs. Sinclair suggested that Rosemary get out her accordion, on the way, and the group joined in singing old and new favorites. Gayle was impressed, all over again, because of the size of Rosemary's repertoire. It seemed impossible that she should know such oldies as "Sleepy-Time Gal," "Nobody's Sweetheart," "Ida," as well as "Love's Old Sweet Song" and "Camp Town Races."

"She seems less British, the longer we know her," Gayle confided to Worth.

"You're just becoming better acquainted," Worth said, with a chuckle. "I've even noticed you picking up a few of her expressions. You take 'dim views' of certain things, and someone else is a 'good type.'"

"Do I, really?" Gayle chuckled at the joke on herself. "But what made me think of it, just now, is that she seems to know so many of our strictly American tunes. Old ones, too."

"Perhaps she has always been a short-wave fan, even before she came to America," Worth pointed out. "She'd have learned all these tunes, if she

listened much to American radio programs.”

“That’s it, no doubt. I just never thought to ask her if she did listen to our radio shows when she lived in England.”

The cadet dinner and dance was a delightful experience.

The girls of the party from River City had changed to their evening frocks in the dressing rooms downstairs. Gayle wore a brown-and-gold taffeta, with gold slippers and a heavy gold necklace that had been her grandmother’s. Her coppery curls were piled high, and held in place with four antique gold combs, also an inheritance.

“You look positively stunning,” Linda told her. “If you could only dance!”

Gayle looked startled, and Linda chuckled, “I mean, for the floor show, silly.”

“She doesn’t have to dance,” Rosemary said unexpectedly. “It is enough for cadet morale, just to have her sit still and look pretty.”

Gayle blushed, and left hurriedly. “You embarrass me—” she murmured, as she went through the door.

Rosemary was wearing a simple, long-sleeved dinner dress in pale blue chiffon. Linda's dark hair and eyes were set off by a scarlet mandarin coat over a slim black skirt. Both would change later to the evening dresses they had worn before, for the floor show.

Cadet Ted Swain greeted the guests from River City as they mounted the stairs. He led the group to a table in the main lounge of the Memorial Union, near the stage where the Bluejackets' Dance Band was playing. "What wonderful music!" Gayle exclaimed.

Ted grinned swiftly. "We think they're tops. Most of the musicians played with big-name orchestras before they came aboard."

It was a lovely setting for the big party. The tables, bright with candles and fall flowers, were set around the edges of the huge dance floor. Gayle could see across the wide sun porch to the Iowa River, flowing serenely below. Beyond was the west campus, with the widespread buildings of the impressive hospital units.

The music formed a pleasing background to the

gay conversation at the table. Between courses, several couples danced and the cadets looked handsome in their dress uniforms.

“Where in the world do you get enough girls to go around?” Linda asked Ted. “And such pretty ones!”

“Oh, several of the fellows are married. A lot of them invited home-town girls, if they live near enough—and the majority are co-eds at the University,” Ted replied. “Several times, too, groups of Cedar Rapids girls have come down on the inter-urban for our afternoon tea dances. Lots of the fellows have asked the girls they met then, to come back for this party.”

The dinner was over before nine, and the dance started shortly after. The floor show was scheduled for 10:15. Those who were taking part left for the dressing rooms a half hour in advance.

Gayle was proud of her room-mates. Linda’s poise was perfect; Rosemary was delightful. The cadets and their girls were even more enthusiastic over the entertainment than the River City audience had been, two weeks before.

It was with true regret that the Sinclairs urged their charges to come to the bus before the party finished at twelve. "My, I'd love to stay," Gayle murmured to Worth, as the bus pulled away from the entrance. "Still, your memories of a party are always best if you leave just at the height."

Worth managed to smother a yawn. "I had a wonderful time, but I'm certainly sleepy now. Wonder if we'll all manage to stay awake on the ride home—"

Huck Willoughby had turned on his portable radio and suddenly everyone in the bus was alert and wide awake as they heard the excited voice of the announcer—"will investigate, as four persons are seriously injured, and the damage to the River City locks and dam on the Mississippi is estimated at more than a million dollars. The oil barge, owned and operated by the Southwestern Oil Company, exploded at 10 P.M. tonight, just after entering the first lock. Fires are being brought under control."

There was a shocked silence in the bus, and then

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the interrupted program of dance music pulsed from the loud speaker.

Linda cried out, just as Rosemary slipped from her seat to the aisle. "She fainted! Oh, goodness, someone stop the bus! Rosemary has fainted!"

CLIPPINGS IN A NOTE-BOOK

THE END of that ride from Iowa City was always a confused blur in Gayle's memory.

It seemed ages after the big bus slowed to a stop before Rosemary regained consciousness, but actually it was only a few seconds. The pale girl was embarrassed at having so much attention and insisted weakly that she was all right. "I often faint," she told them. "Really, I'll be all right." She smiled wanly. "I hate being so mid-Victorian, but it was such a shock, hearing that announcer say 'River City.'"

"You're tired, and you've had an exciting evening," Mrs. Sinclair said sympathetically. "You're going to stretch out and relax on that long rear seat, for the rest of the trip. We'll have the driver turn

out the inside lights and Huck will turn off the radio, and everyone will try to be quiet.”

She spoke with gentle firmness, and her suggestions were followed. In spite of her anxiety over Rosemary and her worry at the news, Gayle almost dozed off during the trip. The bus stopped first at their apartment.

“Do you think we should call a doctor?” Gayle asked Rosemary.

Rosemary smiled brightly. The color was restored to her face. “My word, no!” Really, Gayle. I do this quite often. I’ll be fine after a night of rest. Please don’t be so upset about me!”

Linda slept in Susan’s bed, in the room with Gayle that night, so that nothing would disturb Rosemary’s rest.

But early Sunday morning, both girls were roused by the sound of Rosemary’s radio. “I guess we didn’t need to waste our worries on her,” Linda grumbled sleepily. “I was all set to sleep until nine o’clock and just have time for breakfast before church—”

Gayle got up and slipped into a warm robe. “She

has the news from Des Moines," she murmured. "I want to hear more about that explosion, too."

Rosemary, in a flannel robe, was huddled in front of the radio. "Oh, I'm sorry!" she said, when she saw Gayle. "I thought I had it turned low enough that it wouldn't wake you."

Rosemary's face was pale and colorless above the rich deep green of her heavy dressing gown.

"You shouldn't be out of bed and in this chill room," Gayle scolded. "I'll light a fire. Have you heard any more about the explosion?"

The announcer was just closing the news so Rosemary snapped off the radio. "Yes. Actually, it wasn't as bad as first thought. Two men were badly burned, two had slight burns, and no one was killed. But it may be months before the locks can be used again."

"How did it happen?"

Rosemary sighed. "That's the horrible part of the story. It was a disgruntled employee—a Max Smith—who deliberately set off a fire on board the oil barge. He was enraged because he was getting only time-and-a-half wages for working on Sunday!"

"Oh, no!" Gayle gasped. "Why—he might as well be a real saboteur! Why, that's frightful, Rosemary!"

"I know. In a smaller way, it's as shameful as what happened to the *Normandie*—"

"That means there will be no more river traffic this fall, and it may delay things several weeks in the spring."

Rosemary nodded.

Gayle set a match to the kindling and papers under the logs in the fireplace. "It makes one wonder," she said thoughtfully. "First, the explosions at the shell-loading plant. And now, the explosion at the locks. What will be next?"

"This Max Smith," Rosemary continued, as if she hadn't heard, "claims that he had no quarrel except with the Southwestern Oil Company. He had planned for the explosion to occur before the oil barge reached the locks. He is extremely remorseful and sobbing in his cell, because of the damage to the government property and the injuries to his co-workers."

Gayle's eyes blazed with quick anger. "He

should be tried for treason! It is almost enough to make one wish for the ancient justice of an eye-for-an-eye! I suppose he didn't even get a tiny blister—”

The papers were filled, the next few days, with stories about Max Smith, his co-workers who had been the victims of his spite work, and his clever defense. He had hired Paulette Showers' father as his attorney. Max Smith was sentenced to five years of hard labor in the penitentiary at Fort Madison—but with good behavior, he could be free in six months. . . .

As with the shell-loading plant explosion, however, the excitement soon died down. The swift routine of school work absorbed the four girls again.

Linda persuaded Rosemary to join the Glee Club. The English girl visited the new “Pastime” rarely, but she was faithful to the Glee Club rehearsals, held Wednesday afternoons after school. Even from these, however, she darted as soon as the formal singing ended; she raced home to listen to short-wave radio.

A couple of weeks after the oil-barge explosion,

Linda, Gayle and Rosemary were at Glee Club rehearsal. Miss Lee, the vocal instructor, had announced that try-outs would be held the following week for the all-high-school operetta, which was to be the ever-popular "Student Prince" this year.

When the rehearsal hour was over, Gayle and Linda paused to talk with Miss Lee about the coming production. "Paulette is going to be a bit miffed," Linda murmured to Gayle, as they waited. "Rosemary will have the lead without question, and Paulette always wants the star billing."

Gayle glanced around the room. "Why, she's gone! She didn't even wait to get a try-out book."

Linda shrugged. "I suppose we'll have to do a selling job, to persuade her to take part. But she can study ours."

"Perhaps she just went away for a moment," Gayle pointed out. "I see she left her notebook over on that desk."

But the notebook was still there, when Gayle and Linda were ready to leave. "Rosemary must have forgotten it," Gayle said. "I'll take it home to her."

"You run along," Linda said. "Don't wait for

me. I still have about ten minutes' work up in the school library."

"I will, if you don't mind walking home alone," Gayle replied. "I thought I'd bake a spice cake for dinner."

Linda grinned. "Don't let me detain you!"

Gayle was about half way home when Rosemary's heavy notebook slipped from her arm and fell to the sidewalk. Some papers spilled from an inner pocket and Gayle stopped to pick them up.

Her curiosity flared.

Why should Rosemary be saving clippings about Max Smith? She had a half-dozen of his pictures, the stories about the explosion, a picture of the court room showing Attorney Showers and the defendant. Clipped together with these newspaper stories and pictures was a short-wave broadcast schedule, cut from the "Movie-Radio Guide" for the first week of October. Several of the news broadcast times for Germany had been checked with a red pencil.

Startled, Gayle recalled that the oil-barge explosion had taken place the first weekend in October.

Doubts, fears, questions were jumbled in Gayle's troubled thoughts. Why was Rosemary so absorbed in short-wave radio? Why had she kept all these clippings and pictures? What did these checked broadcast times for German radio signify? Why had she fainted at the news?

Hurriedly, Gayle thrust the clippings back into place.

It might take time—she must proceed slowly and cautiously—but the grim resolve was formed at that moment. She would find the answers to these troubling questions. . . .

TRIO AND SOLO

“HEY, GAYLE! Did you see this?”

Worth was waiting in his car, outside the apartment, when she returned from the farm late Sunday afternoon.

He was waving a sheet of newspaper and grinning.

“What is it?” Gayle gave a basket of food to Linda, to take on up to the apartment, and turned to look at the newspaper. It was the Sunday *Des Moines Register*. “River City Students have a Night Club,” the headline ran. “Social Center ‘Packs ’Em in’—High School Solves Fun Problems,” Gayle read.

“Why, Worth! This is wonderful. Did you know about it before?”

The boy nodded. “I talked to the reporter last week. I was disappointed that none of you were

there when he took the pictures, last Wednesday afternoon.”

“We had Glee Club rehearsal,” Gayle answered. “Linda suggested that we go for a little while, but Rosemary had gone on home early and forgotten her notebook—”

She didn’t complete the explanation, but started to read the news story aloud. “River City, Iowa— The River City Student Center, Inc., known as the ‘Pastime,’ is paying dividends to many River City residents these days.

“The ‘Pastime,’ River City’s newest night spot, open to all high school and junior college students, is one answer to the so-called ‘growing juvenile delinquency problem.’ ”

“That’s not all,” Worth interrupted. “The local Gazette is going to carry a story tomorrow afternoon about how pleased Judge Moore is with the experiment. He says juvenile arrests have dropped appreciably since the ‘Pastime’ opened.”

“Worth, you didn’t realize how important that editorial you wrote for the first *Blue and Grey* was going to be, did you?”

Worth grinned. "No, as I remember, I wrote it from a strictly selfish point of view. It was all because we had to stand in line for movie tickets—and it began to look like a long, hard winter for us high school Joes."

Gayle read the rest of the long story in the paper and glanced at the pictures. The article described the workings of the club; how it was rapidly becoming self-supporting; how the Parent-Teacher Association and the Kiwanis club had assisted.

When she had finished, Worth had additional news. "Mr. Sinclair called me this afternoon, and said that he had had three long-distance calls—one from Waterloo, one from Sioux City and one from Mason City—asking if delegations might be sent to look over the place. They want to set up similar recreational spots."

"I shouldn't wonder," Gayle said softly, "that you have made a valuable and substantial contribution to our war effort. It's indirect, but it's there."

Worth's quick grin flashed. "You actually have forgotten, haven't you?"

"Forgotten?" Gayle was puzzled.

"That it was your idea, in the first place."

"Was it? Honestly?"

"Sure it was. Don't you remember? That day in Mallory Park, when we decided it wasn't worth waiting in line to get into the movie? I said I wished we had a spot of our own, and you said—just like that—'Why don't we? Just for high school students. You could campaign for it in the paper.'"

"It was sort of a mutual idea, then," Gayle answered. "And then you were the spark-plug. You did write the editorial and you talked with Mr. Sinclair."

"We could probably have a number of good, mutual ideas," Worth began seriously, "as partners—"

He was interrupted by the noisy arrival of Bill Rogers' decrepit old roadster. Paulette Showers rode with him, her blonde prettiness enhanced by a becoming new suit of soft blue wool. She looked a bit too dressy for the ancient, battered car. But she smiled sweetly. "There you two are!" she caroled, as the engine sputtered protestingly and died. "We've been looking for you all over town, Worth!

Bill's mother has asked to find a congenial couple and come along to his house for a spot of Sunday evening supper and ping-pong."

"Sounds swell," Worth agreed, turning to Gayle. "How about it?"

"I'd like it," Gayle answered. "I'll just have to take my things up to the apartment, check in, and check out."

"We had thought," Paulette went on sweetly, "of asking Ed Hackett and Rosemary, but she's been a bit on the snubbing side lately. Doesn't she like the 'Pastime,' Gayle?"

Gayle hesitated a moment. It would take too long to count ten—"Of course, she does. But she studies a lot."

"Oh, does she?" Paulette sounded surprised. "I had heard rumors that she wasn't doing so well in her classes—"

"It's hard for her," Gayle said, defensively. "After all, she is a refugee. And it's difficult to change schools as frequently as she has done. She spends a lot of time on her hobby, too."

"Her hobby? What is her hobby?" Paulette

was leaning forward now, her eyes glittering with curiosity.

Gayle paused again. Why was Paulette so anxious to know these things about Rosemary. "Oh, you must get her to tell you all about it one of these days," she replied airily. "I must get upstairs with my overnight case. Mrs. Rogers will be wondering what has happened to us—"

"I'll carry your bag up for you," Worth offered.

"Thank you." Gayle hurried ahead, to open doors.

Linda and Susan were studying in the living room. The sound of Rosemary's radio, tuned too low to be heard beyond the closed door, came indistinctly from the bedroom.

"Any news?" Worth asked.

"We wouldn't know," Susan answered, grinning. "Rosemary retired to the bedroom with it when we came in, and Susan and I have been concentrating on the books."

Gayle explained about the supper invitation. "And we'll play a few games of ping-pong afterwards."

"Bring her home a little early, will you, Worth?" Susan said. "We'll wait up for you, Gayle. We have something to discuss with you."

"You sound as if it might be serious!" Gayle exclaimed.

"Oh, nothing to worry about," Susan replied reassuringly. "It's just something that should be settled tonight."

"I'll be back before ten," Gayle promised.

It was a jolly evening, at the Rogers' home. But Gayle was quiet and preoccupied. What had been bothering Susan?

The Swift girls were waiting in the living room when Gayle got home. The radio still sounded from the bedroom.

"Change into your pajamas and robe, too," Susan suggested. "Then we'll have a meeting of the board of directors."

"I can't wait," Gayle dropped into a comfortable chair near the fire. "The suspense was too much for me, all evening. Paulette was the center of all attention and I was so perturbed about what you had

to tell me that I didn't even bother to be insulting."

Susan chuckled. "It isn't so bad as all that. It's just that Rosemary has offered to pay a third of all our rents, if we will let her have the bedroom alone, and let Linda sleep on a day bed in our room."

Gayle sat erect. "Why?" She turned to Linda. "Have you two quarrelled?"

Linda chuckled. "Fancy anyone's having a quarrel with a sunny soul like me! No. No bitter words. It's only that she feels she is disturbing the rest of us with the radio, and if she has it in the bedroom, with the door closed, she can listen in complete freedom."

"It may be a trifle crowded," Gayle said, "but I'm sure we can manage all right. It is true that the radio is a little annoying, going so constantly. But I honestly think we should refuse, for Rosemary's sake. She isn't doing so well at school, and Mrs. Mallory stopped me in the drive the other day, to ask if Rosemary had had a cold. She thought she was looking thinner."

"But we can't refuse!" Linda looked shocked.

"She really asked me—in a very nice way. And I think her offer to pay part of the rent for each of us—is very generous."

Susan giggled. "Don't worry about it, Gayle. Mother has always gone on the theory that when any of us over-enthused on any of our hobbies, we tired of them all the more quickly. She's inclined to think it's wiser to let us get our fill."

"It might work that way," Gayle agreed. "Perhaps we should try it for a time, on the understanding that whenever she wishes, we'll go back to the original plan."

"I'll make us all some hot chocolate now," Susan said, "and then we'll have her come out and join us, to hear the decision."

"I'm not too happy about it, just the same," Gayle said. "If only I could think of some scheme to take her mind off this absorption in that dog-goned old radio!"

CODE

ON TUESDAY morning, just before the alarm sounded, Linda reached over from her day bed and joggled the pillow under Gayle's head.

Sleepily, the brown eyes winked open. "Oh— Oh, Linda!" Gayle smiled. "I'm not used to your being in here, as yet. . . ."

"Remember what you said? About taking Rosemary's mind off short-wave radio?"

Gayle woke up completely. "Yes. Do you have a plan?"

"Um-hmm. Thought of it last night. You know, our big Homecoming game is with Davenport High a week from Saturday. Why don't I suggest to Mr. Sinclair that we have another floor show at the 'Pastime' that night, for our Homecoming Dance? If he agrees, then I'll ask Rosemary to be

the star attraction. She will have to spend some time rehearsing and getting ready for it. It's bound to take her away from the short-wave a little."

"It's a grand idea," Gayle told her. "If only it works—"

Linda leaped from bed. "Won't hurt to try."

Later, Linda reported. "I had no difficulty with Mr. Sinclair. He was delighted with the idea. But—whew!—did I ever have to talk fast to persuade that Rosemary!"

"But she is going to?" Gayle demanded eagerly.

"She is. But she made the oddest condition. She's consenting to take part, only if we don't have rehearsals before school in the morning, or after dinner at night."

Gayle nodded. "That is when she has been listening to the radio most. Around eight in the morning, and a little after seven in the evening. We may have to think of something else. . . ."

Gayle was more upset over Rosemary's complete absorption in short-wave radio than she admitted to the other girls. She considered discussing it with Benton; with Worth; with Mrs. Mallory. But

some intuition kept her from mentioning her worries to Rosemary, herself. There were too many puzzling things about the English girl. She was friendly, she was willing, she was co-operative in anything which had to do with the apartment. But she had a kind of quiet, strong reserve that prevented anyone from becoming too close to her. And Gayle shrank from trying to penetrate the girl's aloofness in too direct or forthright a fashion.

Even when she wasn't listening to the radio, these days, she still seemed to be listening to far-away voices. She spent a lot of time, too, figuring or writing in her notebook. Gayle guessed that this concentration had little to do with school work, because she seemed to be unprepared in all her classes. She had lost her fine, high coloring. She was nervous, jumpy. . . .

In spite of all this, Gayle decided to say nothing to anyone, until after the Homecoming dance. If Linda's scheme to make the refugee forget the radio failed, then Gayle resolved to discuss the situation with Benton.

But Linda was not so restrained.

On Saturday morning, Linda, Susan and Gayle were having a leisurely breakfast at nine o'clock. They had called to Rosemary, knowing she was awake, because they could hear the radio. But she didn't come immediately.

And when she did arrive at the table, with her orange juice, her breakfast plate, and her coffee, Linda wailed, "Oh, Rosemary! Look at you! I'll bet you were up half the night!"

Rosemary smiled wanly. "What's wrong?"

"You have dark circles to tie under your chin!" Linda scolded. "Here you are, the star of my show tonight, and you look simply horrible!"

"Linda!" Susan exclaimed.

"Well, she does," Linda retorted. "And listening to that dratted radio all hours of the morning, too!"

But Rosemary wasn't angry. "I won't disappoint you tonight, Linda," she promised. "I'm going to be all prettied at the beauty parlor this morning. Even a facial! And I'm going to wear that frilly blue tulle frock with all the silver sequins."

Linda was a little mollified. "Well—but I do wish you'd promise me one thing. I wish you'd come home after the game this afternoon, take a nap and not listen to the radio."

"I'll take the nap," Rosemary promised, docilely.

"And you won't listen to the radio?"

Unexpectedly, Rosemary started to cry. "I've got—got to hear just one program!" she sobbed. "I pro—promise. Just one!"

Linda, all warm sympathy, threw her arm around the shuddering shoulders. "Gosh, Rosemary! I didn't mean to sound *that* tough! You're going to look elegant in that divine blue dress."

"I—I hate to be such a silly sissy," Rosemary whispered. "But I am tired."

"Linda, I am sorely tempted to tell Mother on you," Susan threatened. "I haven't been a tattletale for ten years, but doggoned if I don't think it's high time that you were taken in hand."

Linda, completely contrite, agreed. "I'm just a nasty bully. Please forgive me, Rosemary."

"It's all right," Rosemary said quickly. "What is every one wearing to the game this afternoon?"

It was almost time for intermission when Linda came hurrying to the booth where Gayle and Worth were sitting, drinking lemonades and cooling off a bit after a fast dance. "Have you seen Rosemary?" she demanded.

Gayle glanced at her watch. "Heavens! It's after nine. Isn't she here yet?"

"Susan has been watching for her, at the entrance," Linda told them. "Rosemary knows the floor show is to start at a quarter of ten. She told me, just before I left, that the one radio program she had to hear was at eight-thirty. She was all ready, and set to leave the apartment at a quarter of nine."

Worth stood up. "We'll run get her, Linda. Just have the orchestra play a few encores. It won't take twenty minutes to run out to the apartment and bring her back."

"Oh, would you? I'll be forever grateful—"

"I'm afraid she's ill," Gayle murmured, as they

raced down the stairs. "She's all unstrung—"

"She couldn't have been so absorbed in the radio that she forgot all about it, could she?"

Gayle chuckled, a little bitterly. "It's possible."

As Worth's car rolled up the drive, all the garage lights flashed on, beneath the apartment.

Gayle gasped. "Worth! She must be ill! She must have called Benton—or Mrs. Mallory!"

Just as Gayle and Worth jumped out of his car, they saw Rosemary inside the garage.

She was beautiful, in the pale blue evening dress and the white jacket. But her eyes were wild, her face pale as she turned from Mrs. Mallory. "Oh, Gayle! and Worth! I'm so glad you've come!"

Mrs Mallory paused, just as she was stepping into her limousine. Gayle could see Benton in the chauffeur's seat.

"What's the matter, Rosemary?" Gayle demanded.

There was a note of hysteria in the girl's voice. "I've figured it out—the code!" She held out papers torn from her notebook. "The orders came

FOUR GIRLS AND A RADIO

over the short-wave radio from Germany, just now. Saboteurs in River City are going to blow up the railroad bridge at ten o'clock tonight. Just as a trainload of shells from the plant will go over! We've got to stop them!"

SWIMMING IN THE DARK

IN SPITE of the terrific shock of Rosemary's announcement, Gayle felt an overwhelming relief.

Rosemary was loyal. Rosemary was all right!

She took a deep, steadying breath. She glanced at her wrist watch. "It's nine-thirty," she announced calmly. "We have half an hour. Wouldn't it be wiser to call the police?"

"Oh, no!" Rosemary's voice was almost a wail of terror. "Don't you see, Gayle? The saboteurs are local. Fifth columnists are always in the spots of importance. We don't know any of the police. Even Mrs. Mallory doesn't know any of the local officers whom she can trust implicitly."

"Things are going to be different from now on," that sturdy old lady promised grimly. "I am heartily ashamed of the fact that I don't even know

the name of the chief of police or of the sheriff of the county.”

“Let me go back to the ‘Pastime’ and get some of the fellows,” Worth urged. “At least we’ll be safe with the boys we know.”

“Just the ones you know—for sure!” Rosemary agreed swiftly. “Boys who have lived in River City always. Not the newcomers, like Ed Hackett from Detroit.”

Worth looked startled, but he planned swiftly.

“I’ll get Bill Rogers and Lee Hawkins and Jeff Byron,” he promised. “They’re all our own ‘Home Guard.’”

“Mrs. Mallory’s car is swifter and larger,” Gayle suggested quickly. “Why don’t you go after the boys in it? Rosemary and I can go in your car, directly down to the bridge. We’ll wait for you there—”

Two figures, running, came into the light.

“Linda and Susan!” Gayle exclaimed. “Come with us in Worth’s car!”

Bewildered, the Swift sisters sputtered, but they

hopped into the car. "What happened to you, Rosemary?" Linda demanded.

"We'll explain," Gayle said, slipping into the driver's seat.

Benton, at the wheel of the large limousine, pulled ahead down the drive. Mrs. Mallory, clinging to a strap in the rear, hung on desperately as the driver took the curves on two wheels. Worth sat in front, with him. . . .

"It's about ten blocks to the bridge," Gayle said. "Could you tell us a little more about the code, Rosemary?"

"Aren't you going back to the club?" Linda demanded. "Say, is everyone completely crazy? Where in the world is Worth going with Benton and Mrs. Mallory?"

"Tell us at once," Susan ordered.

Rosemary, tense and excited, turned to fling her news to the girls in the rear seat. "I figured out the code on the short-wave from Berlin," she told them. "They've given orders to saboteurs here in River City to blow up the railroad bridge over the Missis-

sippi at ten o'clock tonight, just as a train loaded with shells from the plant is scheduled to go over."

"Rosemary, you're nuts!" Linda retorted bluntly. "I knew that all that radio listening would drive you mad."

"But I'm not," Rosemary said, with quiet and convincing firmness. "I got the first inkling at the time of the first explosion at the plant. I could have been sure, if I had heard Midge's broadcast, the night we went to Iowa City, when the oil barge blew up in the locks. And I am positive tonight."

Gayle drove with rapid sureness through the brightly-lighted, crowded downtown section. The clock in the window of the Western Union office registered twenty minutes to ten. . . .

"Can you tell us a little about the code?"

"It was really quite simple," Rosemary said. "On the early-morning broadcast of the news in the German language, the night of the shell-loading plant explosion, a similar explosion was described, as having taken place in Russia. Then, in the English-language announcements of the evening programs, Lord Haw-Haw—he's the traitor from Iowa,

you know—was to give a commentary on the latest political developments in the Midwest. And Midge, another American-born broadcaster in Berlin, was to give her program at 10:30 P.M. That is when the explosion took place.” She showed them the notebook papers clutched in her hand. “I have the record of it here.

“Then, on the morning of that Saturday that we went to Iowa City, in the German-language news, there was a description of an oil barge that had been exploded in a Russian river, destroying dock installations. Lord Haw-Haw was to talk again, with Midge scheduled for 10:45. That is when the barge blew up, here at River City.”

Gayle’s mind was racing. That was the reason Rosemary had kept those clippings about Max Smith!

“This morning,” Rosemary continued, “the Germans announced that a railroad bridge on the Volkhov River had been destroyed, just as a train carrying munitions to the Russians trying to lift the siege of Leningrad, was crossing it. Lord Haw-Haw, the man from Iowa, was to talk at 8:30. It was his pro-

The guard was not on duty.

Rosemary, forgetting her high-heeled silver slippers, turned and ran a little way up the long incline toward the railroad bridge, a shadowy, forbidding outline of steel girders.

"I see a light!" she called back excitedly. "See! There's a boat, right under the center span of the bridge."

"That settles it!" Mrs. Mallory said firmly. "Benton. I want you to take me home at once. I'm calling the F.B.I."

"Fine!" Gayle exclaimed. "Why didn't we think of it before?"

"I did," Mrs. Mallory retorted, "but I wanted to see for myself that Rosemary didn't just imagine this whole business. Be careful, children. Just watch. We'll call the F.B.I., and they will have the authority to stop the train. We'll be back, with lots of help. . . ."

Worth glanced at his watch and muttered. "They'll never make it in time—there's only ten minutes—"

Involuntarily, in her dark coat, Gayle shivered.

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gram I insisted on hearing, tonight. And Midge is scheduled to broadcast at 10 o'clock."

"Couldn't it just be coincidence?" Linda insisted. "It really does sound rather simple."

"I hope it is," Rosemary said, with great sincerity. "But the very simplicity of the code is in the German tradition of efficiency. The information from spies is no doubt coordinated in Berlin. The orders are sent from there on the regular short-wave programs, so that any agents here can pick them up on any ordinary commercial radio set. If any one agent is exposed, it usually means that only a few others are caught at the same time, because they usually work independently, or with four or five others, at the most. . . ."

Gayle skillfully parked the car on a dark side street. "We'll walk to the guard house and warn the soldier," she said. She pointed to a huge sign at the edge of the fenced right-of-way. "RAILROAD PROPERTY—WARNING—NO TRESPASSING. PRESENT PASSES AT GUARD HOUSE."

"It's up this way," Susan declared. "I've seen the soldiers changing guard there."

"We should wait here for the others." Instinctively, Gayle was speaking in a whisper. It was a deserted, gloomy, dark part of town. The only buildings were tumbled, unpainted shacks; gaunt warehouses, weathered coal-bins.

"Here comes a car!" Linda exclaimed.

It was the Mallory limousine. Rosemary stepped away from the group of girls and waved. Her white jacket could be easily discerned in the dark.

The car stopped, and the four boys spilled out the doors.

"Susan says the little guard house is up this way," Gayle declared. "Let's go up and tell the soldier on duty."

"Good idea!" Worth applauded.

There was almost a block to walk in the rough cinders, along the high wire fence, before they came to the guard house.

The boys and girls covered it in a hurry, Benton walking more slowly with the old woman.

The guard was not on duty.

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Worth glanced at his watch and muttered. "They'll never make it in time—there's only ten minutes—"

Involuntarily, in her dark coat, Gayle shivered.

"Here!" Worth had unfastened his wrist watch and thrust it toward Gayle. "I'm going to swim out there—"

"Me, too!" Bill Rogers was already racing recklessly down the slope, inside the high fence.

"Worth! Bill!" Gayle called after them helplessly. Lee Hawkins and Jeff Byron took off, too, a split second after the others. "Try to find a boat!" Gayle urged. "The water will be freezing cold!"

"Gosh! Isn't there something we can do?" Linda demanded helplessly. "Are we just going to stand here?"

"All we can do is watch," Gayle replied. "At least, when more help comes, we can tell them what is happening. . . ."

"Worth and Bill are in the water!" Rosemary said, exultantly.

"They're both wonderful swimmers," Gayle murmured.

Now that their eyes had become more accustomed to the gloomy darkness, the girls could see the two heads, above the water.

"They could go faster if they used the crawl," Gayle went on, "but using a breast stroke, that way, they can swim silently and yet see ahead—"

"What happened to Lee and Jeff?" Susan asked.

"They ducked under the bridge. I do hope they find a boat—" Gayle replied.

The four girls were silent, for a time. It was agonizing to stand quietly, in this tense silence, able to do nothing—

"There they go!" Linda sang out. "They've got a row boat!"

"Worth and Bill are swimming more slowly, now. They don't want those men at the bridge to see them."

It was difficult, just then, to see what happened. Whether the men working in fierce desperation at the bottom of the central support of the bridge heard the swimmers, or whether there was a tell-tale scrape of an oar-lock, the girls couldn't tell.

But suddenly, a powerful searchlight swept the waters. A gun barked, twice.

Then, with shocking abruptness, a powerful boat motor sounded. Running without lights, the boat

swept away from the bridge and headed for the river bank, to the right of the bridge.

Gayle clenched Worth's wrist watch fiercely in cold, trembling fingers. Worth! Had those horrible men shot Worth?

But she hesitated only a second. "Come on, this way!" she cried to the other girls. "We mustn't let those men escape!"

The others followed.

Gayle was grateful for her platform sandals. She could run so much faster than the other girls, in their high-heeled slippers. . . .

The boat was headed toward the nearest dark side street, on the right-hand side of the bridge. They must have left a car there.

There was a dim street-light burning on the corner.

Sure enough, there was a huge black sedan, parked without lights, at the end of the block, facing away from the jetty.

Fiercely, Gayle paused long enough to shout at the other girls. "Stay there! They can see your light clothes!"

She raced ahead, alone, down the center of the dark street. She was so grateful for her dark coat—

The sound of the motor swelled. The boat had almost reached the jetty when Gayle got to the car.

Never had she worked so swiftly.

She thrust Worth's watch into her pocket. It had a night dial—

Four minutes until ten o'clock!

Using both hands skillfully, she unscrewed the protecting covers over the air-valves and pressed down the tiny centers. The air hissed out.

One tire flat!

The motor sounds from the river ceased, and she could hear the excited men, cursing and urging Kurt and Otto to hurry—

The air hissed out of the second rear tire. There was no more time. The men were racing along the jetty.

Gayle darted to the dark protection of a narrow gap between two empty store-buildings. But not before the license number on the car was stamped indelibly on her brain.

As she huddled there, trembling from cold and excitement, she was furious that she hadn't made one of the girls stay at the guard house. The boys or Mrs. Mallory would come back and there would be no one to direct them here. . . .

There were four men—

They started to climb into the car, when one cried out, "Otto! You've got a flat!"

There was a burst of guttural cursing, and then a familiar voice spoke. "The one on this side is down, too. We'll have to drive on it, anyway. That bridge'll be going in just two minutes, and we'll have to be at my house playing a quiet game of poker when the alarm sounds—"

Gayle gasped.

That rich, resonant, assured voice belonged to Paulette Showers' father!

"Ach! Mein tires!"

"Get going, Otto." The attorney spoke with deadly coolness. "Perhaps you would prefer to ruin your neck."

But it was too late.

The Mallory limousine swept around the corner, its headlights bright on the stricken group in the street.

And there were two cars, close behind. Two men, holding glistening guns, leaped out of the second. The third car was Worth's.

Things happened so quickly, that Gayle had a confused picture. Linda, Susan and Rosemary spilled out of the Mallory car, just as soon as the hand-cuffs had been snapped on the hands of the four dismayed enemy agents. But Otto started to laugh. "You've got us," he chortled, "but you're too late to save the bridge!"

"Shut up, you fool!" Showers snarled.

"We have some pretty bright American youth, too," one of the F.B.I. men replied. "They've never had to Heil Hitler, but they can break off a live fuse when they see it."

Gayle ran back to Worth's car. "Worth! Are you all right?"

"A little cold and wet," he answered. "Gosh, I wouldn't have missed this for anything!"

"But those shots!"

“Oh, we just ducked when we saw the search light,” Bill chuckled. “But the dopes! They didn’t even stick around to see if they’d hit us. Just lit out to save their own skins—”

“As if we’d just swim away and let that dynamite go off,” Worth scoffed.

There was silence in the entire group for a moment, as the whistle shrilled in the night. The train!

Gayle clutched the side of the car. What if the boys hadn’t got all the fuse?

But the train hurtling triumphantly through the night, roared safely over the bridge. . . .

HOLIDAY

WORTH AND Bill joined the group around the huge fire in Mrs. Mallory's library, looking a bit odd in Benton's warm bathrobes and slippers. Then Rosemary had to tell again of her suspicion and her solution of the code message from Berlin. Just as she finished, the two Federal Bureau of Investigation men arrived. Rosemary had to tell the story over again, but her audience was just as absorbed. . . .

"Who let the air out of the tires on their car?" Mr. Norman, the older of the two federal men, demanded.

"I did," Gayle answered. "I was the only one in dark clothes. I was afraid the others could be seen. But who—I haven't had the chance to ask—who ran back to tell Mrs. Mallory and you where to come?"

"I did." Linda chuckled. "But I thought that

was what you meant by all those wicked gestures you were making at us, just before you ran down that dark street.”

“The thing that amazes me,” Susan spoke up, “is that no one seems to be particularly surprised to find that Paulette’s father is one of the saboteurs. Personally, I’m floored.”

“I have suspected it,” Rosemary announced quietly. “You see, the renegade broadcaster from Berlin is named Karl Scheuers. He is from Iowa. I suspect Barrister Showers simply Anglicized his name when he took out his citizenship papers.”

The two F.B.I. men exchanged glances. “We have discovered that the Max Smith who blew up an oil-barge in the locks recently,” Mr. Norman told them, “is actually Max Schcuers. Significantly, it was Attorney Showers who defended him at his trial.”

“I have pictures of all three of them,” Rosemary spoke up, “in my notebook. I kept a record of the broadcasts from Berlin. The family resemblance between Lord Haw-Haw, Attorney Showers, and Max Smith is very strong.”

"I wish to make public apology to you, Rosemary," Linda declared, with great sincerity. "Never again will I object to your listening to the radio."

"It won't be necessary, now. The Germans never make the same mistakes, except the big ones, twice."

"One thing that has puzzled me," Gayle said, turning to Mr. Norman. "What happened to the soldier on guard at the approach to the—"

Benton appeared at the door. "Mr. Norman is wanted on the telephone."

The group in the library was quiet for a time. When the F.B.I. man returned, he smiled at Gayle. "That happened to be the answer to your question, Miss Warren. The two soldiers who were on guard at the bridge-ends, in Iowa and in Illinois, have been found. They are safe, except for a bit of knocking-about. They were attacked, gagged, and trussed. They were turned adrift, in the bottom of a stolen boat. They have just been rescued, about a mile down river."

"What a brutal thing to do!" Gayle gasped.

"You know—I've just been thinking about those

poor soldier boys. I understand there is quite an encampment of them, guarding the shell-loading plant, the locks and the bridge," Mrs. Mallory spoke up. "I wonder if it wouldn't be possible to turn Mallory Mansion, except for a few rooms, into a sort of USO club house for them and their friends."

"That's a lovely idea!" Rosemary smiled. "And it is so typically generous and unselfish of you."

Gayle stared unbelievably at the white-haired old dowager. It was impossible to realize that only two months could have made such an amazing change in Mrs. Mallory.

At that moment, Mrs. Mallory glanced toward Gayle, interpreted the girl's startled look understandingly, and winked audaciously.

"Mr. Norman," the old lady went on, "won't these boys and girls get some recognition for the courageous bit of work they did tonight? And I should think Rosemary would be entitled to a medal."

"I've no doubt of it," the older man said quickly. "Personally, I should like to spank the lot of them,

for not calling us in more quickly. If only everyone could realize, the moment they see something suspicious, that it should be reported to us! But since it has turned out so handsomely, all around, I've no doubt they will receive recognition for their very considerable contribution to the war effort."

"I'm sorry," Rosemary said, in a little voice. "But we did hear such horrible tales, at home, of the Fifth Column work in France. And whom can one trust? After all, Paulette Showers' father, up to now, has been one of the most respected men in River City."

"You have a point," the older man conceded. "And you are a stranger here, and an alien, although a friendly one, to be sure. You have my word—you will be recommended for citations."

"Gosh—" Linda said dreamily, "what a floor show for the 'Pastime'! Red, white and blue decorations. Maybe we could borrow the Pre-Flight school's Bluejacket Band for the occasion and Mr. Norman here, to give the awards. . . ."

Everyone chuckled, but Mr. Norman spoke up

quickly. "I've had excellent reports on that 'Pastime' club you youngsters have formed. I think it's really a good idea. With national publicity for the spot, it will be copied in other cities where similar recreation centers for the young people would go far toward clearing up our juvenile delinquency problems. But I won't be giving the awards. I think we can borrow at least a two-star general from Washington, for the occasion. I'll see what I can do."

It was the Christmas party at the "Pastime."

No one in River City will ever forget the occasion.

A brigadier general and his staff from Washington arrived to take charge.

Rosemary received her gold medal, and the festivities were sent by short-wave to England. This time, she didn't cry when she talked to her parents.

And there were photographers from all the major news services in the country, plus two from *Life Magazine*, who planned several pages of shots for their "Life Goes to a Party" section. Even movie

news reel camera men were on hand for the gala event. Gayle, Linda, Susan, Worth, Bill, Lee and Jeff received citations and bronze medals.

"I'm much too excited to think of sleeping," Gayle confessed, as all eight of them crowded into Worth's car for the trip home. "It has been such a perfect night. How do you all feel about scrambled eggs and bacon at our apartment?"

Rosemary chuckled. "If you hadn't suggested it, I should have. All this triumph has made me hungry."

But the surprises hadn't ceased.

Gayle led the way into the apartment. It was dark, except for an enormous lighted Christmas tree.

"Why—where did this come from?" she cried.

Then all the lights flashed on, and a triumphant Mrs. Mallory popped up from the new davenport. "Merry Christmas!" she shouted gleefully.

Gayle and the others stared about in amazement. There were new drapes at the windows—new carpets on the floor—all new furniture!

"So this is why you and Benton weren't at the

Pastime!" Worth exclaimed. "We were so disappointed that you didn't come—"

"We had to work fast, didn't we, Benton? We just shooed out the decorators, about ten minutes ago. How do you like your Christmas presents, girls?"

"Pretty soon I'm going to wake up," Linda murmured. "But, please, don't anyone pinch me yet! What a perfectly marvelous evening. I won't ever believe it has all happened."

All four of the girls wandered about, admiring the luxurious new furniture, the beautiful pictures on the wall, the enormous radio and record-player in the corner.

Mrs. Mallory sat back on the davenport, sighing. "I haven't ever had so much fun in all my life. Just think of all those winters I wasted in Florida— Oh, yes, before I forget it. You're all invited to my opening night. New Year's Eve. For the soldiers and sailors. Don't forget your accordion, Rosemary. Are the girls ready with those turkey sandwiches and the hot chocolate, Benton?"

Two smartly-clad maids served the silver trays,

laden with sandwiches, cranberry jelly, olives, hot chocolate. It was Benton who suggested the song-fest. Rosemary got her accordion, and in the light from the fire, the gay young voices rose in all the old holiday favorites—"We Three Kings," "Silent Night," "Oh, Little Town of Bethlehem" and finally, a triumphant "Auld Lang Syne."

Gayle looked about the beloved circle of faces. Rosemary, so serene and content. Mrs. Mallory, beaming with joy as she sang so heartily. Linda, her dark eyes snapping with delight. Susan, so gay and lovable. Benton, his eyes on Rosemary, with a quiet pride.

And Worth! Once she had been so envious of Paulette Showers—now, she could even feel a bit of pity for the girl. No one knew where she and her mother had gone. They had simply disappeared from River City, the day after Attorney Showers had been arrested.

She was looking at Worth's handsome face, revealed in the flickering glow from the fire. He turned at that moment, gave her his quick grin and squeezed her hand.

HOLIDAY

Gayle, filled with an exalted, deep awareness; memorized the joyous sights and sounds of the holiday night—"This is the happiest, most satisfying hour I have ever known," she told herself. Her next thought was a solemn vow, "I shall treasure these moments forever!"

