

STORIES
POETRY

The Inglenook

SKETCHES
TRAVEL

THE SENIOR PRESIDENT.

A wood road, a golden and glorious October sapphire sky above, a fairy haze along the hill line, the swish of drifted leaves underfoot, and two girls who walked unseeing, because of the things they were saying and thinking. Lily was willowy and slim in the long brown ulster awayed by the wind; her bare blond head was set light and straight as a flower's. But who could tell Lily's thoughts?

Beside her, stocky and thick-set, Theresa trudged with heavily planted steps. Her shoulders showed square under the gray sweater. There was that about even the back of Theresa's black bullet head that suggested power, and Theresa had made up her mind to something that afternoon.

Now and then, as she spoke, she flung out an impulsive hand and clutched Lily's arm for emphasis; but Lily did not move or turn, walking with light, lithe grace, and looking straight ahead at the wind-whipped clouds that scudded the blue above the hills. It needed no pounding of Theresa's emphatic little fist upon her arm to make her understand Theresa's meaning.

"You know all the girls think the same thing, and have talked and talked about it, but of course no one has ever talked to you. You're rather dignified and distant, you know, my dear."

"But when it came to a matter as big as this election for senior president, I felt as if some one must speak. So I wasn't fair to you not to speak. So I undertook it, being a courageous soul. All the girls know that I'm telling you all about it today. I'm not exactly delegated, you understand; still, they all know that I'm telling you. They're waiting to know what you'll say before—before—before they vote tonight. I must say, it's a pretty delicate matter to speak to a girl about her best friend—but you don't mind my going on!"

Lily turned her head with a little quick smile, non-committal, amused. "Oh, no; you may go on," she said.

"Frankly," continued Theresa, bluntly, "you'd have been class president long ago if it hadn't been for Millicent Harlow."

A sharp little wince of pain touched the self-control of Lily's lips.

"She's stood in your way from first to last. At first, in freshman year, we thought you couldn't be a nice girl if you had a friend like that, however fine you seemed. So we left you both alone. Then afterward we saw that you were just as lovely as you looked, and we wanted to know you; but, my dear, how could we? How could we? We simply couldn't stand Millicent, and there was no getting hold of you without Millicent. Millicent is always with you. She'd be here this minute if I hadn't carried you off bodily. So we just haven't known you, gone with you, been friends, all on account of Millicent."

"Perhaps you haven't noticed, or minded, but we've minded, my dear."—here Theresa's arm went about Lily's shoulders in a sudden compelling affection that caught at Lily's heart—"and we want you now. Will you?"

Not noticed! Not minded! Did any of them guess how proud Lily was? And how friendly, and how exquisitely fastidious, too? Under her bright self-sufficiency no one guessed with what intensity she had longed to know them all, these girls who were really her kind, who elected her to many an important office, complimented her thus on her executive ability, looked at her, too, with frankly congenial eyes, but somehow never came any nearer, somehow elusively slipped away from any

real acquaintance, any genuine friendship. Was not Lily keen-witted enough to know that for three years she had missed the best thing in college, and keen enough also to guess the reason, without Theresa's telling?

And here at last, for her last, best, brief year at college, the class was offering her its highest honor, and with that, she knew, its friendship—on only one condition.

So far Lily had not turned upon her fiercely, as Theresa had half feared. Lily had let her go on, and Theresa felt her waver, so she thought, ever so little. With her arm still about Lily's neck, she went on:

"You know we just must have the finest girl in the class for president. Except for Millicent, Anne Brower doesn't stand one chance against you, for you are the finest girl in the class, Lily."

The wistful paleness of Lily's lips relaxed into a sudden little laugh of pure incredulity and amusement. It was laughable, of course, but still it was sweet to hear Theresa say it. It was something for a lonely girl even to be walking with Theresa Jacobs, the most influential girl in college.

Theresa was growing quite bold now. She meant to say it all; she meant to have Lily Meyrick for senior president. But Lily was very still as she listened.

"You know, Lily, what a position the senior president has in the college, socially, as well as every other way. Why, she's a part of everything. You can see how"—here even Theresa, the bold, stood for a breathing space—how it would look if you were always with a girl like Millicent, a great uncouth, ill-bred thing like that."

The color surged to Lily's delicate face, but still she did not speak. "You understand, to be very clear," concluded Theresa, "we want you for senior president, Lily, to represent us on all occasions—but we do not want Millicent Harlow to be made prominent thereby." And here Theresa's voice sharpened. "We will not have her, either!" She finished more gently: "But you do understand, don't you, Lily?"

"Oh, yes," said Lily, "I understand." "It really is very easy to break off a friendship," Theresa continued, in a brisk, matter-of-fact way. "It doesn't need a quarrel or anything horrid and disgusting like that. You just stop going to the girl's room, and always have an excuse for not going with her to things, and lots of times don't see her at all. You do it all gradually, and at last it dawns upon her that you've changed, and after that the rest is easy. I've done it several times."

The clouds were never more white against the blue, but Lily did not see them, for all her intent eyes.

"Of course," Theresa went on, "I'm not asking you to promise to give up Millicent Harlow—not exactly that. Only before the election to-night all the girls will be wanting to know how you've taken our—well, our suggestion. If before the class meeting at eight you could do some little thing to show that you see—say—the wisdom of being less intimate with Millicent—it would be a very good thing. If for instance, after chapel, instead of putting your arm round Millicent and trotting off to the reading room with her, as you always do, you put your arm round some of the rest of us, and trotted off with us instead, it would seem to indicate your frame of mind. Please, silent lady, you need make no promises, but am I forgiven for all I've said? There's one thing you might think of in this connection: In a choice between your friend and your class, isn't some of

your duty due to your class?"

"I am thinking," answered Lily.

"Lily," Theresa brought her hand down sharply on Lily's shoulder, "how in the world did it ever happen, anyway? How in the world did a girl like you ever have anything to do with a girl like Millicent? You're so sweet, so dainty—and she! It isn't only that she's so plain and so terribly untidy—how do you stand that awful hair!—but she's so ill-natured and rude. You might think, with all her physical disadvantages, she'd at least try to be polite and agreeable to people, but the outrageous things she says! Why, if she treated even you decently it would be easier to see her absorbing all your time and preventing our ever getting at you. To think that you and she are friends! Lily, how did it ever happen?"

"I guess it just happened," said Lily. "I've known her always, since we were very little girls."

With valiant resolution to keep itself calm during the half-hour before election, the class surged out of chapel. One thing it must know before eight o'clock, and so it crowded about the chapel door, waiting for Lily Meyrick, and watching her. A crowd of girls surged round her. It was so easy to encircle her and separate her from Millicent, pressing up all unwitting for her usual place by Lily's side. All about Lily were faces, before often cold, but now bright with friendship. Warm hands were pressing hers; eager voices were speaking their hopes of their candidate. Theresa had given the class to understand that she had won. Her words now were light enough, but meant much.

"Coming up to my room for a bit, Lily?"

Resolution made Lily's face white for an instant, made icy cold the hands they were clasping, but her voice was even and sweet, eyes and lips were smiling as she said:

"No, I'm going down to the reading-room with Millicent." Her eyes sought the unkempt head, the ungainly shoulders that she loved. "Where is she? I want her."

Instantly they had separated, so that Millicent stood by Lily's side. Lily put her arm about her, while her slim figure in the white muslin gown swayed just a little as she stood there.

"I hope you'll excuse me," she said to Theresa. "Thank you for asking me." The words were addressed to Theresa, but they were meant for all. Meant for all, too, were the proud uplift of her golden head, the shining sweet defiance of her gray eyes, the resolution of her wistful lips, the proud, protecting tenderness, as she stood by Millicent. The crowd melted away silently, each girl knowing that the finest girl in the class had put aside their highest honor, and had chosen instead—Millicent Harlow!

It is etiquette that nominated candidates shall stay quietly in their rooms during an election. A little before eight Lily parted from Millicent at the reading-room door.

"I don't honestly believe you'll get a dozen votes, Lil," said Millicent, with well-meant comfort.

"I know I shan't get one," said Lily, laughing.

"Oh, yes, one!" cried Millicent.

"Yes, one!" corrected Lily, her eyes tender as they watched Millicent's awkward stride up the corridor.

In her own room Lily did not turn up the gas. She was tired and thought she would lie down a little while. To that end she removed Millicent's coat that sprawled on her couch. Lily dearly loved order. Millicent used Lily's room as if it had been her own, also