

BOOK II

College Days

PART X

The Mother Campus

CHAPTER I

Summer Idyl in a College Town

Soon the long summer days will begin to pall on the citizens of Wheelport, and the buzz of the fly and the drone of the bee of a hot sunny afternoon will turn their nostalgic eyes toward the return of the college season, and the life and gaiety of college youth; but as yet, seeing it was only days running into a few meager weeks since the end of the spring term, they were enjoying a mild relief from the hectic young ~~young~~ adventure in their midst, as one enjoys the comparative peace and calm after a night of hilarious roistering. The mood was of quiet relaxation and

diversion the good people of the town could themselves offer - as one close-knit family.

The afternoon shadows were lengthening appreciably, when George arrived early in July at the Berely house at Wheelport. Strange as the town appeared to him, and despite the misgivings he had about living with people he had never met, the scene that met his eyes was heart warming, and had a salutary effect on him. There, in front of the two story white cottage on a finely landscaped lawn, the grass fresh and a vivid green as if it had just been watered, sat the Berelays and their next door neighbors whom they were entertaining in the cool of the waning afternoon. There were Mr. and Mrs. Berelay and their sixteen-year old daughter, Betty, and Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Sherman. They sat sprawling in wicker chairs around a serving table on which were light snacks and cool drinks, except Betty who was standing up and about to leave when George had arrived. The men were in shirtsleeves, while the women wore loose colorful chintzes. Betty was dressed in a full summer outfit, and was charming with her long thick braids roped like thicknesses of gleaming pearls around her head, fashioned like something between a tiara and a diadem.

Mr. Berelay stood up at once to his full great height and bulk to welcome the new-comer, followed by Mrs. Berelay, a handsome woman, matching her husband in size as well as the heartiness of her smiling green eyes. Betty extended a small cool white hand to George, smiling all over her young pretty face, showing to great advantage the delicate dimpling in pale cheeks and the full luminous gray eyes.

Mrs. Berelay introduced the Shermans in her gracious manner, and begging to be excused she left to bring some refreshments in honor of the guest. George couldn't help notice the striking likeness between mother and daughter as to the size and shape of the eyes, the line of the mouth, and even to the dimpling in the cheeks. What was that fond (and so soon)

and ~~the~~ ^{in him} unexpressed hope that Betty remain forever her soft petite self, of the tender innocence of feature, of the delicately molded face - of the tender allurement and charm of her budding young womanhood! She had, like her parents, that cosmopolitan air about her, as if she had lived all her life in the big city and had come to Wheelport only for a brief visit.

George wondered the true reason of the sudden departure of his hostess as he glimpsed the table laden with so much fine foods.

Mr. Bereley, as if reading George's mind, remarked: "You'll see, Mr. Sheraton, she'll come up with something new. We've been expecting you, you know." His full florid face was full with the smile of cheer and heartiness. "Something she held out on us, something special for you."

And true to his word she did come up with an upside-down cake, as picturesque as a landscape. George must have the first cut. And a good-sized one it was. To please his hostess he must finish all of it, even though his stomach was telegraphing alarming signals of distress from previous gorgings. When it was all over, however, he found to his surprise that he was able to get up from the table without undue discomfort, and to proceed to the shade of the latticed bower in the garden in the rear of the house.

The Berelays, in the registered opinion of the townspeople, were classified as above middle-class, just under the upper crust. They were thought of as "comfortable". Just comfortable. But as a hostess Mrs. Bereley was famous in Wheelport, ^{and} in and out of the State. The two-story bungalow was a cozy place, a haven of peace to the soul-weary and thirsty in arid Maine; an illustrious, brilliant home, soft with its roseate Oriental carpeting, the glitter of fine damasks, and the poetic moodiness of burlled maple furniture; a larder filled with delight to the most captious of discriminating gourmets.

Mr. Bereley was a man of many enterprises, only one of which was permanent and of good standing—his drygood-store on Main Street, which was the main street in Wheelport. Combined with other appurtenances of female attire it was not a bad little business in itself, but not quite big enough to support a house in accordance with Mrs. Bereley's standards. Not enough to dress her daughter in the latest of fashions, best of linens, satins and silks, which rustled daintily and sweetly when Betty walked across the room. All these set off her daughter's natural grace and poise. At anyrate there was not enough in that establishment to satisfy and stanch Mr. Bereley's ebullient and burning energy. Indeed, it would be superfluous and wasted in the calm and cool semi-darkness, in the nervating and lazying smell of yard-goods; so Mr. Bereley left it to the capable hands of two young women, himself being free to attack the world in his own fashion.

In spite of his great bulk and heaviness of feature he was quick of action and emotion, as if every move was hinged to his quick thinking brain. He seemed always to be preoccupied with some scheme or other, how to draw more milk from the world's skimpy udder. It was a tough world, but he thought himself equal to it, what with his great body and his overflowing energy! Indeed, his nerves were so charged and explosive that he was constantly chewing gum to keep them doused and under semblance of control. If he sat decorously quiet in his favorite chair, reading the evening paper, informing the family of the important news-bits of the day, interspersed with witty comments, while chewing his gum slow-

ly, you'd surmise, and rightly so, that the bursting volcano inside him was well under dampers; but should he suddenly start chewing ~~with~~ with a laboring and quick movement of his jaws, throw away his paper, and start a caper around the room, you'd be equally right to assume that something inside him ^{has} caught fire and that he was sure to pop with a new scheme.

One evening as they all sat in the comfortable living room George held Mr. Bereley under close scrutiny; and shortly, confided to mother and daughter that soon there would be an announcement of great import by the head of the household. Mrs. Bereley merely nodded and dimpled a good-natured smile, while Betty looked up to George in some bewilderment.

Next morning, when George's pronogstication came true, Betty looked up at him with the glazed eyes of adoration, and somewhat with the timidity of apprehension in them. Indeed, it was an ingeneous scheme, one such as only Mr. Bereley could have conceived and brought forth. He was solemn and pontifical when he proceeded to explain its fine points:

Whereas, a certain mill on the Kennebec had accumulated a dump of iron-filings back of it to the proportions of a good-sized mound; and whereas, the president of the company had asked him if he knew of a way of disposing of this ever growing metallic nuisance, and whereas, further, certain weight-manufacturers use some sort of metal to weight down their weights, why, then, is it not right and proper that he bring the two parties together, and thus do a good turn to the owner of the mill, his friend, who in his own good time had conferred many a favor upon himself? If in doing ^{so} ~~it~~ he would make a little pile of his own, it would just ^{be} a by-product of his good intent, and in the nature of a windfall. The weights-manufacture business would bless him for this innovation of providing them the precious metal at a cheap price!

The idea once conceived, Mr. Berly lost no time in executing it. With jaws working ever faster he got correspondence out to the weight-manufacturers, while laboreres were hired and contracts let out for railroad flat-tops. In no time at all a long array of cars had great mounds of the dark-grey metal on their expanse of surface. To George, watching the operatins of his genial host, Mr. Berely observed rubbing his pudgy hands in glee: "Coming along beautifully. Tic-tac and smooth. It'll net at least a thousand dollars - out of nothing. Just knowing your way around."

Every day George counted with elation the number of cars added to the chain, and one morning he was thrilled to see a monstrous locomotive hook up to the chain.

George had never seen such a monster of power before. It was fascinating to watch it puff and sizzle steam through its stubby funnel. Those huge steel wheels, and the shining steel slabs that ran through them - the seven-league boots! The hellish flame in the maw of the furnace lighting up the profile of the engineer, his hand already on the throttle.

Like a pygmy hidden in the innards of this mass of steel, the fireman was feeding the flame ~~and~~ soon to explode into cascades of steam-blasts, ~~and~~ carry ^{ing} everything before it in a huge outpouring of waves of power that would rock the very ground he stood on.

The fireman kept up his coal-shoveling, his face flaming in the gleam of the furnace, a huge billow of curling black smoke belching up with each shovelful.

There was a long piercing blast on the whistle, and the engineer's hand made a slight almost imperceptible forward motion. A quick succession of puffs of white-gray steam shot up in the air that made ^{the} atmosphere overhead reverberate and echo with thunder. The earth was trembling. The

great wheels made a few swift grinding revolutions, but only a slight forward motion, as the couplings clicked and buckled. Then the cars, as if in stubborn resistance, would settle back into a wait-and-see inertia and even slide back, ever so minutely. Another shove of the throttle and the wheels whirred and sparked and tore the cars along with them. There would be a whining of the wheels as they ground forward on the rails, then a pause, and another push forward, each time the wheels turning faster and longer and the pause shorter. The ^{cocussive} puffs of steam came like pistol-shots in quick rhythm with the clackety-clanking of the rails, as the locomotive picked up speed. And the engineer shot the lever home.

Mr. Berely's jaws worked hard again on his gum a few days after he had received full compensation for his ingenious scheme. There was money clinking in one pocket, and a warm pad of greenbacks in another. Mr. Berely always got fidgety with money he had no immediate use for. Hence the whirl of gum on the gums. Surely, something was brewing in his restive brain.

It was summertime, and Betty had not had a pony now going on three years. And anyway she is not of an age when she'd go riding in a cart drawn by a pony. Mrs. Berely herself could well be rid of the dusty streets in an excursion to the country. And then there was George, who should be shown the beautiful countryside. And to be sure, all these things could be accomplished by one single simple act: the purchase of horse and buggy. Marvelous! So, one Saturday morning, rising very early, he left the house before anyone could hear or see him. And a few hours later, as the family sat at breakfast, they were shocked by an apparition of a prancing young

mare pounding a mighty hoof and shaking her elegant brown head in a morning salute through the front window of the kitchen, facing Temple street.

Mrs. Berelley, who at the time was urging a few more pancakes from a sizzling pan on George, almost dropped pan and contents in George's lap when she saw two big brown eyes flirting with her in the window, but succeeded ^{only} dropping the hot cakes in his lap. George, however, had stood up almost at the same time to observe the unusual phenomenon, and so escaped ~~only~~ ^{only} with a few grease spots on his trousers. Betty let out a delicate scream as she burnt her gullet with hasty a swallow ^{from} her chocolate cup. There were tears in her eyes as the three of them dashed to the window, but George wasn't sure whether they were tears of joy or pain. The jovial full face of Mr. Berelley, all wreathed in smiles, appeared beside the horse's head in the window. "How do you like it, folks," it seemed to say. Then they were on the lawn, and Betty went into his arms and gave him a long kiss, while Mrs. Berelley reserved her approval with only a smile that showed a few gold caps in her mouth. Then her gaze turned to George for the expression of his sentiments.

Mr. Berelley was launched on a new burst of chewing on his gum. And before any one could notice that something new was brewing in his head, and while they were still in the process of getting acquainted with the glittering new equipage and the spirited young animal, restlessly pawing the turf on the lawn, he broke in upon them with a new suggestion. "What say, folks, we take the day off and go picnicking in the country...?" His florid face was alight with the novelty and gaiety of the whole thing, and with the satisfaction and pride that he ^{had} found it within his means to accomplish this miracle.

They had lunch between Paris and China, villages deep in the countryside, and then went ^{on} to a lake where they could boat and fish. While the men were occupied catching up with the fish in the lake, which they

didn't quite succeed, the women disported themselves titillating the placid waters with their bare feet, and splashing their faces and arms. Then they came ashore to wait in the shade of a grove for a cooler hour to start on the homeward journey. Mr. Bereley lay stretched out to his full length in a secluded spot, and soon drowsed off. Betty and her mother after a while, stealing discreetly away, went wading almost up to their knees. George decided to have his first swim since he had left Portgrave. Behind a dense clump of trees he undressed to his trunks, and plunged into the tepid water of the calm lake. The effect of the swirling water over his body and the thrust of his arms as they cleaved the surface in a powerful overhead stroke, and the tautening of his torso and abdominal muscles to give impetus to the propeller-like action of the legs, was immediate and refreshingly soothing to his super-heated flesh. Before he realized it he was in the middle of the lake, which at that point was quite a distance from the shore. He looked back and recognized Betty and her mother, who looked like two indistinct pygmies, ~~and~~ moving slowly and aimlessly about. He shouted a greeting which came telegraph-like ringing in their ears over the mirror-like surface of the water. He thought he saw them turn toward his voice, and then shading their eyes to locate him in the water. He raised a glistening arm to them. They evidently had found him, for he made out the rapid movement of their arms, as if they were frantically beckoning him toward shore. He called to them in an encouraging voice, telling them that he would soon be back with them. Suddenly he began to feel the drag of fatigue in his muscles and found that to keep buoyant was becoming more of a task than a pleasure. He realized now for the first time that he had forgotten to take into account the heavier buoyancy of the sea as compared with fresh water with which he hardly had any experience. "Density" is the word, he thought. But it made very little difference now what the scientific

tera was the thing was to get back. The distant shore seemed a little nearer. Should he cross, then rest long enough before he made the re-turn crossing, or should he turn back now? When he found himself turned back already he wondered how that ^{had} come about. Certainly he had no knowledge of consciously turning back. Then he smiled to himself: It was the subconscious taking over. Somehow it's always there for the good and welfare of the body. And it knew best. While the conscious is calculating and ~~debating~~ ^{deliberating} it takes over. And now it was the subconscious priming: "Slow down, ease up, float on the back for a brief respite. And plodding and resting ^{in turn} he finally made it. Exhausted and somewhat drooping he stepped on the shore at the point where he had left his garments.

"You slowed down to a crawl on the home-stretch," Mr. Berely teased George when ~~he~~ rejoined them.

"Not used to fresh water, it doesn't hold you up," George explained briefly.

"You sure you are dry?" Mrs. Berely worried, "we are ready to start back. The air has cooled considerably, and a breeze might be chilling when you are wet."

"All warm and snug," George thanked her.

"All right, we'll see that you keep warm," Mr. Berely chortled. "I'll let you handle the reins. That should keep you busy and comfortable."

"What do you want from ^{the} poor fellow," Mrs. Berely protested mildly.

"George probably never handled a horse."

"O, well, this one is well trained and quite docile," Mr. Berely expounded. George wanted to say that the only experience he had ever had with a horse was riding one bare-back. And although it was an old dilapidated mare it nevertheless succeeded in catapulting him over its head, and that it was sheer luck that he hadn't remained maimed for ever. But he kept his silence. It's do or die. It'd be fun to rein in and guide this

animal. All you do is pull to the right on a right turn, and left on a left turn. A pull on both reins on a halt, and say 'ho'.

"If you trust me," he said. And he climbed into the driver's seat. Betty was gay as she sat down next to George. "You'll do," she said.

"Well done," Mr. Berely commented as they turned into Temple street. The dust of the unpaved street did not rise to meet them, as if laid by the cool of the oncoming evening. The ladies were glad to be home again, to refresh and have a change of clothes.

"Well, I am off to the store to see how the girls are doing," Mr. Berely announced. After a pause, "Maybe you'd like to come along, George. We'll be back in time for dinner."

"That would top the day off fine," George was glad.

"The ladies will appreciate being left alone," he winked. "We'd only be in the way."

Mr. Berely took the reins. They drove in silence for a while. Mr. Berely said: "Not much for a man to do in a store like mine. All woman things, and drygoods. Not much adventure, too dry." And he laughed at his own humor. "But on Saturday, at this hour, it should be lively there. What with the ladies having their last fling before closing time, and those from the farms likewise before returning home."

"Interesting," George conceded.

"All sorts of types. And you'll meet my girls."

"Your girls types too?"

"You'll see for yourself," Mr. Berely grinned.

George found the two girls in Mr. Berely's shop an interesting study in contrasts. Roberta, buxom but shapely, as if sculptured from a

well designed matrix, was entirely French in the vivacious humor of her large black eyes and mobile face, as well as the quick agility of her body and the guttural roll of her r's. She was imperturbable and quite unconcerned as to who might enter the place of business, not even to the extent of granting a second glance, unless it was in the matter of routine of the day. She was self-sufficient: on her own, of the give-and-take type - that is taking first and giving later. She entertained no illusions about anybody or anything, for she was only concerned about her own world. She was practical. She had often upbraided her friend Geraldine for taking up with the "impractical and idealistic paupers". Later she had referred to George as the Pauperish-prudent-prude, after Geraldine had confessed to her that George was very careful in his love making.

Geraldine Stockton, on the other hand, was more impressionable and more susceptible to outside influences. She was immediately aware of any new visitor, especially if Mr. Berely introduced him and he looked interesting. She was taken aback and flushed deeply when Mr. Berely introduced George to his girls. She confided to Roberta, after George had left, that George had an interesting face. Intelligent! "You with your intelligent face!" Roberta pooh-poohed her.

Geraldine had a dignified bearing, blue eyes and a very fair almost transparent complexion. Her hair of russet tinge, gleaming gold in direct sunlight, crowned a small well-shaped head, ending in a soft coil which rested on the clear whiteness of the nape of her neck. She was two or three inches taller than Roberta, slimmer of figure; and draped in summer silks it accentuated to a remarkable degree the delicate lines of her body.

In 1912 Britannia still ruled the waves, and a great portion of the world to boot, so who could blame Geraldine Stockton if she had embraced to the last the last shred of tradition of that ancient town in England on the Tees. To be sure (and how could it be otherwise?) that she had made

sure, she volunteered the information at every opportunity that her name traces not from that town in California by that name, but the Stocton-On-Tees, borough and seaport of Durham, on the borders of North Riding of Yorkshire, with some peculiar but typically English place-names. As if you didn't _____

know them! And you didn't, but you were ashamed to admit it; ashamed of your ignorance of the English penchant for strange names for towns and boroughs and water-bodies. But she explained to you anyway that the "Tee" on the tail end of Stocton was a body of water on which Stocton was situated; that her ancestors had merely dropped the tail-end when they adopted the name. And maybe added a "k". In Stocton, she'd further embellish, there were old castles and other historical amenities and attractions and prerequisites for the mummification and swathing of tradition to be preserved for all eternity. Stocton had the honor to be invaded and ransacked by the Romans in those most ancient of times, when modern tradition could possibly have engendered and grown to become mouldy. Through it all Geraldin bore her hoary heritage with unsurpassed and unparalleled ~~sweetness~~ ^{and} grace. There was elegance without the slightest hint of the overbearing haughtiness of the highborn lady - the Lady of Stocton-On-Tees.

In George she saw the sweet solitude and security of the twilight coolness, after the heat and grime of the daily war of living. It was a longing in her for the more chastened sweetness of life. Often she had been called to fight the battle of love. Almost always she had won, and come out unscathed. The sweating and gasping agony of the rich escort in the night after the rich repast, repelled her, but left deep in her a swelling well of loneliness.

It was the claw of the incubus, and she was so delicate and sweet!

It was pleasant, even seductive, to think of an evening with George. In the fragrance of a summer evening, under the moon and stars; or in a moonless night, when the night was soft and breathless with stillness! When she would desire and acquiesce!

In the scented wood, on the carpet of leaves and turf she draws him

onto her. The streams are swollen and they rush through his head. The mountain peaks reach to the skies, and the beast stands on the prow ready for the leap. The thunder and lightning in the black sky and the storm, and the convulsion of the beast, and the convulsion of the earth! Ah, for the power of god to assuage and calm the storm! And out of the depths he cries to the innermost gleam of his conscience - the power of his will, his unblemished youth!

The storm passes and the night is still. He watches her prostrate form. There is the dew of moisture on her forehead where a dank curl hangs limply. The thin blouse is now open to the protruding erect firmness of her breasts. He lays a hand on them as if to calm their raging storm. Her eyelids flutter as she takes his hand to her lips and teeth.

Spent with emotion he lies down beside her, kisses her lips and squeezes her hand in mute apology. "I am not worthy of you," he demures, "I am an apology for what you could have. A poor student - with prejudices!"

She sat up and looked in surprise at him: "A poor student, yes -- but prejudices!"

There was the grimace of a contrite smile on his face as he sat up with her. "Not the prejudice one thinks of usually," he said in a low voice, as if ~~he~~ ^{admit it} ashamed to ~~say~~ to himself. "Often I get tangled up with myself, to the confusion of others. A sort of complex complex, emotional dystrophy, so to speak. At any rate it's more of a taboo than a prejudice. A sacred fear of and veneration for that inner female delicacy and sanctity, the wellspring of life, as well as of all the credos, beliefs, desires, hopes and despair! The chaste ecstasy culled in a moment's blast of exquisite joy! Like a ripened delicate fruit I dare not contaminate with my touch for fear of it dying in the blossom."

"You are the dearest and tenderest of beings," she said passionately, pressing his head to her breast. "You are a baptismal font. In your presence I am baptized and clean again, absolved of all sins. I am young again."