

CHAPTER III

THE SUPPER



JANET wore her blue ribbon the night of the supper in the unfinished college building.

Everybody else seemed to be gazing at the long tables. One was decorated with a peach-tree made of a wild-cherry branch with brilliantine leaves and doughnut peaches. Another had for its centerpiece a pig roasted whole, with an ear of corn in its mouth to complete the realistic effect.

Janet scarcely glanced at these things. Her eyes were searching the crowd for a gleam of pink—the pink of

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Phebe's dress. She was ready to cry with disappointment, when she felt a warm touch on her arm and turned to look into the very eyes of Phebe, who had just come in.

Mrs. Sear and Mrs. Loring greeted each other with stiffness and needless ceremony, but the little girls, taking all happy things for granted, moved away, hand in hand.

By-and-by the Hawleyville Cornet Band marched into its appointed corner. The men were resplendently uniformed and the instruments were like broken bits of flashing sunlight.

Janet danced with excitement and pulled Phebe to the nearest possible point.

Alas! When the shining instruments

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lifted their brazen voices in a sudden great roar like hurricanes and hailstones, thunder-storms and Niagara Falls joined in one mighty tumult of sound, Janet put her hands over her ears and rushed, shrieking, from the building.

Fortunately, her cries were lost in the louder cries of the brass instruments, and few persons took note of her behavior. Phebe followed with more dignity and they walked about outside until the music had ended.

“It isn’t so dreadful out here,” Janet said from the safe vantage of nearly half a block’s distance. “It sounds better and better the farther away we get, but I’m glad the house didn’t fall down and kill all the people and our

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mothers. It might, you know; and I wish it was just a little more like birds."

Later, when they had re-entered the brick building and were walking about together, Phebe's father suddenly wrenched their hands apart, said: "Come with me, my daughter," and led Janet's friend swiftly from her.

Janet, bewildered, unable to understand why such a thing had happened, ran about seeking her mother. Her father had gone to a flour-mill some miles distant and could not return before the next day, so she and her mother had come without him. Moving about in the crowd, she chanced to hear a woman's voice saying:

"If Mr. Loring is opposed to The College and the festival and everything

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the rest of us are trying to do, why did his wife bring a pyramid cake and come here, with Janet?"

"May be Mr. Loring doesn't know all she is about; he is out of town," was answered in the voice of another woman.

Janet dashed up to the speakers and said:

"Is my father 'posed to The College? I didn't know it, but I'm 'posed to it, too, because the brass band sounds like the world breaking in two in the middle." Then she rushed off, certain that she had done something to vindicate her father. As she turned, she felt Mr. Sear's eyes bent upon her in a disapproving way that made her uncomfortable.