

***GRACE
LIVINGSTON
HILL***



***THE CHANCE
OF A LIFETIME***

Grace Livingston Hill

The Chance of a Lifetime

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CHAPTER I

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The morning Alan MacFarland's father broke his leg, Alan got a special delivery letter from his former high school professor, inviting him to accompany him as a sort of assistant, at a small salary, on an archaeological expedition to Egypt that was to sail from New York in three days.

"I would have given you more notice if it had been possible," wrote Professor Hodge, "but the vacancy only just occurred through the resignation of a young man who was taken seriously ill. I have recommended you, and I hope you will be able to accept. It will be the chance of your lifetime. The salary is not large nor the position notable, but the experience will be great. I am sure you will enjoy it. You are young, of course, but I have great belief in your character and ability, and have told our leader that I am sure you will make good. It will be necessary for you to write at once if you wish to hold the job, as there are other eager applicants; but you have precedence."

There followed a list of necessities that Alan must bring with him, and directions to the place of meeting with the rest of the expedition.

Alan was sitting at his father's desk in the Rockland Hardware store reading this letter. He had just come from the house, at his father's request, to open the mail and answer one or two important letters that were expected. This letter of his own had been brought to the store by mistake instead of being delivered at the house, and therefore it happened that the great temptation of his young

life was presented to him all alone, away from the watchful, loving eyes of his mother or his father.

Alan's first reaction was wonder and awe that he, Alan MacFarland, just a graduate of the Rockland High School, had been chosen for such a marvelous honor, a place in the great expedition to Egypt! There was nothing in the whole world of honors that Alan could think of that he would more desire to do. He had always been interested in archaeology, and his soul throbbed with eagerness. To go in company with Professor Hodge, who had given him his first interest in ancient things, seemed the height of bliss. His eyes shone as he read, and his breath came in quick gasps of wonder. He looked up at the last word of the letter with a dazed expression and stared about him, as if to make sure that he was awake and in the land of the living, not dreaming or anything.

A chance like that to come to him! A smile broke over his face as he sat with the letter still in his hand and gazed through the iron grating that surrounded the cash desk. Across the store were shelves filled with neat boxes, green and brown and red, all labeled; gimlets and screwdrivers and chisels in orderly rows, but he saw instead a wide desert under a hot orient sky, and toilers in the sand, bringing forth treasures of the ancients. He saw himself with a grimy, happy face, a part of the great expedition, exploring tombs and pyramids and cities of another age.

Suddenly the immediate environment snapped on his consciousness; bright gleaming tools of steel and iron—saws and hammers and nails and plows; and the desert faded. They fairly clamored at him for attention like so many helpless humans.

"What are you going to do about us?" they asked. "Your father is helpless, and we are your responsibility."

Alan's smile suddenly faded even as the desert had done.

"But this is the chance of my lifetime!" he cried out indignantly to himself. "Surely Father would want me to accept. Surely he would not stand in my way."

"Yes, but are you willing to put it up to him?" winked an honest oatmeal boiler, aghast. "You know what your father told you this morning! You know how touched you were when he told you that he could bear the pain and the being laid aside, since he knew you were free to take over the store and that he could trust you to run it as well as he would have done himself."

"But there is Uncle Ned," cried out Alan's eager youth. "He has nothing in life to do now since he has retired, and surely he could look after things for a while till Dad is on deck again!"

Then conscience spoke.

"You know what your father said this very morning about Uncle Ned. You know he told you that Uncle Ned let everything run down, and got the books all mixed up those six weeks he had charge while your father went to California last year. And you know your father said there was a crisis just now in his affairs and that if he couldn't tide things over for the next six weeks he would lose all he gained in his lifetime."

Alan's hand make a quick nervous movement in laying down the letter, and a heavy paperweight in the form of a small steam engine, a souvenir of the last dinner of the United Hardware Dealers the elder MacFarland had attended, fell with a clatter to the floor.

Alan stooped and picked it up, and it seemed as he did so that all the blood in his body rushed in one anguish flood to his face, and throbbed in his neck and head. Was this

appalling thing true, that he was going to even consider whether or not it was right to accept this wonderful offer? Surely, surely, his father would not permit him to make such a sacrifice!

Then his conscience held up before him the picture of his father as he had seen him just a few minutes before, his face white with pain, his lips set in a strong endurance, his voice weak from shock; and again he heard the trembling sentences from those strong lips that had never acknowledged failure before:

“There’s a note to be met, son, the first of next week. The man is needing money badly and will foreclose if it isn’t paid. I thought I had it all fixed up, but I got his letter last night, and I reckon that’s what I was thinking about when I crossed the street in front of that car. You see, the worst of it is he has a purchaser ready to take over the store and give him cash at once on foreclosure. I suspect it’s that evil-eyed Rawley that’s been hanging around asking questions the last three weeks, and there’s nothing for it but to raise the money somehow— There are those city lots we’ve been saving for Mother—They’ll have to go, unless you can get Judge Whiteley to fix up another mortgage somehow to tide us over—”

The voice had failed with a new wave of pain, and Alan’s mother had signaled him in alarm.

“That’s all right, Dad,” Alan’s strong young voice had rung out with assurance. “I’ll fix that up okay. You don’t need to worry a minute! And of course I can run the store. You needn’t think anything is going wrong just because you are taking a few days’ rest.”

That was how he had cheered his father, one short hour before, and walked down the street with his shoulders back and a proud feeling of responsibility upon him to take over

the business and make it succeed, pull it out of a hole as it were. How his heart had responded to his father's appeal.

And here he was considering dropping the whole thing, shedding the whole responsibility like a garment that could be discarded at will, and running off to play at digging up gold vases in some dead king's tomb! Calling it the chance of a lifetime and crying out for an opportunity to fulfill his dreams and ambitions, while his father lay in pain and discouragement and saw his own life struggles and ambitions end in utter failure, too late to mend.

Well, he couldn't do that, of course. He couldn't lead his own life at the expense of all Dad had done, not now, just as things were nearing a fulfillment of his dreams. And in a sense Dad was doing it all for his sake and Mother's. Who was he to presume to live his own life at the expense of his parents'? And why should his life be any more important in the universe, and in the eyes of God, than his father's life and fortunes were?

He was sitting up now, with the paperweight in one hand and the letter in the other, staring at the four walls of the hardware store that had always seemed so important and so friendly to him. These questions were being shouted at him by a bright chisel that caught the light of the sun through the window, by a keg of gleaming wire nails that stood behind the counter within sight at his right hand, by a bundle of ax handles that bunched together over in the corner next to a great burlap bag of grass seed. All these inanimate creatures suddenly seemed to come alive and accuse him. Even a box of bright little seed packets left over from the spring seemed to reproach him. And then he seemed suddenly to have to defend himself to them all; he, the son of the house, who was now in command and expected to bring order out of the confusion and trouble.

What made any of them think he was going to desert, his glance seemed to say, as his upper lip stiffened and his chin lifted, just the slightest, perceptible bit?

Alan laid down the paperweight and grasping his father's pencil began to write on the back of Professor Hodge's envelope.

Deeply grateful for your thought of me. Would like above all things to go, but impossible. Dad run over by automobile this morning. Fractured leg and other injuries. May be some time in recovering. Meantime, business responsibility on me. Great regrets and many thanks. Suggest Bob Lincoln. Here's wishing,

Alan.

He counted the words carefully, and then reached out his hand for the telephone, but instead of calling Western Union as he had intended, he hesitated, with his fingers on the receiver, looked about thoughtfully, firmly, as though the matter was settled of course, but stuffed the scribbled envelope down in his pocket and called his home.

"How's Dad, Mother? The doctor been there? What does he say? What? Ohhh-h! He does? Did you say he thinks it's a difficult fracture? He said Dad might be a long time in bed? What's the word? Complications? Oh! Worry? Why no, of course not! There's nothing whatever to worry about. Tell Dad I'm at the helm and the ship is sailing fine. I'll get all this mess straightened out in great shape, don't you be afraid. Just tell him so! Tell him— Tell him I'm having—the time of my life! Why—tell him—I'm having"—he caught his breath as if a pain had shot through him and ended in a bright voice—"Tell him I'm having the chance of a lifetime. See? And don't you worry, little Mother! Dad'll pull through

beautifully. This is just his chance to rest. He's worked hard for years. It's my turn to take the helm!"

He hung up the receiver sharply and shut his lips in a fine, firm line, his eyes taking on a look he wore when he had to break the enemy's luck on the football field, or win in a race, or climb a ladder to rescue someone in a village fire.

Then with a defiant glance around at the inanimate objects that had accused him, he seized the telephone again and called for Western Union, firmly giving his message word for word in a clear, crisp voice, feeling in his heart that he had cut his own throat but was glad he had. Then he set to work in a mature, businesslike way to open the morning mail. This sickly feeling at his stomach was not to be noticed any more than if he had got knocked out playing baseball. He had this job to do and he was going to do it. And surely he was no worse off than before he got that letter from Professor Hodge. He ought to be glad the professor thought him worthy to go on such an expedition. It maybe wasn't the only chance in the world, even if good old Hodge had called it "the chance of a lifetime." Well, if it was, this store was the chance of a lifetime, too. He might never have another opportunity to help Dad, and begin to repay all he had done for him. Good old Dad!

Something misty got into Alan's eyes as he opened the next envelope, and he cleared his throat and brushed his hand across his forehead. Then suddenly he forgot Egypt and Hodge, and the expedition and the honor, and his loss and everything. For here in this letter was a challenge greater than any buried cities could give. It was even worse than Dad had hinted. The man who held the mortgage had come out in the open with sneers and threats, couched in language that was so sure of winning that it added insult to injury. What! Let that man insult his father? Not if he knew

himself! If he couldn't do anything else, he would thrash him. But he knew, good and well, he was going to do something else. He'd get that money somewhere and put Dad on the top, if he had to sell his own skin to do it. Alan's lips shut, thin and hard, and his eyes took on their steely look. The desert faded, and honors held less significance. Here was another matter that called for all his nerve and powers. Other fellows could go to Egypt and do whatever was necessary to be done to unearth the secrets of the ages. But he, Alan, was the only one who could put his dad right with the world again.

All day he worked frantically, not taking time to go home for lunch, holding long telephone conversations, and writing letters. Interviewing his father's lawyer and getting in touch with the president of the bank, making an appointment with a real estate agent in the city for the next day, writing letters to two or three powerful friends of his father's whom he could not reach over the wires, sending telegrams.

It was wonderful, the thrill that came to him as he realized his own responsibility and the necessity of good judgment. If he only had someone to consult. Someone closer than just bank presidents. Of course, there was Keith Washburn—and Sherrill. Sherrill had amazing good sense for a girl. But of course he could not tell either of them, good friends though they were, about his father's business. He must weather it alone. If he only could ask Dad a question or two. But his mother's various messages, reporting the state of the beloved invalid, made it very plain that Dad ought not to be bothered with a thing for many a day yet.

Alan went home late to dinner that night and tried to wear a cheerful face to cover his weariness. Now that his actual work was done, until morning he had time to think of his own disappointment, and it cut deep into his heart and

brought out the tired lines on his face more than he dreamed. Maybe he might have gone after all if he only had not been so hasty. Perhaps his plans would have carried smoothly, and by tomorrow everything would have been straightened out and the business safe. Surely then there could have been found somebody who would have taken over the store for a while till Dad got well. But no! He must not even think of that! Mother must never suspect; Dad must never know what he had given up. Dad would have felt even worse than he did about it. Dad was ambitious for him. Dad would have wanted him to be connected with this great matter!

His father was under opiates and in the hands of a capable nurse from the city. Alan could only tiptoe silently up to the door of the sickroom and peer anxiously into the cool, dim shadows. That sleeping form with the closed eyes, the strange, unnatural breathing, how it stabbed his heart. Of course, he could not have gone off to a desert and left his father like that.

Perhaps it was his need of being reassured after he had visited his father that led his footsteps out across the lawn and down the next street to the Washburn house. His mother did not need him. He had tucked her into her bed for a nice nap, kissed her, patted her, and told her not to worry. He had a strange lost feeling, like the first time he went to kindergarten all alone. So he wandered to his friend's house.

Sherrill was at the piano, playing, the lamplight falling from the tall shaded lamp on her head and shoulders, bringing out the glint of gold in her hair, the delicate curve of her cheek and chin, the exquisite molding of her slim shoulders. He stood a moment and watched her wistfully. How sweet she was, and wise. What would she have advised him to do? Would she have said he must stay? But of course

she would. He could not think of himself even asking her. He would not want her to think there had been any other thought in his mind for an instant, than to stick by his father. And yet— She was young! She was sane! Perhaps he had been over sentimental! He longed to hear her say it. Yet he could never ask her. The only person he could feel like asking was God, and he felt that he already knew what God would have him do.

She had stopped playing now and was wheeling a big chair up to the light. He drifted up to the open window and called her.

“Sherry, come out in the hammock and talk to me.”

She came at once, in her pretty white dress, standing in the doorway, poised for a second, while she called to her mother:

“Only out in the hammock, dearest. I shan’t be long. Alan is here!”

They sat down in the big, capacious swinging seat under the sweet-smelling pines and talked.

Sherrill had had letters from two of the girls. Priscilla Maybrick was in the Catskills having a wonderful time, and Willa Barrington had gone with an aunt to Atlantic City. They talked for a while about the comparative merits of seashore and mountains, and then a silence fell between them, a pleasant silence such as brings no embarrassment between good friends.

“Had a letter from old Hodge today,” said Alan nonchalantly, as if it were a matter of small moment. Somehow he had to let it out to someone, and Sherrill Washburn was safe and sane.

“You did!” said Sherrill interestedly. “What did he have to say? Is he still in that suburb of New York? Keith heard he had resigned.”

"Why no, he isn't there," Alan said. "He did resign. Hadn't you heard? He's a high mucky-muck in an expedition to Egypt. Archaeological, you know. Digging up some of Tut's relatives and things like that."

"You don't mean it! Really! Isn't that just wonderful? Did he say when they start?"

"Friday," said Alan grimly. And then in a tone as if he were reporting an invitation to a pink tea, he said, quite offhandedly, "He asked me to go along."

"Oh, Alan!" said Sherrill, clapping her hands in ecstasy and looking at him with admiration.

"Yes," said the boy, "gave me all the dope and everything to meet him in New York, day after tomorrow."

"Day after tomorrow!" The girl gave him a quick look, and sympathy broke into her voice.

"Oh, Alan! Then you can't go! Of course. But isn't that hard! You wouldn't want to leave your father just now. Does he know about it?"

"No, and I don't intend he shall!" said Alan, and there was a ring of purpose in his voice. "Please don't say anything to Mother either, Sherry. It would just worry her, and she's got enough to be anxious over now."

"But wouldn't they both perhaps feel you ought to have told them? It's such an important thing. Perhaps they could make other arrangements and let you go."

"There isn't a chance!" said Alan briskly, thinking of the hard work he had been doing all day. "Nobody else knows about Dad's business the way I do, and I wouldn't trust anybody to take things over. Besides, Dad may be worse hurt than we think. The doctor can't tell everything just yet. Of course, I know it's a chance of a lifetime, as old Hodge said, but it can't be helped. The way just isn't open, that's all. I only mentioned it because I thought you'd like to know

that Hodge had asked me. I guess it's an honor. He must know a lot of other fellows better fitted than I am."

"Of course it's an honor," said Sherrill eagerly, "a great honor! But I'm not a bit surprised. I don't believe Professor Hodge knows another boy of your age that is as dependable as you. But as for being the chance of a lifetime, you can't tell. Maybe staying at home is the chance of yours. Things we want are not always the ones that are best for us. This may not be the chance of your lifetime at all."

"Evidently not!" said Alan with a little laugh that hid a twinge of bitterness. "Well it was mighty nice of him to ask me anyway, and I've that to remember, like saving up candy you can't eat along with your diploma and other trifling honors!"

"Have you answered him yet?" asked Sherrill thoughtfully.

"Sure! Wired him within an hour after the letter came."

They were silent a moment, swinging back and forth under the old pine trees, Sherrill's white dress making a patch of white in the shadows.

Footsteps were coming down the sidewalk, ringing footsteps that walked with a purpose. They paused at the rose-vine arch over the gateway and hesitated then turned in and walked more slowly up the stone flagging toward the house. About halfway up they paused, and the two in the swinging seat under the trees could see whoever it was looking toward them. They could not make out his identity. It did not seem to be any of the boys who frequented their company.

"Oh, I say, Mac, is that you?" called the visitor.

Alan rose from his seat and answered, taking a step forward.

"Yes? Did you want to see me?"

CHAPTER II

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The newcomer came swiftly forward then and held out his hand. Sherrill saw that it was Robert Lincoln, Alan's former rival on the football field.

"Hope you'll pardon me for intruding," he said, and there was something surprisingly humble in the boy's tone. "I won't keep you long. I just got a wire from Professor Hodge and I had to come and thank you. I say, Mac, you've been mighty good to recommend me after all that's passed, and I sure do appreciate it. I shan't forget it."

"Oh, Bob, is that you?" said Alan, much embarrassed. "You say he wired? Did you get the job? Congratulations."

"Sit down, Bob," said Sherrill, rising. "I'm just going in the house for a sweater. It's a little chilly."

"Don't go," said young Lincoln. "It's nothing private. You don't mind if I tell Sherrill, do you?"

"There's nothing to tell," said Alan diffidently.

"I think there is," said Bob, turning to Sherrill. "Alan's put me in for the chance of my life. I'm going with Professor Hodge to Egypt. Starting day after tomorrow. Can you beat it? And I owe it all to old Mac here. I never even heard of the job until I got the wire, and I needed something the worst way.

"Mac," he said, turning back to Alan, "I owe you something more than just thanks. I owe you a lot of apologies. I guess there's plenty of humble pie coming to me. I'll own I've said mean things about you several times, and the time you thrashed me I guess I deserved it even more than you knew. But I never knew you were upright like

this. I thought you were a hypocrite. Now I ask your pardon. This is the best thing I ever knew a man to do to his enemy."

"Oh, Bob, cut that out," growled Alan, "there was nothing great in what I did. Knew you were keen on such things. Happened to hear you wanting to go away. Since I couldn't go myself I didn't see any reason why you shouldn't profit by it. I hope I'm not a dog in the manger."

"I'll say you're not!" said Bob fervently. "And I'll have to own that if the chances had been reversed, I'm afraid I would have been. I'd have said I couldn't go myself but you shouldn't anyway."

"Aw, cut it!" said Alan. "You aren't like that, Bob, and anyhow that doesn't cut any ice. I'll own I was upset that I couldn't go myself, but I'm tickled to death you can, since I can't."

"But why can't you go, Mac? Aren't you keen about it?"

"Keen? Boy! It's like the pot of gold and the rainbow all in one to me. I'd rather go than get rich if you know what I mean. But it can't be done. My dad got run over this morning, and I've got to stay by the store and take his place. It'll be weeks, maybe months, before he's around again. Lucky if it isn't years."

"Say! That's tough luck. I hadn't heard. Been groveling in the factory all day. But Mac, why couldn't I take your place? I'm a year older than you, and I could take orders. I'd have my heart in doing something like that. You go, Mac, and I'll stay!"

Alan wheeled about and faced the other boy for the first time that evening.

"Would you do that for me, Bob?" he asked, his voice all husky with feeling.

"I sure would, Mac," said Bob. "You're the first person since my sister died that's cared a straw what became of

me. Look what you've done for me! Sure, I'll do it gladly!"

Alan put his hand out and gripped the other's hand in a warm grasp.

"Guess I've got an apology coming, too, old man," he said, still huskily. "You're great. I won't forget this. I can't accept of course, because Dad needs me, but you've taken half the sting of saying no away from me. I didn't think when I suggested your name that you would even know what I was connected with. But I'm glad now it happened. I'd—like to—feel—we are friends!"

"Suits me to the ground," said Bob eagerly. "I haven't got many of that species. I should say you might head the list if you don't mind. And now, I wonder if you'll put me onto the ropes. I size it up that I haven't got much time. Professor Hodge said you had all directions. Do you mind letting me copy them? I know you'll want to keep the letter. It's some honor to have been asked."

"That's all right," said Alan heartily, "we're partners in this in a way, and when you get out there old man, write me a card now and then to let me know what I'm missing, see?"

"Sure thing!" said Bob. "You'll be mother, home, and heaven to me, Mac. You know only too well I'm not very popular around here. Can I just step over to the door to the light and copy this?" he asked Sherrill.

"Oh, come in to the library by the desk," said Sherrill, "both of you come in. I've got a pitcher of lemonade in the refrigerator and a great big chocolate cake that needs eating."

"Oh, boy! Lead me to it!" said Bob excitedly. "I'm boarding down at the Copper Kettle and had half a chicken wing and one lettuce for my supper."

Laughing, they went into the house, and Sherrill settled the boys at the library desk while she went to forage for

refreshments, but Alan soon followed her to help her.

"He insists on copying it lest the paper get lost," he said, "so I'll help you rustle the grub."

Sherrill wheeled about him with shining eyes then went and carefully closed the dining room and pantry doors before she spoke. "Alan MacFarland, you blessed old hypocrite! Did you go and ask Robert Lincoln to go to Egypt in your place?"

"Oh, I just suggested his name," said Alan, looking sheepish. "I thought he might as well have the chance."

"But I thought you were sworn enemies!" said Sherrill. "It isn't long since you gave him an awful thrashing!"

"Well, he needed it," said Alan thoughtfully, "but you know he almost licked me, too. He's got a lot of nerve, and he's strong as wire. He's a smart kid. I think he'll make good."

"But, Alan, I thought you didn't like Bob. I thought you didn't approve of him at all."

"Well, I don't!" said Alan with a strange grin on his face. "At least I thought I didn't. But I guess I'll have to change my opinion. He certainly has showed up in great shape tonight, offering to stay in my place."

"Maybe he doesn't really want to go," suggested Sherrill.

"Yes, he does, Sherry!" protested Alan earnestly. "He told me in there just now it had been a dream of his life to do something like that, and he promised me all kinds he was going to make good. Listen, Sherry. Bob's had a rotten deal lately. His sister died last month, you know, and she was the only one that ever cared for him. His brother-in-law is as hard as nails. He gave Bob a job in the canning factory carrying out peelings at six dollars a week and his board. Told him if he didn't like that he could get out, it was all he would ever do for him. I think he's been kind of up against

it. You know Bob. He'd never stand being humiliated by that old grouch. He'd just go to the devil pretty soon, and nobody care."

"But how do you know what he may do in Egypt? Do you trust him?"

"Sure! I think he'll make good. He used to be crazy about old Hodge. It was the only thing we ever had in common. I think maybe he'll turn out all right. He's keen on the job."

Sherrill had been buttering thin slices of bread for sandwiches, and now she turned around with the knife in her hand and her eyes bright.

"Alan, I think you're just wonderful!" she said, with a shining look.

"Nothing of the kind, Sherry. I've just had to grind my teeth all day to keep from boohooing because I can't go myself."

"Well, I think you're wonderful!" stated Sherrill again, whirling back to her buttering. "This may be the chance of Bob's life, but I'm inclined to think you've got a bigger one yet coming to you. Now, these are ready. Get the pitcher out of the right-hand door, please. And put that plate of cake on the tray. I'll take these in."

"Say, this is some set out, Sherry!" said Alan, surveying the burdened tray. "But I'm glad you did it. I believe that kid is really hungry."

Sherry flashed him a glad look and led the way with her plate of delicate sandwiches.

Bob looked up from the letter he had copied, his face flushed with eagerness, and a radiant smile that made him seem like a new person, not the boy they had disliked through the last three years of high school.

"Boy!" said Bob. "That certainly looks good! You two people are making me feel I'm leaving some real friends

when I go away. I didn't think I'd ever regret leaving this little old burg, but I certainly think I've missed a lot not having you people for friends. No, don't say anything. I know you likely wouldn't care for me any more than you ever did if I stayed, but let me go away with the illusion that you would, can't you? A fellow has to have someone to tie to!"

"You make us ashamed, Bob, that we have been so unfriendly," said Sherrill. "Won't you put it this way, that we just haven't got to know the real you? We didn't mean to be horrid, really we didn't."

"You make me feel more than ashamed, Bob," said Alan, laying a friendly arm across the other's shoulder. "Let's make up for the loss from now on, shall we? What say we'll be real partners in this job across the sea. You're the representative on the field, and I'm the home correspondent or something."

"Okay with me," said Bob heartily. "Boy, you don't know how it feels to have you say that. I can't ever thank—"

"Cut it out, pard!" said Alan huskily. "Here, have some more lemonade."

They had a merry time and ate up every scrap of sandwich and every crumb of cake, drinking the lemonade to the last drop. Then suddenly Bob Lincoln sprang up.

"I must go!" he declared, looking at his watch. "It's awfully late, and I've got a lot of work cut out for me tomorrow. First I've got to hand in my resignation to the Rockland Canning Factory, which same I shall enjoy doing; and then I've got to get all that junk in that list together and pack. There's a few things in that list I don't believe I can compass, but I don't reckon it matters. I've learned pretty much to get along without things lately anyhow," and he

laughed a careless little ripple, the kind he had been used to giving to cover his angry feelings.

Sherrill and Alan looked at him with sudden comprehension. This was the old Bob they had not liked. Had it been that he covered up his loneliness with this attitude and they had not understood him?

Then Alan spoke quickly. "Look here, old man," he said, "you and I have got to have a good talk fest tonight. Suppose you come home with me for the night. Then we can get everything thrashed out. You know we're partners. You're taking my place, and it's sort of up to me to see that you have everything in your outfit you need. Yes, that's my part. Come on, old boy, let's get down to brass tacks!"

Bob looked at Alan with sudden wonder.

"You're great!" he said, with deep feeling in his voice. "What a fool I was! I used to think all that church going you did was just a pose. I called you a hypocrite once right in the school yard! And I believed you were. But now I see— Well, I can't tell you how I feel about this. I'm not going to let you do anything more for me of course, but—it's awfully decent and fine of you to talk that way."

"Come along, pard!" said Alan laughing. "We'll settle our differences in private. Come, we haven't any time to waste."

Alan gave him a push toward the door, but he paused before Sherrill.

"Good night, Sherrill," Bob said earnestly. "You've given me an awfully nice evening, and I shall always remember it. I used to think you were a snob, but now I see you're real. I can't thank you enough for letting me in on this pleasant evening."

Sherrill went to the door with them and called a happy good-night, watching them go down the walk, Alan's arm

flung across Bob's shoulders as if they had been comrades for years.

Suddenly Alan turned and sprang back toward her.

"I'm carrying some of your property, Sherry." He laughed, handing her a handkerchief. "You dropped this under the hammock when we came into the house, and I absentmindedly put it in my pocket."

Their fingers touched as Sherrill took her handkerchief, and she heard Alan's low whisper, "It was great of you to do that, Sherry. He thinks you're wonderful, and I can't thank you enough."

"Oh, I was glad to have a part in it, Alan," whispered Sherrill, "and say, Alan, I've been thinking. I shouldn't wonder if, after all, this would turn out to be the chance of your lifetime. I think you've gone a long way toward saving Bob!"

He gave her fingers a squeeze and sprang back to Bob and they walked down the street, whistling together an old school song, a thing they never had done before.

"Who was that other boy, Sherrill?" asked her mother, looking up with pleasant curiosity in her face.

"That was Bob Lincoln, Mother."

"What! Not the Lincoln boy that Alan dislikes so much? Not the boy that made so much trouble in school and was always doing wild things? Not the one that Alan fought with?"

"Yes, Mother," laughed Sherrill. "The same boy, but you'd be surprised how nice he is, and how grateful he was for the sandwiches and cake. He hadn't had much supper. You know his sister died not long ago, and he has to get his meals almost anywhere."

"Well, but, my dear! How did he come to call on you? I'm sure he's not the kind of boy you would want to have for a

friend. I hope he isn't going to start in now and bother you coming here. I'm sure your brother would not like it at all. Keith is very particular about you, you know."

"Oh, he didn't come to see me at all, Mother; he just ran in to speak to Alan a minute—on business—and we asked him in."

"Well, but, my dear, it isn't wise to get too intimate with a boy like that. He will think he can come here again. I'm surprised that Alan didn't take him away at once. It's all well enough to be kind, but I really couldn't have you asking a boy like that here regularly. Sherrill, you never stop to think about things like that——"

"Listen, Mother dear. You needn't worry about Bob. He is going to Egypt day after tomorrow, to be gone three years on an archaeological expedition with Professor Hodge. So, you see, there's nothing to worry about at all. He came to ask Alan something, that was all, and we were just being kind to him. We found out he has been awfully lonely, and Mother, he was so pleased to have somebody a little friendly! You ought to have heard him. I felt so ashamed I didn't know what to do."

"Is that the red-haired Lincoln boy that used to drive by here in that old rattley Ford?" asked Sherrill's grandmother, looking up with sudden interest. "I always liked that boy's looks. He reminded me of a cousin of mine that ran away and joined the navy. He came back a first-rate man, too. I always thought his aunt that brought him up never understood him. She fussed over him a lot."

"Now, Mother!" said Sherrill's mother with a tender smile. "You always were a romantic dear. Who would ever have thought you noticed a boy going by on the street?"

"Well, I did!" said Grandmother Sherrill. "And I'm glad you were nice to him, Sherrill. If he's going to Egypt he can't