



The Girl Next Door

Augusta Huiell Seaman

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CHAPTER I

MARCIA'S SECRET

"Marcia Brett, do you mean to tell me—"

"Tell you—what?"

"That you've had a secret two whole months and never told me about it yet? And I'm your best friend!"

"I was waiting till you came to the city, Janet. I wanted to tell you; I didn't want to write it."

"Well, I've been in the city twelve hours, and you never said a word about it till just now."

"But, Janet, we've been sight-seeing ever since you arrived. You can't very well tell secrets when you're sight-seeing, you know!"

"Well, you might have given me a hint about it long ago. You know we've solemnly promised never to have any secrets from each other, and yet you've had one two whole months?"

"No, Jan, I haven't had it quite as long as that. Honest! It didn't begin till quite a while after I came; in fact, not till about three or four weeks ago."

"Tell me all about it right away, then, and perhaps I'll forgive you!"

The two girls cuddled up close to each other on the low couch by the open window and lowered their voices to a whisper. Through the warm darkness of the June night came the hum of a great city, a subdued, murmurous sound, strangely unfamiliar to one of the girls, who was in the city for the first time in all her country life. To the other the sound had some time since become an accustomed one. As they leaned their elbows on the sill and, chins in hand, stared out into the darkness, Marcia began:

"Well, Jan, I might as well commence at the beginning, so you'll understand how it all happened. I've been just crazy to tell you, but I'm not good at letter-writing, and there's such a lot to explain that I thought I'd wait till your visit.

"You know, when we first moved to this apartment, last April, from 'way back in Northam, I was all excitement for a while just to be living in the city. Everything was so different. Really, I acted so silly—you wouldn't believe it! I used to run down to the front door half a dozen times a day, just to push the bell and see the door open all by itself! It seemed like something in a fairy-story. And for the longest while I couldn't get used to the dumb-waiter or the steam-heat or the electric lights, and all that sort of thing. It is awfully different from our old-fashioned little Northam—now isn't it?"

"Yes, I feel just that way this minute," admitted Janet.

"And then, too," went on Marcia, "there were all the things outside to do and see—the trolleys and stores and parks and museums and the zoo! Aunt Minerva said I went around 'like a distracted chicken' for a while! And beside that, we used to have the greatest fun shopping for new furniture and things for this apartment. Hardly a bit of that big old furniture we brought with us would fit into it, these rooms are so much smaller than the ones in our old farm-house.

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