

Will Barbara have a date for the wedding?



Sister of the Bride

Beverly Cleary

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Chapter 1

I guess this is just one of those days, thought Barbara MacLane on her way home from school one bright afternoon late in April. She was not alone. She was walking beside a boy, a very tall boy, but their thoughts were like those famous parallel lines that lie in the same plane but never meet.

Barbara was mulling over the events of the day. First there was that argument with her brother, because his cat had clawed one of the stuffed animals she kept on her bed. At breakfast her father had lectured her on doing better work in chemistry. Part of the afternoon had been spent in conference with her counselor who thought she should have her future planned as neatly as an English composition. He was an English teacher, who thought life should have a topic sentence. And now she was being walked home by Tootie Bodger.

Tootie, who was six feet four and played the trombone, had his problems. “Just because I’m tall everybody expects me to do things I don’t want to do,” he was saying as they walked up the hill. “Like dance with all the tall girls when I don’t like to dance. And play basketball. All winter the whole school kept asking me why I didn’t turn out for basketball, and when the season was over I thought they would forget it. But no such luck. Today the coach stopped me in the hall and said that next season he wanted to see me come out for practice. He said I was basketball material.”

“Why don’t you?” asked Barbara automatically. It seemed as if everybody in high school had to be some kind of material. That was what her counselor said she was. College material. He had sat there, tapping his nose with that yellow pencil and telling her she was college material and asking what college she wanted to go to and what she wanted to major in when she got there.

“I don’t want to go out for basketball,” answered Tootie. “I don’t care what they do. Flunk me. Expel me. I am not going to play basketball.”

“Why don’t you want to?” Barbara was more interested in keeping the conversation alive than in learning the answer. It had been easy enough to tell her counselor where she wanted to go. To the University of California, where her mother and father had gone and where her sister, Rosemary, was now a freshman.

“Aw, I’m not any good. I’d just fall all over my feet,” said Tootie.

“Oh, Tootie, you wouldn’t either.” She felt this was expected of her, but she went right on thinking her own thoughts. Her counselor hadn’t thought much of her reason for wanting to go to the university, that was plain. And naturally she couldn’t tell him that all she wanted to do, all she had ever wanted to do, was catch up with her sister, Rosemary. So she had just said lamely that the one thing she was sure of was that she did not want to major in chemistry, and he had said she had better give some thought to her future....

“Yes, I would,” insisted Tootie. “I always fall over my feet. Besides, I never can care that much about getting a ball through a hoop. It seems pretty stupid to me, chasing a ball around just to throw it through a hoop. I’d rather practice my trombone.”

They walked awhile in silence. It was too bad, Barbara decided, finally giving her attention to the boy beside her, that everyone expected Tootie to play basketball when he was such a good trombone player. The whole school respected him for his ability to play *The Tiger Rag*. You would think that would be enough. She wished she knew of something to say that would make him feel better, not only because she really wanted him to be happy, but because the walk home would be so much easier if he was more cheerful.

“It’s getting so I get the feeling nobody likes me.”

“Why, that just isn’t true,” protested Barbara, again because it was expected of her. “You know it isn’t true. Everybody likes you. I like you.” She saw at once that this was the wrong thing to say.

“Do you, Barbara?” Tootie asked eagerly. “Do you really like me?”

“Of course I do. You know that,” Barbara answered impatiently, feeling that Tootie was insensitive to shades of meaning. There was no way to explain that she liked him to smile at in the hall or to talk to before class and that was all.

“No, you don’t,” contradicted Tootie, his morale sagging once more. “Not really.”

“Yes, I do, Tootie.” Barbara spoke without much conviction. This could go on all the rest of the afternoon. The whole trouble was that he liked her so much more than she liked him that she felt uncomfortable when she was with him.

“If you really liked me you’d go to the movies with me Saturday night.” Tootie looked straight ahead, waiting for her answer.

“I’m sorry,” said Barbara. “I would like to, Tootie, really I would, but Mom said something about Rosemary’s coming home Saturday, and she said she was going to ask Aunt Josie and Gramma over. You know how it is. Family dinner and all.” They turned up Barbara’s street, which was damp and woodsy and smelled of bay leaves.

“Rosemary only goes to the university over across the bay,” Tootie pointed out. “She comes home all the time. It isn’t as though she goes to Vassar or someplace a long way off.” His voice was reproachful as he ducked to avoid a bay tree that leaned across the sidewalk.

Tootie was quite right. Rosemary came home twice a month to have the orthodontist look at the retainers that held her newly straightened teeth in place. Tootie knew this, because his mother and her mother had been members of the same club for years.

“I am sorry, Tootie,” Barbara said firmly, carefully hiding her real feelings. She should have offered some more plausible excuse for not going to the movies with him. After all, she liked him enough not to want to hurt his feelings. Someday she would learn. Someday she would be as skillful at this sort of thing as Rosemary. Lucky Rosemary—eighteen, away at college, free of growing boys.

“Okay, if you don’t want to go out with me.” Tootie looked gloomier than ever.

Barbara remained silent to avoid any more you-don’t-like-me-yes-I-do conversation. By now they had reached her house, an L-shaped white house with green shutters, set in a clearing at the point

where the pavement stopped looking like a city street and began to look like a road. Sidewalk and curb ended in a clump of redwood trees beyond the MacLanes' house, and there the road began to climb and twist up the hill.

Barbara paused in front of her walk. "Well, good-bye, Tootie. Thanks for walking home with me." There was no question of asking him in. Mrs. MacLane, who described herself as three-fifths of a teacher because she taught English and social studies part-time in the junior high school, would not be home yet. She almost always stayed after school to help her slowest students. Neither Barbara nor her sister, Rosemary, when she lived at home, was permitted to invite a boy into the house unless one of their parents was home.

"So long," said Tootie, who understood the situation. He brightened slightly. "See you tomorrow." He turned and, hunching his shoulders, plodded back down the street.

Poor old Tootie, thought Barbara as she walked around to the back door and let herself in. If only he would stop being so gloomy about everything. Boost his morale in one spot and it sagged someplace else. It was like trying to pick up a handful of cold spaghetti. She stepped into the kitchen where she found her thirteen-year-old brother, Gordy, eating cold pork and beans out of a can. His cross-eyed Siamese cat, Buster, was sitting at his feet looking elegant and disdainful even while begging.

"Hi," said Gordy with his mouth full. "I saw old Tootie Bodger walking home with you."

"M-hm." Barbara was not going to admit to Gordy that she was not particularly glad to have Tootie walk home with her, that she considered it a waste of a beautiful spring afternoon. She found the sight of her brother eating cold beans particularly irritating after her exasperating conversation with Tootie. Maybe all boys were exasperating. Maybe this was one of the fundamental truths of life her father was always telling her she had so much to learn about.

Gordy, his red hair uncombed and one side of his sport shirt hanging out, chewed thoughtfully for a moment. "You know, old Tootie even looks like a trombone. Long and narrow."

Barbara wanted to smile, but she would not give her brother this satisfaction. "That's a mean thing to say. He can't help it if he's tall and thin."

Gordy picked one bean out of the can with his fingers and fed it to Buster. "Why a fellow with his build doesn't go out for basketball beats me," he said.

"Tootie doesn't like basketball. He can't see any point to throwing a ball through a hoop," Barbara told her brother. "Can't you put those beans on a plate?"

"Nope, I can't wait that long," said Gordy. He added virtuously, "I'm a growing boy." And he was. He would soon be as tall as his father, whom he resembled. And someday his curly red hair would grow thin and sandy, just as his father's had.

Barbara detected in his manner a certain pleasure in annoying his sister. She and Gordy disagreed about almost everything lately. Their mother said they went out of their way, even took pains, to disagree, but somehow, once they had started differing on every little thing, they could not stop.

Neither was willing to let the other have the satisfaction of giving in first.

“I wouldn’t call eating cold beans out of a can gracious living,” she remarked, feeling that she was one up on Gordy because she knew where her mother had hidden a lemon meringue pie.

“Okay, Miss Barbed Wire, nobody asked you to,” said Gordy, picking out another bean for Buster, the cat he had saved his own money to buy.

As much as she disliked being called Barbed Wire, Barbara made up her mind to ignore this brotherly remark. She noticed that the grocery list had been removed from the bulletin board on the cupboard door, and concluded that her mother was going to shop on her way home from school. Probably to buy more cans of pork and beans, thought Barbara as she left the kitchen and carried her books down the hall to the room she shared with her sister, Rosemary, on the weekends Rosemary came home from college. Mrs. MacLane always watched for specials on anything that would help fill up Gordy when he came home from school. Pork and beans, eight cans for a dollar, were a good buy. So were tamales, four cans for thirty-nine cents.

Barbara opened the door of the bedroom, which was always kept shut to prevent Buster from using her collection of stuffed toys for sparring partners. Now she tossed her books down beside her nineteen animals—the teddy bear, Pooh Bear, Tigger, the stuffed penguin, the fat pink pig, and all the rest—which bore snags and tears from Buster’s teeth and claws, like wounds from a one-sided battle.

Barbara unbuttoned the pink blouse that Rosemary had discarded after her first semester of college when she took to wearing grays and beiges. If she changed now, she could wear it to school another day and save ironing a fresh blouse. Of course Rosemary, in spite of their mother’s protests, was quite right about neutral colors being so much smarter than pastels. But Barbara still thought it was a pretty blouse and was happy to have inherited it along with several other discards that Rosemary did not consider appropriate for college, even though several of them bore good labels. Rosemary had done a lot of babysitting to earn those labels.

As Barbara changed into a cotton dress she discovered that she had somehow absorbed some of Tootie’s gloom. Lucky Rosemary, who was across the bay at the university and who even owned a sophisticated basic black dress. Rosemary always got to do everything first. Lipstick, heels, dates—always Rosemary was first, and by the time Barbara caught up and was wearing lipstick and high heels on special occasions and being walked home by Tootie Bodger, there was Rosemary way ahead of her in basic black with earrings.

Barbara could never get over the feeling of being a little behind, a little left out. These feelings were intensified on the weekends Rosemary came home from college to share with the family her enthusiasm for her life across the bay. Rosemary seemed so sure of herself. She was even sure she wanted to be a nursery school teacher, and was looking forward to the work she would do at the university’s Institute of Child Welfare. Her conversation seemed sophisticated, full as it was of references to work shifts in the cooperative dormitory where she lived, to midterms, and to grade-point averages, words that were strange to Barbara’s life as a junior at Bayview High. Oh well, thought Barbara to console herself, as she often had ever since the two sisters were little girls, at least I am the one with the naturally curly hair.

Gordy and Buster must have finished the can of pork and beans, because in the next room Gordy

began to play his guitar and sing, “Michael, row the boat ashore. Hallelujah!” Barbara closed her bedroom door. Gordy had been practicing that song for days, and he never seemed to improve.

Gordy stopped, experimented with a chord, and tried it again. “Michael, row the boat ashore. Hallelujah!” It was not right. He tried once more before he continued. “Jordan’s river is deep and wide. Hallelujah!”

Barbara sat down on the bed and put her fingers in her ears. This had been going on for weeks. Gordy and two of his junior high school friends had formed a trio to sing folk songs. Their ambition—in a year or two when they were really good—was to make records or, rather, “cut” records, as they were always careful to say, that would sell millions. Other boys not much older had done it. Why shouldn’t they?

“Sister, help to trim the sail. Hallelujah!” Barbara heard Gordy singing in spite of her fingers in her ears. Lucky Rosemary, to be away at college and escape this. Poor Barbara, left behind to endure her brother’s folk singing, uncertain about her future, forbidden to wear earrings....

But sitting on the bed with her fingers in her ears was a dull way to spend an afternoon. Not that Barbara had anything more interesting to do except, of course, study. She could always study, and she supposed she should study even on a sunny April afternoon, because her father, who taught print shop at the high school, was sure to talk with her chemistry teacher one of these days. But she did not feel like studying chemistry. She felt like...she did not know what. Running barefoot through fields of daffodils maybe or writing a poem. Certainly not studying chemistry while Gordy plinked at his guitar and sang in the next room. The sound waves from Gordy’s record player managed to get past the fingers in Barbara’s ears. He was playing a record of *Michael, Row the Boat Ashore* good and loud, so she could catch and try to imitate the chords of the guitar player.

When Barbara took her fingers out of her ears she discovered that the telephone in the kitchen was ringing. This was a welcome sound. The telephone might keep her from studying chemistry on a sunny afternoon just a little while longer. It had rung several times before she was able to reach the kitchen and silence it by saying, “Hello?”

“Hello, Barby.” It was Rosemary, muffled and breathless, calling from across the bay. “Guess what? I’ve found someone to take my work shift and I’m coming home this weekend.”

This was not unusual. Certainly it was nothing to be so excited about. “You sound funny. Do you have a cold or something?” asked Barbara. Her fib to Tootie had been partially turned into the truth.

“No. I’m calling from a phone booth down at the corner drugstore. I didn’t want to talk on the pay phone in the hall.”

This was strange. Rosemary usually made her calls from a pay telephone on a stair landing in Stebbins Hall, where she lived. There was rarely anything private about her conversation. “Why not?” asked Barbara, now picturing her sister in a telephone booth, her golden-red hair shining against its dark walls.

“Look. I can’t talk all day. This is a pay phone and I have only twenty cents,” said Rosemary. “Just tell Mom I’ll be home late Friday afternoon and to please have something besides meat loaf and

string beans for supper.”

“All right. But why the excitement?” Barbara knew her sister’s excitement was caused by something other than her desire for a change from meat loaf and string beans, a once-weekly dormitory menu.

“Can you keep a secret? A big one?” asked Rosemary.

“Well...I can work at it,” said Barbara. “You know how women are.”

“This is no time to be funny,” said Rosemary. “Not on my twenty cents.”

“I can keep a secret,” promised Barbara.

“Barby, I’m going to get married!” Rosemary’s voice was filled with joy and excitement.

Barbara was stunned into silence. Married? Her sister married? She knew Rosemary had become more sophisticated since she had gone away to college, but she had no idea...*married*. Why, she was only eighteen. She still had bands on her teeth.

“Are you still there?” asked Rosemary.

“Yes, I’m here,” said Barbara.

“Then say something,” pleaded Rosemary.

“But who are you going to marry?” asked Barbara, wondering if she should have known without asking.

“Greg, of course, silly.” Now that she had shared her secret Rosemary’s tone was light, almost gay. “Who else?”

Who else was right. It had been Greg this and Greg that every time Rosemary came home from school since Christmas vacation. Barbara should not have been surprised. But she was surprised. Rosemary had liked so many boys. Or men, as she called them now that she was in college. “You mean you’re in love?” Barbara asked.

“Of course I’m in love!” Rosemary’s muffled voice was almost singing. “Why didn’t anybody ever tell me being in love, really, truly in love, was so wonderful?”

Barbara, who was in no position to answer, knew this question was purely rhetorical.

“My time is up,” said Rosemary hurriedly. “Remember it’s a secret until I tell Mom and Dad.”

Barbara could not let her sister go. “Wait!” she cried desperately. “Borrow some money. Do something, but don’t hang up!”

A moment of silence came over the telephone. “All right,” agreed Rosemary. “I see a couple of girls I know at the soda fountain. They ought to have twenty cents between them.”

“At least tell me when you’re going to get married,” begged Barbara.

“June.”

“*This* June?”

“Of course.”

It was too soon. April was almost gone. May, then June. There wasn’t much time. “When in June?” persisted Barbara.

“The tenth. That’s between spring semester and summer session,” explained Rosemary, as if this made everything very clear.

“But what’s that got to do with it?” Barbara wanted to know.

“We’re going to summer session,” said Rosemary.

This was too much for Barbara to comprehend. “When are you going to tell Mom and Dad?”

“That’s why I’m coming home this weekend.” Rosemary’s voice lost its lilt and took on a worried note. “What do you think Dad is going to say?”

“Well...” was Barbara’s doubtful answer.

“He seemed to like Greg when I brought him home for dinner that time during spring vacation,” Rosemary reminded her sister. “Except for that one argument, and I think he was just having fun baiting Greg. At least I hope so.”

“Yes...” The family usually liked the boys whom Rosemary brought home. They poked fun at some of them, but since Rosemary had gone away to college they had liked most of the boys or, at any rate, had not found anything seriously wrong with them. They had been more critical when she was in high school. “But you know Dad...And Dad might have been serious about that argument. You know how he is about printing.”

“I know, I know Dad,” said Rosemary. “That’s what’s bothering me.”

Speculating on their father’s possible reaction disturbed Barbara, too. *Marriage*. Till death do them part. It sounded so permanent. Their father was sure to feel that there was a big difference between asking a boy home to dinner and marrying him. She could not guess what his reaction might be, but she did know that if he disapproved he would not hesitate to say so and say so forcefully. She recalled that once when Rosemary had bought a cotton skirt with *L’amour! L’amour! L’amour!* printed all over it he had made her return it to the store. He said it made her look boy crazy.

“Say something,” pleaded Rosemary from across the bay.

“There isn’t much I can say,” said Barbara. “You know he may go straight through the ceiling.”

“I know.” There was despair in Rosemary’s voice.

“And Mom will say, ‘Now, now. Let’s talk it over.’” Barbara hoped she was offering some comfort.

“I know,” repeated Rosemary. “Well, I guess I’ll find out soon enough, and I’ll manage Dad somehow. Look, meet me at the bus around five o’clock Friday afternoon, and don’t breathe a word to anybody. Promise?”

“I promise,” agreed Barbara.

There was a sudden wail from the other end of the line. “Oh-h! They’re leaving!” The receiver was slammed onto its hook, and Barbara knew that her sister had dashed out of the telephone booth to borrow twenty cents.

Well. Rosemary engaged to be married. Barbara still could not believe it. Bewildered, she continued to stand with her hand on the telephone. Rosemary married to Greg...what was his last name? Aldredge. Dark, slight Greg. That was a bit of disappointment. Barbara had always pictured both her sister and herself marrying tall men. She searched her mind for every scrap of information about Greg Aldredge. She knew he had originally come from the East, because he had amused the MacLanes by his references to “out here.” Out here people were friendlier. Out here people were less conventional. That sort of thing. His family now lived someplace farther down the peninsula below San Francisco. He was a graduate student, majoring in English and minoring in history. No, it was the other way around. His major was history and his minor English. He had a brother who was a premed student at the university and a sister who was a physical education major. He had an old car, and he had spent two years in the Air Force. This was all the specific information Barbara could summon about Greg. Except, of course, the argument.

Stunned as she was, Barbara could not help smiling as she recalled the talk at the dinner table the evening Rosemary had brought Greg home. Mr. MacLane, whose students printed the yearbook in the school print shop, had remarked that the yearbook staff wanted the names under the pictures of the graduating class printed entirely in lowercase type. Mr. MacLane, a man who pretended exasperation with the human race, was particular about capital letters, punctuation, and proper syllabification at the end of a line. Any student who divided English into English caught it from Mr. MacLane. He was famous for saying, “If you don’t know, look it up” to his classes, and this earned him the nickname of Old Look-it-up MacLane. Naturally he was impatient with a yearbook staff that had such a notion as reducing capital letters to lowercase letters.

Greg made the mistake of mentioning the poet E. E. Cummings, who did not use capital letters or punctuation and often ran words together for effect. Of course this provoked an argument from Mr. MacLane. What if every author took it in his head to throw away the rules? What kind of books would we have then? Books that no one would read, that’s what we would have. Greg felt that the printer’s job was to print the text, not criticize the author’s art. Not that he did not respect punctuation, you understand, sir, but...Mr. MacLane had a lot to say about the contribution of the printer to the art of bookmaking, and Greg had been silent or, anyway, had kept still.

“Sister, help to trim the sail. Hallelujah!” Gordy sang with a new chord, bringing Barbara back to the present. Still she did not move. Gay, popular Rosemary washing socks? Impossible. Now why did she think of a thing like that? Barbara asked herself. Marriage was not washing socks. It was love and moonlight and orange blossoms. Things like that. New dishes, new clothes, everything brand-new all

at once. Oh dear, now she would never catch up with Rosemary.

And a wedding, Barbara thought suddenly, meant bridesmaids, flowers, parties, presents...and she was going to be in on all the fun. The gloom she had felt after her walk home from school was entirely gone now. The secret began to well up within her until she felt as if she would burst if she did not tell someone.

“Jordan’s river is deep and wide,” sang Gordy. “Hallelujah!”

I won’t tell, Barbara reminded herself. I promised. Cross my heart and hope to die. Unanswered questions flooded her thoughts. Forty cents’ worth of telephone conversation had not been nearly enough. There would be several bridesmaids, of course, with Barbara, the bride’s only sister, as maid of honor in blue with a nosegay of pink roses. Or perhaps green with yellow roses. That would become a brown-eyed blonde. Barbara decided she must start reading the society pages to find out about these things.

Now in her imagination Barbara, maid of honor, was coming out of the church on the arm of a college man, who was attentive to her all during the reception. People were looking at them and smiling and thinking, What an attractive couple they make. Now she was waiting with the bridesmaid for Rosemary to throw her bouquet...she was catching it...everyone was smiling and nodding. Of course the maid of honor would be the next bride.

Just then Mrs. MacLane startled Barbara by opening the back door and carrying in a bag of groceries. “Help me bring in the rest of the things, will you, dear? I’m late because I stopped at the Department of Motor Vehicles to pick up copies of the motor vehicle code for my ninth graders. They’re all interested in driving cars, and I thought traffic rules might be something that would interest them in reading.” Mrs. MacLane taught three classes of slow students, of which the ninth grade English class was the most difficult.

“Sure, Mom.” Barbara was surprised that her mother had noticed nothing unusual. Her one thought, Rosemary is going to get married, was so intense, she felt it must surely be audible.

“Sister, help to trim the sail!” sang Gordy in a new experimental way that was almost a howl.

“Goodness,” remarked Mrs. MacLane, “I should think Sister would have that sail trimmed by now. This has been going on for at least a week.”

Barbara was glad to escape to the garage to pull a bag of groceries out of the luggage compartment. As she did so, a can of cat food tumbled out and rolled down the driveway. This was Tuesday, she thought as she ran after it. Wednesday, Thursday, and then Friday. She did not see how she could ever keep a secret that long. But she had to. She had promised.

Chapter 2

If the secret within Barbara had been written in music, this part of her day would have been marked *crescendo*. The news seemed gradually to increase in force within her until she felt as if she must shout, “Rosemary is going to get married!” While she set the table for dinner she tried to think of something else—school, her English assignment, Tootie, anything—but her thoughts always flew back to Rosemary and her wedding. A lovely wedding in June, with Barbara as maid of honor catching the bridal bouquet. Oh joy, oh bliss and a handsome best man, hallelujah, her thoughts sang as she folded the paper napkins in half. April, May, June, here comes the bride, hallelujah!

Mrs. MacLane, who was unpacking groceries in the kitchen, remarked, “The Safeway had another special on pork and beans. It’s a good thing Gordy never seems to tire of them. And there was a special on cat food for that cat of his. I do hope Buster won’t turn up his nose at this brand.”

Beans and cat food. Barbara felt a twinge of pity for her mother as she got out the greens and the wooden bowl and started to prepare the salad. There seemed to be no room in her soul for poetry since the school board, hearing that she had a teaching credential, had prevailed upon her to take over three classes of slow students. But then, of course, her mother did not realize there was going to be a wedding in the family so soon.

Mrs. MacLane began to pack the meat she had bought into the refrigerator, and Buster came running into the kitchen to rub against her legs and purr hoarsely. “Scat,” said Mrs. MacLane, and gave Buster a shove with her foot. “Wouldn’t it be nice if people purred as charmingly as cats when they are hungry? Half the quarrels in the world would never take place.”

“Especially people like Gordy,” agreed Barbara.

As if in answer Buster stopped purring, fixed Mrs. MacLane with his crossed blue eyes, and began to swear, as only a Siamese cat can.

“Speaking of Gordy,” said Mrs. MacLane, “he’d better feed this cat if I am ever to get dinner on the table. Gordy!” she called above the sound of the record player. “Come and feed your cat, so I can get dinner in peace.”

Gordy slouched into the kitchen. His mother looked at the tousled hair, the hanging shirttail, the sneakers without laces, and did not conceal her irritation. “Gordy, can’t you pull yourself together? You look so untidy. I don’t like to see you look so sloppy.”

“Aw, Mom, do you have to pick on me all the time?” Gordy asked. “No matter what I do somebody in this family is always picking on me.”

“Gordy, I’m not picking on you!” Mrs. MacLane snapped. “But there is no excuse—”

“Mother, you just said people should purr when they are hungry,” Barbara reminded her mother as she finished the salad. “You’d better start purring.”

Mrs. MacLane laughed ruefully, and Barbara felt this was a good time to let her mother have the kitchen to herself. She went into the living room and flopped down on the couch, where she looked critically around the living room and dining room. The wedding would not be here. Rosemary would want to be married over in Woodmont, the next town, in the church the family had attended since Barbara could remember. The towns of this county, the population of which had doubled and redoubled in the past twenty years, were so close together that it was easy enough to drive to the church of one's preference in a few minutes, even though it was in another town. This was what Rosemary would want to do. There was no question about that.

But the reception? The house was less shabby since her mother had gone back to teaching. The carpet was not quite a year old, and a chair had been reupholstered long enough for the newness to wear off that had made the other chairs look shabby by comparison. It was a comfortable house of no particular style or period. But would Rosemary want the reception here? Barbara wondered. She speculated about the cost of a wedding reception at the country club, even though she knew this was out of the question. Oh well, there was really no point in trying to plan the wedding until Rosemary came home.

Barbara picked up a magazine that was lying on the couch. She tried to read a story, but she was too wedding minded and the advertisements were too distracting. Pictures of silverware made her wonder which pattern she would choose if she were Rosemary. Finally Barbara settled on a perfectly plain pattern that looked as if it could be inherited from someone's grandmother. It would go well with anything. Next, she selected two kinds of bath towels—plain blue and white, printed with blue roses—coordinated, the advertisement said, with sheets and pillowcases, also printed with blue roses. If Barbara were the bride instead of Rosemary she certainly would want to be coordinated. She read on. Refrigerators, washing machines, even detergents and scouring pads, took on interest in the light of Rosemary's news. Oh, but Rosemary was going to have fun. All that shopping...wedding presents...packages to unwrap. Barbara dreamed on until she was called to dinner.

She continued to dream of the wedding through dinner and only half listened to an argument between her father and Gordy. Gordy told his father that he was probably born with a C mind and, in that case, it was senseless to expect him to be an A student. His father pointed out that people who were born with C minds simply had to work harder. They often did better than A minds who wasted their talents. And anyway, Gordy wasn't going to get by with that old C-mind argument in this household. He was a MacLane, wasn't he? That was enough.

Barbara was suddenly aware that she had been so busy daydreaming about the wedding and trying to keep the lid on Rosemary's secret that she had completely forgotten to mention her telephone call. "Oh, by the way," she said, in what she hoped was an offhand manner. "Rosemary phoned this afternoon. She said to tell you she was coming home Friday for the weekend."

"Just before midterms?" Mrs. MacLane expressed surprise. "Her appointment with the dentist isn't until a week from Saturday. Did she say anything else?"

I won't tell, I won't tell, Barbara thought desperately as she said, "She said please don't have meat loaf and string beans for dinner."

"I like meat loaf and string beans," protested Gordy.

“You like anything that will fill you up,” his father reminded him.

Who wants to eat meat loaf and string beans when she is in love? Barbara asked herself. Nobody. Love calls for strawberries and angel food cake and meringue and possibly, for something more filling, cheese *soufflé*. Fluffy things.

“I know how monotonous dormitory food can be, especially in springtime.” Mrs. MacLane, who had attended the university during the Depression, sympathized with Rosemary’s request. “I remember how I used to long for fresh asparagus and strawberries when it seemed as if we had been living on carrots and bread pudding all winter. I saw some fresh strawberries in the market today. I think we’ll have them for a treat when Rosemary comes home, even though they are a little high yet.”

Barbara wished her mother had not mentioned the cost of strawberries. She would prefer to have Rosemary eating strawberries, oblivious of the price because she was in love. Sometimes her mother seemed positively earthbound by the details of living, but then she did not know she had a daughter in love. Not yet. Barbara rose to clear away the dishes and to serve the lemon meringue pie, which her mother had already cut. There were little beads of brown moisture rising from the meringue, causing Barbara to reflect that although her mother was a good enough cook, she would never be invited to go back East to take part in a Pillsbury bake-off contest.

“I don’t think she should come home when she has to study for midterms,” remarked Mr. MacLane. “I don’t care how much meat loaf she has had to eat at school.”

“Perhaps she feels she can get more studying done at home,” suggested Mrs. MacLane. “Sometimes it’s hard to study with a roommate and her friends around all the time. What does surprise me is that she could tear herself away from Greg, the way she talks about him all the time.”

Barbara, who had served the pie, now took her place at the table. She was careful to keep her eyes on her pie.

“Who knows? Maybe they’ve had a fight. Maybe our daughter is coming home to mend her broken heart,” said Mr. MacLane jovially. “You know how kids are.”

The family ate the pie with the beady meringue in silence for a few minutes. Barbara tried to think of something to say that was far removed from the subject of Rosemary and Greg, but all she could think of was her walk home with Tootie Bodger, and she was not particularly eager to mention him. Her mother was always so enthusiastic about Tootie. He was such a nice boy, she said, in spite of that ridiculous nickname. Barbara decided that if she absolutely had to, she would fling Tootie into the conversation to keep her family from asking too many questions about Rosemary, but only as a last desperate measure. She was beginning to feel worn-out from the excitement of her secret. Maybe by now she was too tired even to want to tell it. She hoped so.

People should keep their own secrets, Barbara thought suddenly. Rosemary had not been able to contain her secret and, to relieve her own crescendo feeling, had passed it on to Barbara who, according to the unreasonable rules of secrets, had to contain it or feel that she had betrayed her trust. It was not fair.

“Tom, do you think Rosemary is getting serious about this Greg? Really serious, I mean,” Mrs.

MacLane suddenly asked her husband. “She has talked about nothing but Greg for months, and now they’ve been going to museums together. You know that isn’t a bit like Rosemary.”

Gordy agreed. “A wienie roast is more her speed.”

If I were a character in a comedy, I would either choke on my pie or spill my milk, thought Barbara, who did neither, even though she would have liked to distract her parents in some way. Perhaps this was the moment to fling Tootie Bodger into the conversation.

“I hope not,” said Mr. MacLane. “She’s only eighteen, and she has three more years of college.”

“I know...” said Mrs. MacLane thoughtfully, “but girls get married younger nowadays. You know that. And a girl as attractive as Rosemary is bound to meet someone sooner or later in such a large school.”

“She had better buckle down and bring up her grades if she expects to stay there long enough to meet him,” observed Mr. MacLane.

“I wonder if Greg had anything to do with her poor grades last semester,” mused Mrs. MacLane. “Or was it the shock of finding herself one of over twenty thousand students after a small high school?”

“She’s up against competition that is a lot stiffer than anything she has ever faced before,” Mr. MacLane pointed out, as he pulled a cigar out of his shirt pocket and took off the cellophane wrapper. He always settled back and smoked a cigar after dinner, and there was nothing his daughters could do about it. “Besides, why on earth would she want to marry Greg?” he asked in the jovial manner a cigar always evoked. “I doubt if he could support her in the style to which she is accustomed, and that style includes twenty-five dollars a month for the orthodontist. I’m certainly not going to support her after she gets married.”

“She won’t be wearing bands very much longer,” said Mrs. MacLane.

Oh, thought Barbara, nervously rolling the edge of the place mat between her fingers, this is *awful*. Now it was too late to throw in Tootie Bodger to save Rosemary. “I thought Greg was nice,” she said, and hoped her remark was not significantly conspicuous.

Mrs. MacLane considered Greg. “For one thing, he is older than Rosemary and has been in the Air Force. I think she finds that attractive.”

Mr. MacLane lit his cigar, shook the lighted match, and blew out a puff of smoke. “If it’s age she wants, I’m sure she can find someone more decrepit than Greg.”

Oh, swell, thought Barbara miserably. Now he was going to start being funny. She was sure of one thing. *Her* husband, if she ever had one, would never smoke cigars. That was qualification number one. Positively no cigar smoking. Qualification number two: Be serious about his daughters.

“Barbara, get me an ashtray,” Mr. MacLane ordered.

“Sure, Dad.” Barbara was glad to leave the table even for a moment. She would have liked to

excuse herself altogether, but the conversation had such a horrid fascination she could not bring herself to miss it.

Mr. MacLane accepted the ashtray. "A man's home is his castle," he informed his family. "He has a right to expect ashtrays to be handy and salt shakers to be full at all times."

"And never find nylons dripping in the bathroom," prompted Barbara, hoping her father would elaborate on a man's home is his castle. This was a subject that could keep him going as long as his cigar lasted. The vacuum cleaner should never be run while the man of the castle was listening to the ball game. Telephone calls from other girls should not exceed five minutes. Anything worth saying could be said in that length of time. That sort of thing, on and on in a bantering way that had a serious undercurrent.

Mrs. MacLane, however, was not ready to let the subject of Rosemary drop. "I wouldn't like to see her get really serious about a boy when she is only eighteen. It seems so awfully young."

"Rosemary married? That's a laugh." Gordy, having finished the last crumb of piecrust, was ready to join the conversation. "Remember that time she cooked the cucumbers, because she thought they were zucchini? The poor guy would starve to death."

Mr. MacLane leaned back in his chair and exhaled a cloud of blue smoke. "Supposing she is serious about him," he said good-naturedly. "That doesn't guarantee he is serious about her. She'll have to catch him before she can marry him."

Barbara kept her mouth shut tight.

"E. E. Cummings," said Mr. MacLane derisively, and Barbara could see that he was all set for one of those half-jovial, bantering conversations. "I would hate to see any daughter of mine throw herself away on someone who approved of writers who did not use punctuation or capitals. This fellow Greg probably likes *archy and mehitabel*, too."

"So do I, Dad," said Barbara. "And the reason there aren't any capitals in *archy and mehitabel* is that it was supposed to be typed by a cockroach, who couldn't jump on the capital key and a letter key at the same time. The author wasn't just being lazy. He had a good reason."

Mr. MacLane chuckled. "A book written by a cockroach is just about what I would expect this fellow to like."

Barbara laughed in spite of herself.

Mrs. MacLane had ignored this bit of conversation. "I don't know," she said with a sigh. "I wish I did."

Mr. MacLane flicked a little tower of ash from his cigar and smiled. "I wouldn't worry if I were you. Why would anybody want to marry a flighty girl like Rosemary?"

"Dad!" Barbara's exclamation was involuntary. "Is that the way you talk about us behind our backs?"

“All the time,” answered her father comfortably.

Barbara sat in injured silence. It was no wonder Gordy was such an exasperating brother. It was hereditary. He had an exasperating father. She wondered what it was like to be some other girl, one with a meek father who agreed to everything and handed out a nice fat allowance.

“Oh, I don’t know that Rosemary is completely scatterbrained,” said Mrs. MacLane seriously. “She just likes to have a good time and, besides, college students have so much to do, I think they sometimes seem to be going in several directions at once. She is really a very well-meaning child.” Child, thought Barbara dismally. Rosemary is practically a married woman, and Mother is calling her a child.

“She has never uttered one word of complaint about having to live in a cooperative house at the university. Washing glassware for a hundred girls after dinner every day as her share of the work can really be a pleasure. She seems to enjoy her life, and so many girls we know would be unhappy if they couldn’t live in a sorority house or at least one of the new dormitories.”

“Well, I wish she would stop scattering her brains and bring her grades up,” said Mr. MacLane. “I think I’ll have a talk with her this weekend. Tell her she can’t carry fifteen units of studies and another fifteen of this Greg and expect to make the grade.”

If her father had begun to talk about Rosemary’s grades and Greg at the same time, the moment had come for Barbara to make the sacrifice and throw Tootie Bodger into the conversation. “Tootie Bodger walked home with me today,” she announced.

“That’s nice,” said Mrs. MacLane. “Tootie is such a nice boy.”

“I suppose so,” said Barbara. Tootie was probably kind to animals, too, but that did not make her want to go to the movies with him.

“He’ll probably ask to take you out one of these days.” Mrs. MacLane smiled her approval at her younger daughter.

“Maybe,” murmured Barbara. Harmless old Tootie—kind to animals, trusted by mothers—Barbara would be only too happy to trade him for a best man or an usher.

“What that boy needs is to turn out for basketball,” remarked Mr. MacLane, who not only knew every boy in Bayview High, but had definite opinions about what they should or should not do.

“But he would only fall all over his own feet.” Barbara used the words straight from Tootie’s mouth and wondered how she got on this side of the argument. Probably because she was talking to her father. For some reason, the last couple of years, she seemed to argue with her father every time she talked to him whether she intended to argue or not. She had not meant to defend Tootie, although she liked him in an impatient sort of way. She even felt a little sorry for him, since Gordy had pointed out that he was shaped like a trombone.

“If he learned to handle himself on the basketball court he might stop falling over his feet,” Mr. MacLane said.

“But Tootie doesn’t want to conform.” Barbara knew her father felt there was too much conformity among high school students. “He doesn’t want to be pressured into playing basketball just because he’s tall. He wants to play his trombone.”

“He could do both,” suggested Mr. MacLane, “although not necessarily at the same time.”

“You don’t understand,” said Barbara, ruffled at her father’s attempt at humor. “Tootie is dedicated to his trombone. He is *serious* about it. He is studying with a man from the San Francisco Symphony. He just plays *The Tiger Rag* and things like that because the students like it.”

“I don’t see why he puts up with a nickname like Tootie,” mused Mrs. MacLane.

“He likes it better than his real name,” explained Barbara. “How would you feel if you were six feet four and your real name was Robin?”

“I can’t imagine what Nancy Bodger was thinking of when she named him Robin. He must have been a fat, pink baby,” said Mrs. MacLane, and she patted Barbara’s hand. “I’m glad you like him, dear.”

Now I’ve done it, thought Barbara. Just wait until the next Amy meeting.

Mrs. MacLane’s club, originally called *L’ Ami*, because this was French for *friend*, had been changed by some irreverent husband, possibly Mr. MacLane, to the Amy Club, and its members were known to their families as the Amys. When the club was formed its purpose had been the raising of funds for worthy causes, but somehow over the years it had gradually become a social club, without officers or dues or even regular meetings, whose chief purpose, as far as Barbara could see, was to be an excuse for its members to get together, eat rich desserts, and talk about their children, usually in a humorous vein. Rosemary and Barbara poked fun at the Amys, and Rosemary said the real trouble with the Amys was that they did not use their minds.

Now Mrs. MacLane and Mrs. Bodger would probably compare notes, conclude that Tootie and Barbara liked one another, and make all sorts of little plans to help them get together. If Barbara did not look out she was going to be stuck with Tootie, all because her father made her feel contrary.

Barbara suppressed a sigh as she rose to clear the table. She could not help feeling noble at the way she had sacrificed herself to help save Rosemary—for the moment. She did not envy her sister the weekend that lay ahead, because she was not sure her father had been entirely joking in his remarks about Rosemary and Greg. He often spoke lightly of matters that he was most serious about.

Mr. MacLane, who had worked with young people so many years, was never intimidated by them, and he never hesitated to speak his mind. It was a real problem. Barbara sometimes felt that life would be easier for her and Rosemary if they had a father who could be moved by persuasion, tears, or sulky silence. Poor Rosemary. She wondered if she should try to telephone her at the dormitory to warn her of what lay ahead, but she decided against it. There would be plenty of time for warnings when she met Rosemary at the Greyhound station. Let Rosemary have a few more days of happiness.

Mr. MacLane had left the table and had settled himself in the living room to enjoy his cigar and his evening paper. Barbara cleared away the last dessert plate, and as she rinsed them under the faucet

she wondered how anything as fluffy as meringue, even beady meringue, could become so gluey when it stuck to the plates. Her mood was no longer crescendo. Since her father's remarks about Greg and Rosemary, *diminuendo* was a better word. Her excitement was diminished to the point where her secret was going to be easy to keep until Friday. She no longer wanted to tell anybody because, if the dinner table conversation was any indication, there might not be a wedding at all.

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