

The Lady And The System

Anonymous



THE sun had been too bright outside. It had left a jabbing feeling in Jody's head. This was the first student court meeting she had ever attended, and Kay was showing her the ropes by coming along. Kay stood at the door as though she talked to Dean Endicott every day of her life, her beige linen dress as unwrinkled as when they left the dorm, her brown-red hair smooth in braids around her head. Jody looked down at her already crumpled chambray. She wished she hadn't left her hair hanging around her neck. It was so darn hot.

Kay grinned enthusiastically at Mrs. Endicott. She chose the chair next to the dean of women, letting Jody stand uncertainly in the middle of the mahogany-panelled study. But she stopped bubbling long enough to say, "You know Jody Lyon, don't you, Mrs. Endicott? She's our new president." Mrs. Endicott smiled in front and mumbled something about "of course."

Mrs. Endicott was a Martin College legend—had run things her own way for years. The fat silver buttons on her bright blue dress bobbed up and down when she breathed. She was heavy and hot. Perspiration stuck out on her chin and her streaky grey hair clung in wisps to her forehead. She could be charming when she wanted to.

Then Mrs. Dwight came in, just leaving the door ajar. Mrs. Dwight was the Newell Hall housemother; thin and dried-up and nodding her head when she talked so that she looked like an angry hen preaching to rebellious chickens. She and Mrs. Endicott were always together. Jody had the feeling that Mrs. Dwight wasn't too happy with her as president. Jody wasn't as

enthusiastic as Kay—and Jody didn't keep her room very clean. Every once in a while, Mrs. Dwight checked their rooms. "Just one big happy family," she would say in house meetings.

Kay jumped up and shut the door while Mrs. Dwight sat down stickily in one of the polished chairs. "My, my! What weather. And it's just May, too." She and Mrs. Endicott clucked at each other. Mrs. Dwight shut her eye-slits, smiled playfully at Kay, and then, remembering Jody, smiled at her too.

Mrs. Endicott raised her puffy wrist and looked at her watch. "It's five after. We should really begin. Mr. Mackay will be here soon—he has a class until four. Maybe I could tell you a little about the case we have today." She picked up a heavy glass paperweight showing a scenic view of Yellowstone Park. "I don't know what our girls are thinking of—the war is over, but the way some of them carry on I wonder what has happened to our morals." Her voice was rich and throaty, but somehow it slid past Jody completely. Mrs. Endicott shook her head slowly. So did Mrs. Dwight.

"Well, this girl today is in your hall, Katherine. And Joan. Her name is Margaret Schofield—they call her something else, don't they?"

Kay didn't answer so Jody did. "Scotty. Scotty Schofield. She's in my corridor." Then she realized that the room was quiet, so she stopped. Everyone looked at her, and she wished she could pull her words back to herself.

Mrs. Endicott waited until everyone looked at her again, and began. "Yes. Yes. That's it. Well, this girl—I don't think you girls have been told the story—this girl asked Mrs. Dwight for an overnight slip to stay at Mrs. Merrill's home—she lives in town, you know, and this Schofield girl knows her daughter quite well. Her fiance was coming in and she wanted to stay out later with him she said. So Mrs. Dwight gave her a slip, even though we don't like to give them just so girls can stay out later than twelve." She began fiddling with the paperweight again. Jody wondered if it was as smooth and cool as it looked. Mrs. Endicott placed it in the middle of her blotter and went on.

"Last week Mrs. Dwight was playing bridge with Mrs. Merrill and asked her about this girl, and Mrs. Merrill hadn't ever met her. So this girl, Margaret Schofield, had signed the slip herself and had, so we found, spent the night at the Banker hotel with this man." She sat back in her chair and watched

first Kay, then Jody, to see their reaction. Her face was absolutely immobile, but a bead of perspiration trickled down the side of her forehead.

Jody watched her. This man. Just Paul. Just the fellow Scotty had loved ever since she knew what love was. Just her fiance, the guy Scotty wrote to every night—not mooning like some girls, but thinking of and wanting. Scotty and Paul—not just kids playing at going together, but deep and somehow older and all one piece.

Mrs. Endicott was talking about a similar case. The girl had dropped out of school of her own accord, so they didn't have to expel her.

Jody had been the first person Scotty had really seen after that weekend, after Paul had gone back. Scotty was a wonderful girl—she seemed older and was able to look through all kinds of muddled situations and somehow find the right way. Jody had planned lots of futures with Scotty in that corner room on second.

Scotty had had something on her mind then, and Jody had asked what was wrong, but Scotty had just flashed an outside smile and said nothing. Jody had forgotten it and gone on reading Scotty's poetry anthology until Scotty just began to talk. "I love him so damned much. And we haven't changed—he has and I have but we've changed together. We've changed the same way. God, Jody—he's home! He's O.K. And it's all over. He's back!" But then she didn't cry—just pounded her forehead three times with her clenched fist and swallowed so hard that Jody could see her shoulders move. "We're going to be married in June, Jody. In a month! After I graduate." Jody could feel her happiness breathing into every corner of the room.

After that things had been just like always. Scotty never did talk much about Paul. Almost as though talking about him took a part of him away from her and she couldn't bear to miss even a breath of his name.

It was the next Thursday that Kay had come to Jody and told what Mrs. Dwight had found out. At first Jody thought that Kay was talking about Scotty's getting married. "Surely Dwight won't object to that. This school can't stop people from getting married."

Kay looked at her, puzzled. "You know. About staying at the Banker with Paul last Saturday night."

"But Scotty spent Saturday night at Nan Merrill's house—so she could be with him longer."

Kay had just snorted. "Grow up, Jody. She forged Mrs. Merrill's name and Mrs. Dwight found out and we're going to have a little senate session with Scotty soon." She shook her head. "Some days you just can't make a nickel." And she left.

Jody sat there for a while, but finally she *did* go to Scotty's room. Scotty was outlining her psych chapter.

"Scotty."

"Mm—yeah—oh, hi, Jody. Gosh, it's hot today."

"Scotty—Kay was just talking to me—" Scotty had the kindest smile.

"Oh—about last Saturday night—wasn't it?" Jody wondered how Scotty could read her mind.

"Yeah."

"Don't worry, hon. Although I can't say that—I keep forgetting you're our new president. I broke a rule, I know that. It's just that I got caught. I wish you weren't one of the people who will have to dole out the punishment. Because I know how you feel. But you have to take the dorm viewpoint." She seemed poised and unafraid.

"Oh, Scotty, why? No—it's not the morals question I'm talking about. We've been all through that and you know that what other people do doesn't mean a thing to me. It's not that—it's just—why did it have to be *you* who got caught." She looked down at her hand and saw it was shaking.

Scotty smiled up at her. "Somebody has to be the example. But it kind of gripes me too—because I'm sure somebody else from Newell spent the night there too."

"Who?"

"Oh, nobody. That's incidental. It's my neck now. Jody, in Senate next week forget that you know me like you do. I've done a terrible thing, I guess—in the eyes of Endicott and Dwight. They can't get me for just staying with Paul, so they have to harp on this forgery business. But I'd do it again." She leaned back and scratched her head. "Except for all this trouble you're going through because of it."

Jody bit her lip. "I won't go and sit there and listen to Endicott rake you over the coals. If this is what being president means, you can have it!" She reached over and felt the stockings drying on the back of the door. They were still soggy.

Scotty turned in her chair and looked straight at her. "Look, Jody. You're the big gun in this dorm. You have to abide by the rules and the conventions—Kay did a good job last year because she kept Dwight and Endicott happy—and you can do a better job. Somebody has to stop things like I've done—and so what if I had to leave school." She looked back at her psych book.

"God, Scotty, it isn't fair!"

"Jody, you can't have everything in this world. And I've got Paul and that's all I really want. He's worth anything—and I'll never be sorry—"

She never would be sorry. Jody was sure of that. For Scotty and Paul it was O.K. There weren't many people whom Jody would say it was O.K. for. . .

The sun was lower and it crashed through the window over Mrs. Endicott's shoulder and flipped into Jody's eyes. Mrs. Endicott was just saying hello to Mr. Mackay. Jody liked him. He was a good egg—young enough to have a decent point of view. He sat next to Jody, hunching his shoulders as he sat. He didn't look at Endicott or Dwight, only at the tips of his shoes. He must have been in the army. Brown officer's shoes.

"Yes, bring the Schofield girl in." Mrs. Endicott sat up straight and tried to brush the wrinkles out of her lap.

Jody pushed her shoulder blades hard against the chair back, wishing she weren't there. Scotty came in quietly. She smiled politely at Mrs. Dwight and Mrs. Endicott. Jody was amazed to see that Scotty wasn't nervous at all; it was as though she were the guest of honor instead of the prisoner. Mrs. Endicott pointed to a chair and Scotty sat down. Jody didn't dare look at her eyes—she had told herself she would keep quiet.

"Margaret, you know what we are speaking to you about, I imagine." Mrs. Endicott waited, but Scotty just nodded her head. Mrs. Endicott cleared her throat and went on. "Probably we all have a different moral sense; we can't expect all people to be brought up with the same standards, but here at Martin College we really try to maintain the fine ideals which all young people of today need." Jody pressed her elbows against her hip bones. "And I'm afraid that you have gone contrary to one of our rules."

Mrs. Endicott's fingers ran slowly over the glass paperweight. "We know," she said, looking at its glass waterfall, "that you

forged Mrs. Merrill's name on your overnight slip; we know—and don't ask me how—that you stayed all night in a hotel with a young man. Really, Margaret, I'm amazed. I thought all our young women here held themselves above things like that. How can you expect any young man to have any respect for you after—well, after an incident such as this?"

Scotty just turned her head and looked toward Mrs. Endicott—looked *through* her almost, Jody thought.

Mrs. Endicott tried again. "You know how the authorities feel in matters such as this, Margaret. *Why* did you do such a thing? What type of standards have you set for yourself? To deliberately plan such an escapade!"

Then Scotty brought her eyes back from nowhere and looked directly at Mrs. Endicott. "In the first place, Mrs. Endicott, we didn't plan a thing." She smiled, halfway, to herself. "I really meant to spend the night at the Merrills'."

She did, too, Jody thought. And if she had planned to spend the night with Paul—she would have told us too.

Scotty continued. "I meant to stay at the Merrills'. Otherwise," her voice was smooth and young and confident, "I wouldn't have gotten an overnight slip. I would just have stayed out. With 300 girls in a dorm they wouldn't have missed me." She leaned back in her chair. "It goes on all the time."

Mrs. Endicott and Mrs. Dwight stiffened like cardboard toys, not looking at each other.

"I met Paul at the bus. We are to be married in June. I hadn't seen him in three years. He was wounded in the Battle of the Bulge, was missing for a while, and just got out of the hospital that week." Scotty sat up straight now.

"We were going to dinner and to a show, so we decided to check my overnight case at the hotel until time to go out to the Merrills'. We came back and Paul got the suitcase and we went to the Merrills'. Only, when we got there, I realized it wasn't my suitcase. It was one just like mine." She spoke each word efficiently, letting them fend for themselves in the room. "Paul had picked up the wrong suitcase by accident, so we went back to the hotel to get mine and we stayed there."

Mrs. Endicott and Mrs. Dwight held themselves cleanly away from the group. Then Mrs. Endicott looked Scotty up and down. "But why," her voice was feeling its way along, "*why* did you stay there?"

Scotty turned to look at her fully. "Why did we stay there?" Her voice was velvet.

"Yes. Why didn't you go back to Merrills? Why did you stay at the hotel?"

Scotty looked at Mrs. Endicott for a long time and then smiled just a little. Sadly, almost. "Because we wanted to."

Mr. Mackay grinned at Scotty. "You're the girl—isn't your fiance Paul Emmory—with the 49th in Normandy?"

Scotty lit up. Her eyes turned on, and she nodded. "Yes, that's him. How did you know?"

"He was in my company. I was with him when he was wounded and we spent three or four hours talking about you. I told him I'd look you up when I got back here, if—" he came back into the room. "He *deserved* that medal, Scotty. He was a good soldier. You're a slightly lucky girl." He looked at Mrs. Endicott and then at Mrs. Dwight. "And he's a lucky fellow. Come see me tomorrow."

"Well," huffed Mrs. Endicott. "Time is wasting." She ignored Mr. Mackay.

Jody bit her teeth. The routine, she thought. The eternal inhuman mechanics that settles over people.

Then Scotty came back to the group. "I'm sorry it's causing you all so much trouble." Jody felt heavy. Scotty really meant this, too. "I suppose it was a selfish thing to do—but I would do it again. I know it was the right thing for us to do—and that's what's important. And I know Paul feels the same way."

Jody laid her hands straight out on her lap—all the polish was still on. If only there hadn't been two overnight bags alike—and in this small town too. She watched Kay—sitting very straight and listening hard to what Mrs. Dwight was saying now. Kay was so darned honest about things like this. She listened to everything so hard—even in classes she seemed like a tube, she was always listening so hard. To think all this had happened since last Saturday night. . . Strange. Scotty's luggage was unusual too. Cream with a green stripe on one side. The only other like it she had ever seen was—Kay's. Of course! Kay's. . .

Kay was nodding with Dean Endicott. Jody turned to look at Scotty. Scotty didn't realize, she guessed, how hard she was staring at Kay. Why should Scotty feel sorry for Kay? Jody knew Scotty well enough to know that look. . .

Then Kay turned to look at the others. "It's a hard thing to

punish one of my own classmates, but it's a thing we must do, I suppose." Mrs. Endicott and Mrs. Dwight chorused a nod. "We obviously can't tolerate action such as that because. . ." she looked at Scotty by accident. Scotty was smiling, ever so slightly, at her. Then Scotty closed her eyes, as though she were suddenly very tired, and shifted her smile to the rug. "Because—well." Kay licked her lips and drummed her fingernails on the chair arms. "Because, as you said, Mrs. Endicott, we have to have some standards." She had begun the sentence jerky and uncertain—then slowed down to calmness when she remembered who she was.

Jody had to swallow, but she couldn't. Suddenly her tongue was too large for her mouth. Kay—just sitting there.

"We shall have to decide upon a punishment, Margaret." Mrs. Endicott's chair seemed to be apart from the others. "But perhaps that won't be necessary. We know you are usually an intelligent girl—and that this is just an emotional upheaval in your life. Perhaps you would just like to withdraw from college for a while."

And Kay was listening hard again. Kay was sitting there with the sun making cold hard white lines on her arms.

Both Mrs. Dwight and Kay began to say something, but Mrs. Dwight smiled and told Kay to go ahead. "I was just going to say that although it seems rather hard to leave so late in the quarter, you would probably feel better about it, Mar—Scotty. I know you realize your mistake and wouldn't want to be talked about—wouldn't want the other girls to realize you had been asked to leave." An efficient president, Kay.

"Of course, Kay," Scotty agreed. "It would be easier for all of you if I did just leave. But I've made no mistake. I've been honest—and that's pretty important. I've made no mistake. Maybe it's you." She stood up all in one move.

"I'll see about withdrawing tomorrow, Mrs. Endicott. And Mrs. Dwight, I'll begin to pack tonight. I'm sorry I caused all this disturbance." She walked over to the door and opened it. Then she looked back in.

"I'm getting married the middle of June, Mrs. Endicott. I'd like very much for all of you to come to the wedding."

Jody dug her fingernails deep in her own arm. "I'll be there, Scotty." She stood up. "Hey, Scotty—wait for me. I'll walk back to the dorm with you."