

Advance Praise for *The Gilded Years*

"In this gripping, tension-filled story, Tanabe reveals to us the impossible choices that one woman was forced to make when she decided to follow her dream for a better life. As with many courageous acts, controversy follows our heroine, and for that reason alone, book clubs will find much to discuss here."

—Kathleen Grissom, *New York Times* bestselling author of
The Kitchen House

"Tanabe weaves a tale rich with historical detail and heartbreaking human emotion that demonstrates the complex and unjust choices facing a woman of color in nineteenth-century America. That so many of the questions explored by Tanabe about race, gender, ambition, and privilege still resonate today makes this novel required reading."

—Tara Conklin, *New York Times* bestselling author of
The House Girl

"A thrilling and foreboding tale about social and racial rules in nineteenth-century America . . . Tanabe's narration is reminiscent of novels of the 1890s, with dialogue that is spot-on for that era. The compelling story covers a shameful time in American history, and is unrelenting in its tension and gripping detail."

—Anna Jean Mayhew, author of *The Dry Grass of August*

"The true story of Anita Hemmings comes to life in vivid detail in *The Gilded Years*. Hemmings's gut-wrenching decision to pass as white in order to obtain an education is a poignant journey, and Tanabe's lyrical style is sure to keep readers turning pages."

—Renee Rosen, author of *White Collar Girl*

"*The Gilded Years* really brought home the horrific limitations and choices that were faced by black people post-Civil War, even in the supposedly more enlightened north. . . . That the story is based on true people only added to its richness."

—Laila Ibrahim, author of *Yellow Crocus*

Praise for *The Price of Inheritance*

"Readers will find plenty to savor . . . Carolyn is a winning character with a quick wit, and the opulent environs she inhabits are definitely worth a visit."

—*The Washington Post*

"A compelling novel of financial and emotional high stakes."

—*In Touch*

“Tanabe’s absorbing novel blends equal parts mystery, wit, and romance.”

—*Booklist*

“A deeply enjoyable and riotously funny takedown of the high-stakes New York art world and its most glamorous and illicit auction houses. Tanabe focuses her shimmering humor and laser eye on the dangerous lengths the very wealthy will journey to own a costly piece of history. Lushly detailed and ambitious in scope, *The Price of Inheritance* is rich in romance, war stories, and betrayals. A priceless read by a writer of immense talent.”

—Amber Dermont, *New York Times* bestselling author of
The Starboard Sea

“This absorbing, quick-turning story takes us behind the doors of the big auction houses, into the homes of the art-collecting elite, and onto the international marketplace with sure-handedness, and in fascinating detail. Tanabe writes with passion, intelligence, and a lot of wit, and the book is insanely difficult to put down.”

—Jessica Lott, author of *The Rest of Us*

“Tanabe pulls off a triple coup: she gives us a juicy insider’s look at the high-stakes auction business, a late coming-of-age (and enticingly New York) love story, and a truly suspenseful mystery that crosses borders from Rhode Island to Iraq.”

—Allison Lynn, author of *Now You See It*

“Karin Tanabe weaves a tangled web of romance and intrigue, while exposing the underbelly of the art world. This smart and captivating read will have you turning pages faster than you can say forgery.”

—Emily Liebert, author of *You Knew Me When*

Praise for *The List*

“A biting, hilarious send-up of D.C.’s elite.”

—*People*

“Former *Politico* reporter Tanabe’s roman-a-clef is a hilarious skewering of digital journalism—and how news is tweeted and blogged at a dizzying pace by armies of underpaid and overworked twentysomething journos—as well as a smartly paced and dishy debut, part political thriller, part surprisingly sweet coming-of-age tale, and part timeless ode to dogged reporters with good instincts and guts of steel.”

—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

“A contemporary, politically astute novel that is both wickedly humorous and enticing . . . [with] complex characters, an intriguing plot, and tightly brilliant execution. When word gets around about *The List*, readers will clamor for their copy and devour this book.”

—*New York Journal of Books*

“Tanabe gleefully skewers digital media sweatshops . . . [but] despite its breezy, chick-lit tone, *The List* has more in common with newsroom satires.”

—*The Washington Post*

“*The List* is mandatory reading for anyone who wonders about the impact of new media on Washington’s political culture. Tanabe has written a novel that is delicious fun and incredibly revealing about life at the intersection of politics and journalism.”

—Nicole Wallace, *New York Times* bestselling author of
Eighteen Acres

“A gorgeous book—I loved it. Funny, intriguing, and utterly unputdownable.”

—Penny Vincenzi, internationally bestselling author of
More Than You Know

“*The List* is a wonderfully witty insider’s romp through Washington. Tanabe has as sharp a tongue as she does an eye for detail about everything from political scandal to office politics.”

—Cristina Alger, author of *The Darlings*

“*The List* is a breezy, dishy romp through Washington, D.C., politics, journalism, and scandal—a witty and caffeinated glimpse into a world few of us ever see, let alone know as intimately as Tanabe surely does. But underneath the considerable pleasures of its glimmering surface, it’s a surprisingly moving coming-of-age story about a young woman navigating the bumpy terrain between ambition and ethics, between her hunger for professional success, and the quiet truth of her own heart.”

—Lauren Fox, author of
Friends Like Us and *Still Life with Husband*

“Part coming-of-age, part political thriller, Tanabe’s *The List* is a mordantly funny send-up of quadruple espresso-fueled journalism in the internet age, with the most irresistible heroine since Bridget Jones at its center. This is Evelyn Waugh’s *Scoop* for the twenty-first century.”

—Susan Fales-Hill, author of *Imperfect Bliss*

“Tanabe’s energetic, humorous debut is narrated by a young reporter trying to prove herself by chasing the biggest story of the year. *The List* perfectly captures the frenetic, all-consuming pace of political reporting, with a healthy dose of scandal, glamour, and intrigue thrown in. Think *The Devil Wears Prada* meets Capitol Hill.”

—Sarah Pekkanen, author of *The Perfect Neighbors*

ALSO BY KARIN TANABE

The List

The Price of Inheritance

THE GILDED
YEARS

A Novel

KARIN TANABE



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For the VCVG—with love

There were in her at the moment two beings, one drawing deep breaths of freedom and exhilaration, the other gasping for air in a little black prison-house of fears.

—EDITH WHARTON, *The House of Mirth*

THE GILDED
YEARS

CHAPTER 1

As the electric trolley turned the corner onto Raymond Avenue, the driver sang out, "Vassar College!" The elongated vowels of his coarse New York accent reverberated off the walls, though every woman sitting on the wooden seats was already poised to disembark. Anita Hemmings smiled at two freshman girls who looked at once delighted and struck by nerves, and walked down the steps to collect her suitcases. Her trunk had been sent ahead and would be waiting for her in the school's congested luggage room, then brought up to her quarters by a porter.

The New York town of Poughkeepsie had boasted a trolley only since 1894. In her freshman year, Anita had arrived with her cases in a shaky horse-drawn tram, dusty and soot-colored, and painted with the words HUDSON RIVER R.R. DEPOT and a large gold number four. But for the past three years, Vassar students had pulled up in the efficient trolley, and she couldn't think of a better way to approach the Lodge, the handsome, red-brick gatehouse that served as the campus's entrance and guard post. Anita glanced up at the clock atop its simple façade, centered above four long windows. It was almost five o'clock. She had left Boston at just past seven in the morning and hadn't encountered any

other Vassar girl until she changed trains in Albany. Now she was just steps away from her favorite sliver of the world, the college where she would reside for one more year.

Anita had never lived in a building that could be described as handsome until she went off to school, first in Massachusetts's Pioneer Valley, then at Vassar. Her hometown of Boston was crowded with elegant structures: stately brick houses you could stroll past, imagining the favored lives transpiring inside. But she had never had more than a glimpse of their sumptuous interiors. Here, on the vast expanse of land Vassar occupied a few miles from the gently curving Hudson River, every inch was hers—shared with 522 other girls, but still hers.

In Boston's Roxbury neighborhood, Anita, the oldest of four, shared a small, red-brick row house with her parents; her brothers, Frederick and Robert; and her sister, Elizabeth. It was indistinguishable from its squat neighbors, with a roof that leaked and too few rooms for six. She knew every vein of Roxbury, every needy character in the quarter, and was keenly aware that her friends at Vassar had not grown up in such a place.

"Is that Anita Hemmings?"

At the sound of her name, she turned to see the alabaster face of Caroline Hyde Hardin. The puffs of Caroline's dress sleeves were bigger than last year's, and she wore the trumpet-shaped, S-curved skirt that had become even more in vogue over the summer. Anita fretted for a moment over her travel-weary appearance, but her tension vanished as she was enveloped in a welcoming hug.

"Caroline!" she exclaimed, as her friend stepped back and wiped strands of red hair from her face. It was September 18, but the day was thick with the dense heat of a mid-July afternoon.

"I could tell it was you," said Caroline. "You walk so elegantly, even when you're laden down. Where is Mervis to help us?" she said, looking around for the porter everyone preferred.

"He's just assisting with the trunks of a few other girls who came on the earlier trains. He'll be back down," Anita said, smoothing her light summer dress and taking Caroline's hand, unable to hide her pleasure at being back on campus. "Oh, how I missed this beautiful place," she said, nodding toward the ivy-clad, Renwick-designed Main Building.

The circle in front of Main was crowded with carriages, tired horses, and girls bidding their families goodbye while vying for help with their boxes and suitcases. Before Anita and Caroline had arrived at Vassar as freshmen in 1893, Main had a regal entry with a double staircase leading to an impressive second-floor door, but a long annex had been added to the center of the building that year, courtesy of the school's favorite trustee, Frederick Ferris Thompson. The students called it Uncle Fred's Nose or the Soap Box, for its ample use of white marble. It now housed the ever-expanding library, where the students spent many an evening trying to push to the top of their class.

"It's enormous, but it does look smaller every year, doesn't it?" said Anita. "Perhaps because we've become more comfortable here."

She was right on both counts. The building, built to mimic the Tuileries Palace in Paris, was monumental in size, with five floors crisscrossed by halls twelve feet wide and almost two hundred yards long. On the roof were six thousand feet of lightning rods to help prevent the incessant threat of fire.

Caroline and Anita headed inside and were greeted by a chorus of delighted voices.

“Where did you spend your summer, Anita?” Caroline asked before they were both absorbed into the feminine gaggle.

“Nowhere exotic, I’m afraid. I was just home in Boston and then on Martha’s Vineyard again. My usual summer holiday in charming Cottage City. At home I tutored Greek to several girls preparing for Vassar’s entrance exam. I hope some will be freshmen next year, though I believe a proficiency in Greek and Latin is less important than it used to be.”

“Isn’t that refreshing to hear? I am wretched at Greek. That class on Thucydides and Pausanias last spring tied my brain into knots, though not yours.” Caroline spread her arms as if she were about to clutch the building and let them drop when several families saying farewell to their freshmen moved by.

“Were you back in the Middle East, Caroline?” Anita asked, fixing her grip on her small bag.

“Oh, yes,” she said. “For most of the summer I was in Syria, then we spent some time exploring Italy and France. I wanted to spend more time in Venice, which is just the most enchanting place on earth, a world floating on water, but Father had me working in his school for most of June and July. Lessons in Christianity, lessons in biology, lessons in just about everything. But August was so dreadfully hot that we had to leave.”

Caroline’s father ran a large school in Syria, and she had an abundance of captivating stories about her childhood there. Anita had been nowhere but the American Northeast and clung to Caroline’s tales as if they were Scheherazade’s.

“Are you rooming with Elise Monroe again, Anita?” asked Caroline, waving to a friend who had just entered the building.

“No, didn’t you hear? She’s left school to be married.”

“Has she!” said Caroline, her attention fully on Anita. “Is she marrying the Browning boy? The one who was such a star at Yale?”

“The very one. He’s from Washington, and they’re to be married there just before Thanksgiving.”

“Congratulations to the soon-to-be Mrs. Browning, then. Though it’s sad that her parents didn’t let her finish up one more year here. She was so strong in drama. Such a knack for comedic delivery. I’ll miss her in the hall plays.”

Anita nodded in agreement and the friends meandered through Main, heading up to the senior hall on what everyone called the third floor, though it was the fourth story of the building, a floor above where they had roomed the year before. They took the stairs, as the elevator had a line down the hall.

“If Elise is gone, then who is your roommate this year?” asked Caroline, taking a piece of paper from her case with her room number on it. “Or do you have a single, too?”

“No, I’m rooming with Louise Taylor, from New York.”

Caroline looked at Anita with surprise. “Louise Taylor! As in Lottie Taylor? I never thought she would be short a roommate. How did that happen? Isn’t she rooming with Dora Fairchild again? They have for two years now. They’re awfully close.”

“Dora stayed on in London, it seems, after her summer travels,” said Anita. “Much to the shock and disappointment of Lottie. Kendrick informed me of everything just a few weeks ago. I thought I might be placed in a single in Strong Hall, but I don’t mind.”

“You’ve already communicated with Kendrick? Aren’t you the lucky one,” said Caroline of their admired lady principal.

“Do you know Louise well?” Anita asked, trying to catch her breath after the climb.

“Lottie?” said Caroline, in a suddenly serious voice. “I would say we’re friends, even close friends, but in truth I know her just like everyone knows her.”

Anita looked questioningly at her classmate, hoping she would say more.

“Well, I know of her money and her palatial house in New York,” said Caroline, picking up on Anita’s curiosity. “It’s right near the Vanderbilts’ on Fifth Avenue, you know. Of course you do. It *was* the talk freshman year. She’s also very close to the Rockefellers. Bessie Rockefeller Strong, who was a special student here in the eighties and is Mr. Rockefeller’s eldest, is a mentor to her. Or so they say. Bessie is the one who suggested Vassar to Clarence Taylor, Lottie’s father. Lottie is also friendly with Consuelo Vanderbilt. She was a guest at her wedding last year to the Duke of Marlborough. You know, the one held at St. Thomas’ Church that the papers made *such* a fuss about.”

She looked at her friend to see if she was still listening and saw Anita’s eyes were wide with fascination.

“You saw the pictures, I’m sure. The *New York Times* even ran that ridiculous piece on the luxury of her trousseau, paying particular attention to her intimate wears. I don’t think the whole of America needed to read about the lace on her ivory corset covers, though it was all quite an affair. People lined up for days in front of St. Thomas’ to get a glimpse of her. Consuelo and her swanlike neck. Not Lottie. She was inside the church along with her parents and her very handsome brother, now up at Harvard. A towhead like her. He’s been on campus before. Younger, but not young enough for it to matter. So I know quite a bit about that, and I know the rumors of what happened between Lottie and

Lewis Van de Graff, of the Philadelphia Van de Graffs, at Harvard last year. Everyone here says she's very fast. But I don't really know her as a best friend would, though I'd like to. We're both in Philaletheis, though I'm Chapter Beta and she's Chapter Theta."

Caroline put her hand on the wooden rail and exhaled loudly, as if she was surprised by her own knowledge of Lottie Taylor. Caroline and Lottie had been members of Philaletheis together for three years, the college's exclusive dramatic society and oldest club, but rooming with a woman once described as a speeding locomotive with hair by the Harvard senior class president was another thing entirely.

"I'm sure you two will get on," she concluded. "She's just . . . quite a girl. Yes, that's a good way to put it. She's quite a girl."

Anita had known that Lottie's family was well-off but could not visualize to what extent. Caroline uttering Lottie's name in the same breath as John Rockefeller—who had funded the school's first separate dormitory and was funding a new academic building to break ground that year—was constricting her breathing even further. And then there was Consuelo Vanderbilt. All the Vassar girls followed her doings, but Caroline had said Lottie actually attended her wedding. Anita's starched traveling dress suddenly felt very tight. She put down her bag and reached up to loosen the stiff lace collar.

"Anita, are you unwell?" asked Caroline.

Anita flushed in embarrassment and bent to pick up her things. "I don't know what came over me. It must be this awful heat. I feel a bit faint."

"Come, let's walk down to senior hall and get settled in," said Caroline, taking her arm. "Those stairs were dreadful.

One of the maids can fetch you something cool to drink. Of course it's the heat. They need to open some of these windows and circulate the air." Caroline said as much to one of the young maids, and the two moved away from the other girls still greeting one another as if they'd been off fighting a war, rather than just separated by a summer vacation.

As they walked to the seniors' area, Anita thought about her idiocy in agreeing to share rooms with Lottie Taylor. She didn't want to be housed with anyone prominent, anyone who might attract attention. She needed a nobody from nowhere so she could keep walking quietly through the crowd of Vassar women, well liked, but not too well liked; active in school, but not president of any esteemed club; smart enough, but not first in her class—nothing that would make her shine too brightly or fall too hard. She wanted to be smiled at and then quickly forgotten.

"I'm here in room eighty-nine," said Caroline, as they reached it. "Will you be all right to walk to yours?"

"Me? Oh, yes, I'm feeling much better now. Just a quick spell. I'm in room twenty-one, right in front of the art gallery," said Anita, pointing down the hall. "I'll see you at dinner, Caroline."

"You're in twenty-one?" said Caroline, looking down at the hallway's double marble staircase near Anita's room. "But that's the very best senior room, with a perfect view of the Lodge. How did you draw that one? Oh, never mind," she said, smiling and opening her door. "Lottie Taylor," she whispered.

Caroline was in a single, a bedroom without a parlor, and a less desirable view.

"I'm so happy to be back, aren't you?" Anita said, watching her friend walk into her bright, sparsely furnished room.

"I am, too, Anita. There's no place I love more."

The girls bid each other goodbye, and Anita turned the corner toward her room, opening the oak door with her free hand.

“Just leave it by the desk closest to the window, please,” she heard a voice say at once. Anita saw Lottie, her back to the door, trying to nail a square of ornate silk fabric above their parlor window.

“I’m sorry,” Anita replied. “You must be waiting for your trunk.” Lottie turned to look at her with a nail in her mouth and nearly dropped the hammer. She took the nail out and gave her an apologetic smile.

“You’re Anita Hemmings! And you must think me the rudest girl in the world. I’m sorry I didn’t turn around. I thought you were Mervis with my things.”

“It’s nothing at all,” Anita said, walking into the already heavily decorated room. “I saw Mervis downstairs, but I’m afraid he’s extremely busy. I’m sure our trunks will be brought up soon. Though I think they’ll have to be attended to by someone else. Every senior girl in Main seems to be after him.” As with most of the accommodations in Main, Anita and Lottie had a set of three rooms with two bedrooms and a large shared parlor.

“Fine, fine. I’m in no particular rush,” said Lottie brightly. “I have all the accessories I need to get our parlor in order right here.” Both girls looked at the floor of their square room, which was covered in fabrics and paintings.

Lottie paused her chatter as she stepped down from her chair. In her white dress, with her blond hair pinned to her head and the dying evening light creating a shadow behind her, she looked as if she had flown down from somewhere much finer, somewhere celestial.

“Look at you, you’re even prettier than everybody said,” she pronounced, approaching Anita. “I remembered you,

of course, but we didn't overlap much in classes, did we? You're very Greek and Latin, I hear. I like Asian history and the sciences." She extended her hand, then held Anita by the shoulders as a mother might do to a child who had just come in from playing outside.

"Just look at your hair," she said excitedly. "Straight and dark like an Indian's. I'm very jealous. My life's desire is to be able to tame this top," she said, tilting her head. "My mother tried, my maids tried, all in vain, I might add. When I was fifteen, my parlor maid burned about half of it off. I wore many hats that year."

"I hate hats," Anita said, laughing.

"Oh, me too," Lottie said, smiling with her. "So old-fashioned. If it were up to me, I would spend the entire day lounging in my golf costume. I do love golf. A modern woman's game. Or I'd be totally nude like the French."

She looked at Anita's surprised face, enjoying her reaction. "You're going to be an awful lot of fun to shock. That's apparent already, and it's scarcely been five minutes. We need to shake a little of that puritanical Boston out of you before the semester's end or we won't have any fun at all." She spun around the room, already comfortable in her roommate's presence.

"Did you know a princess lived in this room? A real one. Sute-matsu Yamakawa. Or Stematz Yamakawa, as she was known here. She now holds the title of Princess Oyama of Japan. Vassar class of 1882 and the very first Japanese woman to receive a college degree. Ever. You've heard the stories about her, have you not?"

Anita shook her head. She was familiar with the exotic name, but it was clear that Lottie knew the better stories.

"A woman of legend," Lottie declared. "President of Philaethis. President of '82 her sophomore year. Third in

her class. And such penmanship. I've seen her letters, barely an inch left without text, and she still keeps in contact with her professors. She married the Japanese minister of war. Isn't that charming? War is so dramatic, it's hard not to be taken with it. I curse the world that I wasn't born before the Civil War. I would have been so good at it. Well, at being supportive. As for Princess Oyama, I hear her husband is afraid that she'll divulge national secrets, but I'm sure she'll remain tight-lipped. I plan on meeting her one day quite soon so I've been practicing my bow. The royals expect you to bend at a full forty-five-degree angle."

Anita had no idea where one heard that a princess might pose a threat to Japanese national security, but she didn't doubt Lottie.

"I can't even recount to you the lies I had to tell to secure us these rooms," said Lottie, fluttering her eyelashes as if she'd been caught in a rainstorm. "I made up a whole to-do about not being able to sleep unless I could see straight down the dusty drive to the Lodge. Then I added some nonsense about extreme claustrophobia and an incurable passion for the architecture of James Renwick. But it was worth it, I'm sure you'll agree."

Anita looked at her in awe and nodded.

"I'm simply enamored with Japan. This school is so backward not teaching the Asian languages," said Lottie, looking wistfully at the room's décor, most of it picked up during her travels in the Orient.

"Caroline Hardin will teach you off-color words in Arabic if you bring her molasses candy," Anita offered.

"Caroline can eat all the candy she wants. Arabia does not interest me. The art is poor, and there isn't enough fish to eat." Lottie sucked in her cheeks and pursed her lips, making little underwater noises. Anita wasn't sure which world

Lottie had sprung from, but she was already convinced it was one she wanted to be a part of.

“Oh, look, our rocking chair from Uncle Fred,” Lottie said, running her hand over the curved chair that was paid for and placed in every dormitory room by the prominent trustee. “I used to sit in mine all the time last year when I’d had too much to drink. I’d just collapse like a rag doll and sleep it off.”

“Do you drink often?” her roommate asked, hoping she didn’t sound prudish.

“Anita, dearest. One has to live a little, don’t you think?” Lottie looked up with her pale, heart-shaped face, which clearly favored mischief over morals.

“Of course,” Anita replied hastily, though on campus she was noted for her reserve.

“With your beauty, you are destined to live a dramatic life,” said Lottie, putting her hand on Anita’s chin and studying her face. “Living, *really* living, is awfully entertaining. We’ll do a lot of it this year, I promise you.” She peered around the room at the wall hangings she had put up before Anita’s arrival. In between the draped blue silk was an exquisite kimono, hand-painted with a mountain scene and cascading pink cherry blossoms on the back.

“Let’s tack this cloth to the wall by that kimono,” Lottie said, reaching for a few yards of fabric and picking up a scroll painting of evergreen rice paper with her other hand. “The maids go on about cluttering up the room like this, because dust gathers or some nonsense, and they’re worried we’ll burn the whole place down when it falls into the oil lamps, but I don’t care. I am not living in bland quarters. My mind won’t expand. And for me to keep up here, my mind needs a lot of expanding.”

“I like what you’ve done with it so far. It’s much more

striking than my parlor room last year," her roommate said. Their room looked like a fourteen-by-fourteen-foot advertisement for luxury travel to the Orient.

Lottie let the fabric drop and admired her work.

"Well, as I said, I am besotted with Japan at the moment. I traveled to Tokyo and Kyoto in July and August with Father, and it was majestic. I can't even begin to describe the people. So slight, so diminutive and elegant. They walk on wooden shoes, can you imagine? And they wear long silk kimonos and the food is beautifully presented. Plus the fish! You haven't eaten a fish until you've eaten a raw Japanese fish. I know it sounds dreadful, but it's just the opposite. And then of course there is the actual art. The paintings and calligraphy, the woodblock prints. My father bought an original Hokusai, whose work is causing a sensation in Paris. His name will make it to America soon. We're behind, of course. Isn't that always the case? I tried to bring the print here, but you can guess how that conversation terminated. I'm going to sail to Japan again after graduation. Father promised me I could, as long as I'm chaperoned. I want to go all over the Orient. You should accompany me. We'd have a magnificent time."

Anita knew that within days of graduation, she would have a sensible teaching job or a scholarship to another school. And not one across the Pacific Ocean.

"It sounds splendid," Anita said noncommittally, diverting the conversation from any future plans.

"I am so taken with Orientals," said Lottie. "They have the most marvelous features." She picked up the hammer and headed to the wall above the ornate lacquer tea table, delivered from overseas just that morning.

"You don't mind, do you?" she asked, after she had already put the first hole in the plaster.

“Not at all,” Anita answered honestly.

“I told Father that I was going to marry the future emperor of Japan, Crown Prince Yoshihito,” she said with her back turned and a nail between her teeth again. “And he said he would shoot me first. He meant it, too. He has several guns and a terrible temper.” She spat out the nail so she could be better heard. “It’s not like I said I was going to run off with a despondent railroad worker with an opium pipe. A sensitive man, my father, but a real modern person despite it all. I forgave him because he’s originally from Pittsburgh, and people from Pittsburgh are natural brutes. It’s a good thing my mother was born in New York or I would be an absolute lost cause and never get invited anywhere of note. Mrs. Astor has a real disdain for people from Pittsburgh.”

She looked around the room again and jumped onto the small green velvet couch.

“Come, Anita, let’s tack this all up to the walls and make this room look like a palace.” She grabbed her roommate by the hand and handed her a small nail and the hammer she had been using. “You try this. I’ll wield my Latin dictionary. It will have the most use it’s had in years. Just be mindful of the noise because if Mervis hears us, we’re sure to get fined.”

“Fined?” Anita asked, crossing to the opposite wall.

“It’s worth it, don’t you think? I was fined at the start of every semester last year, but we can’t be expected to live in some desolate chamber. How will we learn anything? You should have seen my parlor as a freshman. That was the year I was absolutely taken with the French Revolution. This year’s décor will be decidedly cheaper, as the Japanese really do have a simpler aesthetic. Plus, if my father doesn’t receive fines from the college, he will think I’m in ill health

and have lost my spirit. This," she said, motioning to the room, "is in everybody's best interest."

The roommates finished tacking up the silk just as Mervis came in with their trunks, grunting about the walls. Lottie smiled sweetly and told him to make out the bill to Mr. Clarence Taylor, then she sent for a maid who helped the pair put away their dresses.

"I'm starving," Lottie declared after she had placed her silver hairbrush on the table by her bed and her silver inkstand on the writing table. Anita had done the same in her room with her modest belongings.

"How about we walk over for an ice cream at the Dutchess? Is there still time to get a leave of absence to go to town?" Lottie asked.

"I believe the Dutchess is closed now. It's nearly six o'clock," Anita replied, looking at the gold clock by Lottie's bed. "The dinner bell will ring soon."

"Not those awful bells," said Lottie, sticking her tongue out like a gargoyle. "Isn't it horrible that we have to run around listening to the cling clang of old bells? The rising hour bell, the dinner bell, the chapel bell—I feel like the Hunchback of Notre Dame."

Anita laughed and said, "You don't look it."

"Really?" Lottie said, puffing up her cheeks. "I feel quite like a French hunchback today. I hate the sleeves on this dress," she added, trying to pull them up at the shoulder. "I told my seamstress in Paris to make them bigger, but she's so conservative and her answer to everything is '*Non, ma chérie.*' Not shockingly, she makes my mother's day clothes, and I tend to hate my mother's day clothes. For eveningwear I much prefer the House of Worth, but Mother said I wasn't allowed to train up in my Lyon silk. Anyway, you should go on. I know you were voted class beauty as a freshman. Don't

try to deny it. And I heard all about you and your big, beautiful brown eyes from a few of my Harvard acquaintances, too.”

Anita’s surprised look caused Lottie to elaborate. “I said *acquaintances*, Anita. Don’t tell me you believe all of that gossip. One little dalliance during the Harvard-Yale game as a sophomore and I’m a scorned woman. Vassar girls sure can talk. I don’t have a flaxen-haired daughter hidden in a convent in Switzerland, if you happen to be wondering.”

“I hadn’t heard that one,” Anita replied, thoroughly entertained.

“Well, I don’t. What I do have is a younger brother in his junior year at Harvard, and he told me that you were quite the talk of the school after our Founder’s Day dance last spring. Many Harvard men in attendance, if you remember. Yes, I launched an inquisition on you, Miss Hemmings.”

It was unfortunate that Anita hadn’t done the same.

As Anita contemplated what rooming with Lottie Taylor would mean for her final year at Vassar, she heard a light knock on their parlor door.

“Come in!” bellowed Lottie in her low, raspy voice. Anita speculated that Lottie’s voice was half the reason so many rumors circulated about her. There was something quite intoxicating about it.

The door opened slowly, and a tall girl bounded in, earning smiles from both roommates. Belle Tiffany, an alto in the choir and the Glee Club, was one of Anita’s closest friends.

“Belle Tiffany! Look at you,” said Lottie. “See, I’m rooming with your old friend Anita Hemmings. The beautiful girls with the soaring voices. What will I do with myself around both of you? I need to develop a skill. I’m a terrible disappointment.”

“You’re exceedingly rich,” said Belle, looking at the decorated walls. “And I suppose you’re amusing, too.”

“That’s true. I am awfully funny,” said Lottie, hopping onto the couch again. “Matthew Ellery, Lucy Ellery’s brother up at Harvard, he was my Phil date last year, and he said I was the most entertaining girl he had ever known. Then he said men aren’t supposed to be fond of girls who favor humor over femininity. But then when I laughed and said I found the whole thing quite amusing, the beast leaned over and kissed me. And I mean kissed. Not just with his mouth, with his entire body, especially the middle. If we hadn’t been clothed, who knows what would have happened?”

“Lottie, stop trying to shock. We’re seniors now. We’re immune to your alarming ways,” said Belle.

“Speak for yourself. I’m sure I’ll make Anita Hemmings faint before the semester is over. Besides, do you want me to graduate without so much as kissing a few Harvard seniors?”

“Most say you’ve done quite a bit more than that,” teased Belle.

“Belle, don’t start rumors. Even if they are true,” said Lottie, catching a glimpse of herself in the mirror propped on her dressing table. “And Anita, try not to look as if you’re going to wilt. I’ll burn your books if I have to—it’s our last year here, and I won’t spend it stuck in Uncle Fred’s Nose reading *Beowulf*.”

“You read *Beowulf* as a freshman. You aren’t required to read it again,” said Belle. “And have as much fun as you want, Lottie, just remember that you should graduate like the rest of us or your father will write you out of his will.” Belle winked at Anita. “Lottie’s father is a major financial supporter of women’s education. He was asked to be a trustee, but he said not until his daughter had graduated. Did you hear that, Lottie? Critical detail, *graduated*.”

“Belle, hold your judgment until we’ve reached the finish line. I’ll graduate. Maybe not with the highest honors, but I will. You’ll both just have to help me.”

When the roommates came back from dinner that evening—where they were happily assigned to a senior table with Caroline, Belle, and Belle’s roommate, Hortense Lewis—Lottie boiled water for tea with lemon and Anita lit a lamp between them.

“I do miss electric lamps,” Lottie said, watching Anita fiddle with the gas. “I was getting rather used to them and look at us now, back like moths to a flame.”

“Do you have electricity at home?” Anita asked, trying to make the gas stream stronger. Her own house in Boston only had gas lamps, and a very limited number at that.

“Oh, yes, my father had every lamp installed with electric wiring, though some chandeliers are constructed for both gas and electricity. It’s glorious. You just use a switch, on and off. One day we’ll have them here, but not for years and years. We’ll be long gone by then, living our extraordinary ordinary lives.”

“Caroline Hardin told me you were rather exceptional,” Anita said, sipping her tea. She stood up to open their large parlor window, as the heat of the day had burned off and the air from the river had turned in their direction.

“Caroline Hardin did? My favorite Syrian redhead?”

“The very one.”

“And what do you think of that?” said Lottie.

“I think Caroline Hardin is usually right,” she said diplomatically. Lottie twinkled a smile, the dimples on her face looking more pronounced in the lamplight.

The two prepared for bed under walls draped in silks and kimonos and pictures of Kyoto. Somewhere, tucked in among the Japonisme, was Anita’s small photograph of a

statue of the Greek goddess Artemis, taken in the Louvre and given to her by one of the Harvard seniors Lottie mentioned. It seemed somehow fitting that her contribution to their rooms was so small. The Lottie Taylors of the world were always the ones to have an enormous impact.