

Chapter 1

Beginning

PAMELA ALLEN thumbtacked a bright green cutout tree to the bulletin board. Two cutout children with lunch pails completed the scene of the little red schoolhouse and its tree-shaded playground. Standing on tiptoe, she carefully placed large brown letters across the top: September - Time for School.

She stepped back to view the effect. Two of the letters were crooked, and one of the trees would look better moved over a few inches. She made the changes and then walked to the back of the room to survey the results.

What a difference the words on the bulletin board meant this year compared with the last sixteen years! Time for school this September meant that she - Pamela Allen - was the teacher. She could hardly believe that it was possible, but here she was. Tomorrow she would begin her first day of teaching in the middle-grade room of the Kingston Church School.

She heard footsteps at the open door behind her. Turning, she saw a black-haired young girl who she guessed would be in her classroom.

“Hi,” the girl said. “You must be Miss Allen, aren’t you?”

Pamela smiled. “Yes, I am. And what is your name?”

“I’m Pearl Drake. You’ll be my teacher this year. My brother said you came to our house the other day but I didn’t get to see you, ‘cause I was at grandma’s, but I just had to see who you were, so I rode here on my bike today just to see if maybe you’d be here, and you are, and -” She stopped, out of breath. Her blue eyes sparkled as she looked from Pamela to the bulletin board and the new pictures around the room.

“Oh, yes, Pearl,” said Pamela, trying quickly to think which place might be the home of this girl among all the homes she had visited. “Let me see, your brother’s name is -”

NEIL AND PAM
TEACHERS OF TOMORROW

“Andy. He’s in the sixth grade,” the girl supplied. “I’m in the fourth. I’m nine years old, but soon I’ll be ten. We’ll both be in your room. I’m glad; I’m going to like you.”

Pamela laughed at the girl’s quick decision. She hoped the other twenty-one pupils in her room would like her in as short a time.

“Can I help you?” Pearl asked. “Oh, Miss Allen, you know what? I have three new puppies, just born last night. Wouldn’t you like to have one as soon as they’re big enough to give away? I’d like to give you one.”

“Why, thank you, Pearl,” Pamela said. “I’d love to have a puppy, but, you see, I’m living in an apartment and wouldn’t have any place to keep it. You live on a farm, don’t you?”

Pearl shook her head. “Not a farm. We have a big orchard - cherries and prunes. I’ve been picking up prunes; but it’s hot and sticky doing that. I earned some money, though. Can I help you?”

“Would you like to get water in these two vases?”

Pearl took the two vases and filled them at the sink in the corner of the room. “Can I help put the flowers in? I like to arrange flowers. We have lots of flowers. I’ll bring some when these are gone. Mamma lets me bring flowers to school. Where did you teach before you came here?”

“One question at a time,” said Pamela. “Yes, you may help put these flowers in the vases, and I’ll be glad to have you bring more. I haven’t taught in any other school before by myself.”

“You mean this is your first school?” Pearl asked. “My, that’s nice. I’ll get to be one of your first pupils. I like that. Mrs. Kent was my teacher last year. She’s taught here a long time, even before Carol - she’s my sister - started to school. Carol’s in the eighth grade. So you’re not married?”

Pamela smiled. What a lot of questions a nine-year-old girl could ask! “No, I’m not married.” But to herself she added “yet,” as she thought of Neil Bancroft two hundred miles away at college.

“That’s all right,” Pearl sympathized. “You’ll have lots of children to look after here in school. My mamma has four

NEIL AND PAM
TEACHERS OF TOMORROW

children to look after, but you'll have -" She stopped and counted the desks that Pamela had arranged in neat rows. "Twenty-two. I think when I grow up I won't get married. I'll teach school and have twenty-two children. That would be fun. Oh, my, its two o'clock! I'll have to ride home real fast. 'By, Miss Allen. I'll see you in the morning early."

"Good-by, Pearl," Pamela called as the girl ran out the doorway and jumped on her bicycle.

Such ideas as nine-year-olds could think up, Pamela reflected in the quiet moment. It took her back to the days when she had been in the fourth grade and had wanted to grow up to be a schoolteacher. As far back as she could remember that had been her ambition. She turned back to the days when she corralled the neighborhood boys and girls-usually girls-and taught school. And if she couldn't get children to be her "pupils" she gathered up all the dogs, cats, and dolls.

Pearl had done a good job of arranging the flowers during her steady chatter, Pamela decided. She put one vase on her battle-scarred desk and another on top of the bookshelves that lined the wall below the windows. Looking at the windows reminded her that the mother of one of her fifth-graders had taken the curtains home to wash and iron. Pamela wondered if the woman would get them back today.

Mrs. Kent and Mr. Ferber came into the foyer of the building. Pamela knew she would enjoy working with the two of them during the school year. Mrs. Kent was a motherly woman whose children were married and gone from home. And as Pearl had put it, she had taught here a long time. Lyle Ferber, principal and teacher of the seventh and eighth grades, had taught for several years; Pamela didn't remember exactly how long. Only one year here at Kingston, though. He and his wife Myrna had invited her to dinner the second evening she had been in town. Pamela smiled when she remembered the antics of his two roly-poly toddlers. What a pair they would be when they started to school!

"All ready for registration tonight?" Lyle asked. "We begin right at six, you know."

NEIL AND PAM
TEACHERS OF TOMORROW

"I haven't forgotten," said Pamela.

"Your room looks lovely, Miss Allen," said Mrs. Kent, examining the bulletin board. "You girls learn so many clever things in college nowadays. I enjoyed my few weeks at summer school this year, picking up some new ideas and methods. But you come out of college all equipped and ready to begin. Where did you get the pictures?"

"Oh, I've been making a collection from magazines and other places for the last two or three years," Pamela said. "One of my teachers at college suggested that the sooner we begin, the better. Sometimes I find booklets at the dime stores with good pictures of animals and birds. I cut them up and mount the pictures on colored paper."

"I remember my first experience with pictures," Lyle said with a laugh. "I hadn't expected to be teaching grade school. I had planned to teach in an academy, so I didn't have any pictures at all on hand. Came the first day of school - I had the same grades you do, Pamela - and I didn't have a thing to pretty up the room. And it was a bare-looking room, too. So I had a contest for the students to bring in all the good colored pictures they could find. For prizes I had several eversharp pencils. You should have seen the pictures I got! Maybe you will - I still have many of them. Myrna and I sat lip late at night mounting them. Those were the days! I don't know how I survived that first week of teaching school. Believe me, it wasn't what I expected!"

"I see you have your daily program already written on the board," said Mrs. Kent. "By the way, did you find the list of pupils I left on your desk?"

"Oh, yes," said Pamela. "And I've visited each of their homes and -"

"You have!" exclaimed Lyle. "You are right on your toes! I was going to say that you couldn't be positive of your student list until after registration tonight, but if you've already visited them, maybe you can be pretty certain. What made you think of making those calls even before school started?"

NEIL AND PAM
TEACHERS OF TOMORROW

“Why, that’s one of the things I learned in my education classes,” Pamela said. “I wanted to see what the children would be like before I faced them the first day. I hoped to meet their parents and see the home back ground they have. Besides, you know, parents don’t have to send their children to church school, and with a new teacher they’ve never met, they might decide to send them to public school - which would be lots more convenient for most of them, I think, after the distances I traveled over this town and the other towns the pupils come from.”

“You’re right,” said Mrs. Kent. “That’s an excellent plan. Are all those on the list coming?”

“One seems to have moved,” said Pamela. “The others are coming, though, and the pastor told me of two who had recently moved here that you didn’t have on the list. I believe I’ll have twenty-two. If I have more, you’ll have to find me some more desks, Lyle.”

The principal scratched his head. “This expanding school! If it gets any more crowded I don’t know what will happen. This extra building was just added this summer, Pamela, and it isn’t quite finished. Mrs. Kent will have to put up with painters and carpenters for a few days yet. But last year it was frightful the way we jammed the boys and girls into two rooms. It’s a relief to have three rooms this year, believe me. But we’re still crowded, even so. The church bought more playground space this summer. That will settle a few problems. Well, if you ladies will excuse me, I must get a few things in order in my room.” He walked through the cubbyhole office into his classroom.

“I must take a look at my room,” said Mrs. Kent. “I’ll be glad when it’s completed so that I can put up pictures and plants and other things. It isn’t a beautiful place at best, I fear.”

Pamela looked out the window at the corrugated-aluminum building that sat in what had been the middle of the playground. It would be a warm place for a few days until the cooler weather came. If it were only painted red it would look much like the little red schoolhouse she had made for her bulletin board.

NEIL AND PAM
TEACHERS OF TOMORROW

Pamela returned to her work. She should finish checking the paper supplies before any more visitors arrived. But she didn't have long to work before Mrs. Hadley came, the woman who had taken the task of freshening up the curtains. Pamela took the snowy, starchy pile from her and laid it over a desk. She found the curtain rods and began putting the curtains up. Mrs. Hadley watched a moment and then started to help her.

"We certainly appreciate your washing and ironing these," said Pamela. "Don't they look pretty now!"

"We'll have to get new ones soon," Mrs. Hadley said critically. "These's getting too old. Won't stand another washing, I know. Maybe you could get the Dorcas to make new ones in the spring." She sat down heavily at one of the larger desks and watched Pamela put up the rest of the curtains.

"You know, Miss Allen," she said, "I hope you'll be good to my Guy. He's my baby, you know. All the others is grown and gone. Guy, he's kinda puny and the other kids pick on him sometimes. 'Specially that Ralph Corwell - he's a real husky kid - bully, too, I'd say. Anyway, Guy's come home several times bawling from the tormenting Ralph does. You'll kinda look after him, won't you?"

Pamela tried to recall which child she had visited was Ralph. She remembered several who were husky for their ages. Oh, yes, he was the handsome black-eyed, black-haired one who had been at the top of a walnut tree when she called at his house. And Guy, yes, she did remember him as shy and small for a fifth-grader.

"Why, of course, Mrs. Hadley," she said. "I'll look after Guy the best I can. Does he like school?"

"Well, he doesn't like to be away from me much," Mrs. Hadley admitted. "But he talked about you a long time the other day. It was the first time a teacher ever came to see him. Mrs. Kent, now, she never came. Of course she has her home here and she's known all the kids at Sabbath school since they was knee-high to grasshoppers, so I guess she thinks she doesn't need to visit them, and it's all right; they don't expect it. But he sure was tickled to have you come. He can't hardly wait

NEIL AND PAM
TEACHERS OF TOMORROW

till tomorrow. I don't plan to bring him tonight when I come to register. I want him to get to bed early. He always gets so upset if he's too excited." She stood up and picked up her purse. "Well, I've got to be going. Your room looks real pretty, Miss Allen. I almost wish I was coming to school myself. I'll tell Guy. He likes pretty things."

Pamela smiled. "I'm sure Guy and I will get along just fine. And thanks so much for doing up the curtains."

After Mrs. Hadley left, Pamela finished checking the supplies as quickly as she could. She would have to hurry if she got a bite to eat and returned at six o'clock for the registration. How glad she was that she had come two weeks before school was to begin! She had been able to find an apartment and get moved in and visit all her prospective pupils, besides getting her classroom ready and meeting with Lyle and Mrs. Kent several times to go over plans for the school year.

At ten-thirty that night Pamela wearily sank into the softest chair in her little apartment, kicked off her shoes, and fanned herself. Registration was completed and everything was set to go at nine o'clock in the morning. Her groundwork had paid off. She had exactly twenty-two pupils, and the parents were all friendly and cooperative as a result of her visits of the last few days. Now it would be only a few hours until she would stand before twenty-two shining faces to begin her first day of real schoolteaching.