The Dividing Line

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Abstract

My best friend just called me a snob. It made me feel funny- like a child who has learned there is no Santa Claus...
**Problem in women**

Is there really beauty here, Absolute,  
Defined as curve of legs or shape of hands?  
Or shall I say this beauty is in me,  
Dependent on the functions of my glands?

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**The dividing line**

MY BEST FRIEND just called me a snob. It made me feel funny — like a child who has learned there is no Santa Claus. Still, I have a suspicion that she is right. I'm not mad at her, but the other day I crossed the street to avoid speaking to her, and today, she called me a snob. “You're starting to talk just like a sorority girl,” she had condemned. “You're a snob.”

It all began years ago when we were small. I stood, all gawky legs going off at odd angles and damp frizzy hair, by the pool at the Country Club. Sally was there, too; a round-faced little girl, younger than I, with huge brown eyes and a wee, snub nose, the face of a Renoir innocent, and long dark hair caught back of her ears like a ballerina's. We smiled shyly at each other, but that was all. In later years, as we knew each other better, we became close friends. We laughed a lot, and cried a little, and grew up together. Now, it is today and yesterday is gone. The little girls that were are gone, too. Strange it is, to grow up and become another person; to find the world a different place. But that is what happened.

The day that Sally ran, dark-eyed and laughing like some darkling rose blowing across our yard, I had not seen her for over a year. College was upon us now — high school years, simply years we marveled, behind us. “I'm going to really become grown-up now that I'm in college, Annie,” Sally said. “I'm not a child anymore.”

It had always been my private opinion that Sally was, if
anything, no child. She had matured far earlier than I, and had dated men 5 years older than she before I had my first real date at 17. It was true that I was a bit quiet and slow, but sometimes Sally went too far, I thought. Even before she moved away in her junior year, I felt a growing restlessness in myself and a vague disappointment over Sally beginning to come up in me. After awhile, I had to give way to it; now, Sally was back and we had to be friends once more.

“I'm going to grow up, too,” I declared. “High school was a waste of time as far as I was concerned. I'm going to do great things someday — I can just feel it.”

“I'm going to read all the good books,” Sally said. “I'm really going to be mature — not bored or cynical, but really mature.”

The next time I saw Sally, she was smoking. Then she went to a costume party in a scanty costume that was the talk of the campus for weeks. Then it was drinking — not just a little, but quite a lot. The feeling of restlessness and disappointment was getting harder to control. I didn't want to see Sally anymore; whenever her name was mentioned, people laughed. Yet, down inside, I still liked her — and now, it wasn't fashionable to like her. I was so confused, so confused by it all.

The months that followed were worse. I saw Sally seldom and never for very long. I always seemed to be floating in space, never accomplishing much and never knowing what I wanted or expected. I changed curricula, and never really settled down. Then, spring quarter, I got a phone call from Sally. I was being initiated into my sorority. “I get to live in the house, next year, Sally. Are you going to live in your house?”

“No.”

“Why not? You have to, don't you?”

“Annie—I'm not being initiated.”

“Oh—why?” A sick, embarrassed feeling flooded me.

“Just because.” I knew why, though. I felt sorry for her; and I was angry at her house for hurting her so. And yet, I thought, she had perhaps deserved it. Depledged on the eve of initiation. For a moment, I hated people; I hated them for hurting my friend. But down inside, I knew that she had earned her reward.

Summer came and passed. When autumn came in a
warm blue-golden blaze, Sally came back to town. We didn’t have much to say, and I never saw her, but things kept drifting my way. Despite Sally’s looks, talent and other assets, no one felt sorry for her; it wasn’t “the thing” to be her friend.

Just before Christmas, I saw Sally again. She was pinned to a rich man’s son—a boy of rather ill repute. “I’m not coming back to school next quarter.”

I was startled. “Why not?”

Sally hesitated a moment, “Dad’s sick. I have to help in the store. I’ll be back spring, though.”

Sally went home and I kept getting letters describing the progress of her father’s illness. It seemed that he was at last knocking at Death’s door.

It wasn’t two days later that he walked into our store.

“Sally,” I seethed the next time I saw her, “Sally, why in the world did you lie to me? Why didn’t you tell the truth?”

“I didn’t lie,” she declared. “Dad is sick—it just doesn’t show.”

“For heaven’s sakes, why don’t you wise up, Sally?” I tried to be kind about it. “People will never like you if you lie to them. All these false standards of sophistication—this drinking and running around—I thought you’d learn when your sorority kicked you out, but you didn’t. I don’t like to see you do these things to yourself. You always wanted to be so mature—so grown up!”

“What’s your big trouble, Annie? What about yourself? You can’t stick in one curriculum and you can’t get along in class. It’s time you grew up, too.”

“I know I have trouble, but I don’t like school. I feel so confused and restless all the time—I just can’t settle down.”

“It’s time you did.”

“Anyway, Sally, that’s beside the point. We’re talking about you. I mean what I say—people are talking about your quitting school. They say—they say,” I tried to put it delicately. “They say there’s a reason.”

“Oh, they do,” Sally seethed. “Well, I’ll be up here every weekend, and they can just look and see if it’s true. I’m not as dumb as I seem; I know what’s going on.”

“I didn’t really believe them, Sally. But that’s what they are saying. I guess they’re judging from past experience. Maybe you’d better take it easy—or something.”
"It wasn't my idea to quit school — believe me. Dad is sick, even though he's not in bed."

"I believe you, Sally. You know, it's funny. We used to be such good friends. And now — look at us."

"I guess we've grown up."

"I guess so. It's too bad."

"Well, I'll see you around, Annie."

Yesterday, I crossed the street and pretended to look the other way when I saw Sally coming. Today, we met unavoidably for a few minutes.

"Oh, hello, Sally," I barely breathed. "How are you? Did you know Dad got a new car? One of the big Chryslers."

"Oh, stop talking like a sorority girl," she spat. "You're a snob if I ever saw one."

"What's wrong with that?"

"I'll see you around, Annie."

As I watched her walk off down the street, her long dark hair whipping against the cold wind, I felt a faint sadness and a mistiness behind the eyes. All I could see were a gawky, long-legged kid of eleven and a little snub-nosed Renoir innocent walking arm and arm down a country road.

Sad it is, to have known such good days, and sad to know them gone.

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**Juniper tree**

High above, where the earth has ceased to be earth
And is only rock and snow,
High up on the mountain where the cold wind
Queries and cross-examines and dooms,
The Juniper crouches, slender limbs tormented and bent
Till they flow with the wind,
Stands like a frail spinster
With new-washed hair dripping down her face.
What do you seek here, old hag of the mountaintop?
If you wished to break rocks
You could have gone to some less strenuous place,
Or do you lure gray eagles from the smoke-canyons
For a test of the heart?
Some have swung higher on floating, still wings,
But they have always come down again.