

under
Summer Skies

GRACE IRWIN



Class PZ7

Book .I71

Copyright N^o Un

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.

copy 2

UNDER SUMMER
SKIES

By

GRACE IRWIN

LITTLE MISS REDHEAD
UNDER SUMMER SKIES



Flopsy's knees were wobbling.

*UNDER
SUMMER SKIES*

By
GRACE IRWIN

ILLUSTRATED BY
THE AUTHOR

1937

BOSTON NEW YORK

*LOTHROP, LEE AND SHEPARD
COMPANY*

Copy 20

PZ7
I 71
Un
Copy 2

Copyright 1937

BY LOTHROP, LEE AND SHEPARD COMPANY

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer who wishes to quote brief passages in connection with a review written for inclusion in magazine or newspaper.



PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

SEP -4 1937

©CIA

109283

Handwritten mark or signature.

1252145

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE LONGEST DAY IN THE YEAR .	11
II. FIRST VISITORS AT EMERALD LAKE .	33
III. MORE VISITORS AT EMERALD LAKE .	56
IV. FLOPSY GETS SOME NEWS	79
V. ALICE, FLOPSY AND TWO HORSES .	111
VI. ALICE HOLT SPENDS THE NIGHT AND FLOPSY HEARS OF A PLAN	132
VII. FLOPSY TAKES A JOURNEY	155
VIII. SUNDAY AT CAMP	180
IX. LETTERS AND A CANOE TEST	197
X. AN OVER-NIGHT CANOE TRIP	212
XI. "AND THEY LIVED HAPPILY EVER AFTER"	229

UNDER SUMMER
SKIES

Chapter One

The Longest Day in the Year

THE bright sun blazed early into Flopsy's bedroom that June morning. In fact, it could not have blazed its way more early, for it was the dawn of the longest day of the year. Flopsy's eyes were positively pried open by its dazzling beams, and as she blinked towards her eastern windows her whole face reflected the radiance of the rising sun. She was happy—very happy. Never, in the thirteen years of her life had she gone to sleep so blissfully content that she was a small girl who had been christened Flora Madden Moore, and that those who loved and knew her best called her by the silly nick-name *Flopsy*.

She lay very still day-dreaming, and her dreams were as rosy as the dawn of a beautiful day. What a night the one before had been! Could she ever be done talking about it? After she and her family had returned from that simply marvelous graduation, they had talked and talked, laughed and laughed. Yes, and cried a bit from sheer unexpected joy. It had been long after two o'clock, before anyone as much as mentioned bed. She had never stayed up that late in her whole life. And she had not been in the least sleepy when she had thrown her arms about her mother's neck for one last good-night kiss.

One? There had been a baker's dozen of good-night kisses. For hours, it seemed she had lain awake, going over and over the events of the evening. She had at last put her self to sleep repeating the words of her composition that she had recited before the whole auditorium. Over and over she chanted the familiar words, and a sweeter lullaby she had never heard in her whole life. She never knew when she was done saying the words and began dreaming them. "Sweet dreams" her mother had said as she had left her. And, oh, they had been! Around and around whirled the joyous triumphs, like the tiny rainbow pieces she had once seen in a kaleidoscope.

But not for ever could she be content to lie still and dream. She sat up in bed and then crawled down to its foot, and peered out into the back garden. She drew a long deep sigh of contentment. It was a lovely world! With this deeply drawn breath she had inhaled the perfume of her mother's lilac bush. It was the most beautiful lilac bush in the entire neighborhood. "And it's older than you," her mother once said.

"It's a sweet smelling world! It's a beautiful looking world! It's a lovely sounding one!" (The birds in the great oak tree were all atwitter.) Flopsy lay back upon her bed again and turned her head towards her little bureau and discovered to her dismay that her small green clock said exactly half-past five.

"Goodness!" she sighed again, but this was not a long drawn sigh of satisfaction, but a short one of exasperation. "No one will be up for a long time. Not until seven at least. And I want to talk some more about last night."

A faint frown clouded the radiance of her face.

She simply must talk—and talk about last night. She longed for the day to begin in earnest. She could scarcely wait to see again her new found friend, Babbie, whose startling appearance on that platform last night didn't seem real this morning. Could she have dreamed it all? She must as soon as possible reassure herself that Babbie had actually come way across the country from her ranch in Rawhide, and had received a diploma with the other grammar school graduates of Number Nine. It had been an almost unbelievable surprise when Mr. Shirley, the President of the Board of Education, had held out that last diploma and had said, "Barbara Hilton."

Flopsy wriggled with ecstasy when she recalled that moment. It was an enchanted moment. It cast a spell over the entire auditorium. Although Miss Hilton had more than once spoken to her pupils of her frail little sister about their age who lived on a ranch and who had never been to school—they never could have dreamed that she would graduate with them. Flopsy knew more about Babbie than her classmates, but she never even in her wildest imagination could have fancied anything so exciting.

Something of this excitement swept over her again—and she sat bolt upright in bed. She was getting very tired of being by herself. The perfume of the lilac bush, the sweet twitter of the birds, and rosy sun itself, were beginning to bore her. She longed for some one to talk to. She fell back in a little heap at the foot of the bed.

"I wonder what the very first thing Daddy will say, when he sees me this morning. Something very silly, I bet." She grinned to herself. He would make fun of her, tease her, she knew only too well.

But he couldn't fool her! He had been very proud of her the night before, he could not disguise this fact, no matter how much he tried. She leaped out of bed and ran to the door, opened it and stuck her head out in the hall. There wasn't a sound.

"Not even a mouse," she groaned, and shut her door as noisily as she dared. "Perhaps," she thought hopefully, "that closing door may disturb someone. Gosh," she complained as she walked slowly over to her bed, "this is as bad as Christmas morning, waiting and waiting for people to get up! Goodness, I never knew Dickie and Frankie to be so quiet in the morning. They just never are when I want to sleep. They are usually imps and holy terrors."

The rosy sun which had awakened her was rapidly becoming uncomfortably hot. She threw herself at the foot of the bed again, and propped herself so she could look down into the garden. She turned her nose up at the lilac bush in full bloom. Scenery could get very tiresome, she pouted. There was nothing she could do at this minute but to go on thinking. But prolonged and solitary thinking proved too much for her—as it always did. She fell fast asleep with one arm crooked under her head.

"Flopsy! Flopsy! FLOP-SY!" her mother's voice came singing from down stairs. "You little sleepy head!"

Flopsy sat up with a start. Where was she? What had happened? She had a crick in her neck, her arm was asleep. O-o-OH—it was hot! She couldn't seem to get her wits together.

"How did I get down here at the foot of the bed?" She frowned sulkily, and shook her arm to get the prickles out of it. Sleepy head, indeed! She could

at least remember that she had practically been awake all night. Through heavy eyes she glared sleepily at her little green clock. Her eyes sprang open with surprise—sleep was torn from them in a twinkling. Nine o'clock! She sprang out of bed. The sounds and perfumes of the early morning had disappeared. The house was no longer quiet. Dickie and Frankie were making a terrific racket out on the sun porch, quite unlike the twittering of the birds at dawn. Mr. and Mrs. Moore were laughing and talking in the dining room. The perfume which now came to her nostrils was that of coffee and bacon. That moment of heavy sleepiness and crossness vanished in a flash. To think she had wasted some very precious moments sleeping when she might have been down stairs talking over that graduation from School Number Nine!

Flopsy made short work of dressing. She slipped into her green shorts, fastened to them a gay top with its sun back—poked her feet into a pair of sandals—dashed for the bathroom. She rubbed a wash rag in a circular motion about her face after the manner of a cat washing its face, but not as thoroughly. She fairly bounced down the stairs and leaped over the last balustrade and sprang into the dining room. Her father looked up over his paper startled by the sudden rush and commotion. Instantly he covered his face with the paper.

Flopsy did look so self-conscious, so self-satisfied, as she stood in the doorway. Mr. Moore did not want her to see the keen relish he took in her. She did look so—funny. Waiting for praise, the little minx! Pert—but sweet! Crazy kid—but smart— All this to himself, of course. He wouldn't tell her. It was

far more fun teasing her. He lowered his paper and looked up over its rim with a wide-eyed innocent expression.

"It's a mighty good thing for you, Miss Flopsy Wopsy Moore, that today wasn't yesterday. It's hotter than all get-out. Would you be interested in knowing what the thermometer is at this moment?" he asked her gravely and as though it were of the greatest possible interest to her.

Flopsy shook her head from side to side vigorously, and wrinkled up her nose in disdain. No one could have mistaken her complete contempt for the thermometer—no one but her father.

"Ah, I see you are concerned. And, I will hasten to enlighten you at once. The temperature at this moment, my child, is 83—and the promise is that it will reach the 100 mark before the day is out. Consider, my dear daughter, what that auditorium would have been like if the outside temperature had been 100? Our clothes would have stuck fast to the chairs, and imagine if you can, what would have happened when we arose patriotically to the Star Spangled Banner. They would have been ripped right off us. Wouldn't that have been embarrassing, wouldn't it have spoiled the whole beautiful effect? Tch! Tch!" he chuckled dismally. "My, you are lucky! And, by the way, I want to pay you a compliment." Flopsy's eyes brightened with hope. "Your hair comb, this morning is beyond all description. Marvellous! Now, I see why you were late for breakfast."

Flopsy's hands went to her head. Her curls were standing up on end. Oh dear, she hadn't combed them!

"Isn't Flopsy's hair picturesque, my dear?" Mr. Moore turned to his wife who had just come into the dining room from the kitchen. "It looks for all the world like a hay rick in the glow of the setting sun."

"Oh daddy!" Flopsy fell into her place at the table with a long drawn out sigh.

Mrs. Moore shook her head, but she was smiling, Flopsy noted.

"Flopsy, you never combed your hair this morning."

"A little," Flopsy fibbed cheerfully. Her mother looked good natured enough to play a little trick upon.

"A little—this way—a little that way—but never once in the same direction, I could swear to that. But the result is so amazing, that I can only offer you my congratulations," Mr. Moore said with a broad grin.

"Flopsy," Mrs. Moore laughed tolerantly, and changed the subject mercifully, "you have had four telephone calls this morning."

"Four!" Flopsy gasped in dismay, and her orange juice went down the wrong way.

"Yes, four. Fleurette at seven. Alice at fifteen minutes after seven. Then Dottie—and—"

"Babbie," Flopsy sputtered between gasps and much pounding of her chest.

"No, not Babbie—a reporter."

"A what?" Flopsy turned white.

"A reporter from a newspaper. Surely you have heard of reporters—after all the movies you have seen—" Mr. Moore suggested hopefully.

Flopsy's face went even whiter—the faint freckles

stood out on her nose. Her eyes were dark and large, her mouth was parted breathlessly.

"A reporter—not a policeman," Mr. Moore comforted her. "At any rate, we may be thankful that you were frightened out of your choking fit—I was afraid you were going to strangle to death."

"A reporter?" Flopsy said weakly. "A reporter?" she repeated.

Mr. Moore took out his watch and looked at it, then he glanced under his eyebrows at his daughter who showed signs of being frightened stiff with a nameless horror.

"I must run along—but I know your mother can soothe your fears. Perhaps she can make you remember last night. You thought then that your graduation was like none other that had ever gone before it. Quite apparently others agree with you. It will make a very pretty newspaper story. Little lame sister, miraculously cured leaves her ranch in the west to graduate in big sister's class in the east. Big sister surprises everyone by wearing a beautiful diamond ring given to her by one of the local heroes! All very thrilling and touching." Mr. Moore stood up, and went to his daughter's side, and started to put his hand on her head. "No, I will not touch the artistic creation you have made of your hair, I might spoil some of its artistic—abandon. Good-bye, my child, I'll read about you in the afternoon papers—"

Mrs. Moore followed her husband out into the hall. Flopsy never looked up, never moved a hair's breath.

"Gone up two points!" Mr. Moore called back, after he had examined the thermometer. "It's a

good thing we are going to get out of this. It's going to be a sizzler all right—all right—” his last words seemed to burn up in the hot sun.

Mrs. Moore came back into the dining room, and laughed outright. She did not mean to make fun of Flopsy but she did look so funny. She was still sitting in the same position and her expression had not changed since she had heard the dreadful word—reporter.

“Good gracious! I see I have a frozen stiff child on my hands this roaring hot day. What is it, Flopsy?”

Flopsy stirred and shivered.

“Mother, what did that reporter want, and why did he call me?” she faltered.

Mrs. Moore sat down at the table and poured herself another cup of coffee.

“Flopsy you funny child, you would think it was a policeman as your father suggested and that you had a guilty conscience. It seems he wanted to get in touch with Miss Hilton, but Mrs. Jackson with whom she boards has no telephone. Some one had told the reporter that you were a great friend of Babbie's. You recall, she shared your seat with you last night. Besides, he thought perhaps you could give some specially interesting details about her—a new slant. They—the newspaper people are going to make a very nice story about it all. It was a very unusual grammar school graduation, you know. Smile, my dear, all is well!”

Flopsy's eyes brightened and she smiled faintly.

“You see, it *was* very unusual for a little girl, who had never been in school before, to graduate and receive a diploma from a grammar school. And, it

was still more unusual that the teacher who coached her was her own sister."

"Did you tell him—" Flopsy burst out, all eagerness now, "did you tell him about the ranch, and how she fell from a horse and it made her lame for a while? Did you tell him Miss Hilton wrote to her sister about me and that she liked me best of all her sister's pupils? Did you tell him she thought I was very funny? And she liked red hair? Did you tell him she never saw me until last night? Did you say—"

"Hold on, you little publicity seeker. When you talk for publication—you talk!"

"I bet he wanted my picture," Flopsy's eyes were shining, she was all in a quiver of excitement. "Wouldn't that be terrific? Alice and Fleurette would be just green with jealousy. But it would be only right, because Miss Hilton wrote to Babbie more about me than she did them. Oh dear—I bet I haven't got a picture."

"Yes, he did mention a picture—but—"

"But, don't you think it ought to be my picture and not Alice's or Fleurette's?" Flopsy's face fell. "After all, I was the one who—"

"Just a minute, just a minute. You haven't a decent picture that I can lay my hands on at this minute—"

"Oh dear, isn't that awful! Can't you find one? And, I hope you told him that—"

"Flopsy, reporters work for newspapers—he wasn't asking to write a book about you—" Mrs. Moore stood up. "There are things to be done this day. We can't sit here talking forever. Daddy is going to see

Mr. Morton this morning, he has decided to take their cottage for the month of July at Emerald Lake. Or before, if we can get it. Now, my dear child may I hope for some help from you? It's a large hope I realize fully—your head is in the clouds. The boys have been on the warpath ever since they got up—too little sleep. Flopsy," Mrs. Moore's tone was almost sharp. "Please, come down to earth for one minute! I want you to collect all your clothes which need washing and bring them down to me."

Flopsy stood up and stared at her mother blankly.

"Oh dear—!" Mrs. Moore was completely discouraged by her daughter's vacant expression. "Listen to me, we, the Moore family bag and baggage are leaving this house in a few days and there are a million and one things to do. Please help me." Mrs. Moore almost wailed.

Flopsy deliberately made her eyes blink with interest and excitement. She hoped that she looked the picture of rapt attention. But, she was muddled inside. Things were happening too fast.

"Emerald Lake is much nearer than the shore we've always gone to, isn't it?" Flopsy backed towards the door, as though to obey her mother's command to go upstairs.

"Yes! Yes! Much nearer—daddy will be able to come up every night. It's not much more than an hour's ride by car. Now, please skip along."

Flopsy darted for the door and started up the stairs. She stopped short and hung over the balustrade.

"Mother," she called gaily, her voice trembling with a sudden brilliant idea. "Now, I can have some

of my friends up to see me for a few days. Can't I? It was always too far to ask them before. Oh boy, will that be nice!"

"Oh yes, by all means. Heavens! The boys are all but killing each other. Boys! *Boys!* BOYS!" she made a dash for the sun parlor.

Flopsy walked slowly up the stairs—very slowly. Her mother had said her head was in the clouds. But this could hardly express it. The clouds were way below her—her head was in the stratosphere—that space where few mortals have ever gone—and none except in a balloon. All was clear and beautiful about her. Down, down below her was the earth and still farther down in some remote and forgotten place were the clothes her mother had asked her to get.

"I'll ask Alice, first—no, I'll ask Babbie and Miss Hilton—then Fleurette—then Dottie—then Mary. No, I won't invite Mary, she's a big stick-in-the-mud." Flopsy frowned a little. "No, Mary would be a big pain—she never can do anything." As she walked into her room a happy thought struck her. "It will be just swell to have Janet. She always thinks she has everything—I'll show her, we can have a summer cottage. I won't ask her though, until I can make a beautiful dive. And swim across the lake." By this time Flopsy had reached her bureau and stood staring at herself in its mirror. She raised her arms above her head and bent her body as though about to dive into the water. Her reflection did not altogether please her, for she could not see her legs and feet. So, she got up on her bed—and stood on it and curled her toes over its edge, as though it were the end of a diving board. She raised her arms again, bent her

body. The effect, she felt *must* be perfect, but when she tried looking down at the "water" and into the mirror at the same second, she lost her balance and took a very unexpected nose dive to the floor. She lay still a few minutes hardly realizing what hit her. Then she giggled.

"What a belly wopper, that was!" she snickered and sat up. "Yes, Janet will be the very last one to come up to our lake. Wouldn't she love it? Oh glory!"

In fact, any and all of her friends would take a wicked joy in seeing her take such a flip flop—and how she would have laughed at them!

"But Janet—that's different!" Flopsy wouldn't have admitted it for the world—but she was a little envious of Janet. Janet had such a superior air about her at times. And she had been to an expensive camp for girls and thought she knew everything about swimming, diving, horseback riding, and canoes.

"Janet will be last—" she repeated as she brushed the damp curls back from her face. "Glory it is—HOT!" she was still lying on the floor.

From down stairs came a few furious howls. Mrs. Moore had evidently shaken up her two small sons. Flopsy jumped to her feet suddenly brought to her senses by the uproar. She stood in front of her mirror again. In a husky, melodramatic voice she began to recite her composition "In the Old Lighthouse Garden." She waved her arms in all directions and rolled her eyes in as many more. This, needless to say, was *not* the way she had done it the night before. She had delighted the whole audience with the quiet simplicity of her manner and her deep rich voice. She broke off abruptly—

“Oh heck, I haven’t a picture for the newspaper. That reporter will be just—*disgusted*.” She stopped and sat down and felt very sorry for the reporter. She wished she could give him a beautiful picture of herself—so beautiful that people would be so amazed that they would say, “My, she is as beautiful as she is smart!”

The telephone was ringing frantically. Flopsy was jarred right out of her day-dreaming. She started for the door. Probably, she thought, it was the reporter again. Poor man, they would have to disappoint him. Her mother was answering the telephone. She hung over the balustrade and listened.

“Oh yes, Alice. Flopsy is up now. She is helping me—or perhaps I should say—I hope she is—but I have my doubts. FLOPSY!” Mrs. Moore called. “Flopsy, Alice wants you and for the land’s sake will you please bring me those clothes I asked you for. You haven’t such an extensive wardrobe that it should have taken you all this time to do your sorting.”

Flopsy spun around like a top. She was eager to dash down stairs and talk to Alice—but she didn’t dare appear anywhere in sight of her mother without her clothes which needed washing.

“Oh dear!” she wailed running this way and that like a chicken with its head off. “I hope Alice will wait—oh goodness!”

Her mother, something told her, would not wait. Her patience showed unmistakable signs of growing very thin. And as her mother was right on hand and Alice at the other end of the telephone wire, she had better appease her mother first. She dashed for her closet—grabbed up everything in sight helter skelter

—and flew down stairs. She dropped the bundle beside her on the floor as she sat at the telephone table.

“Oh, Alice,” she panted, “isn’t it HOT! I am boiling over—I—am—oh!” her voice faltered and she stopped off short. Her mother was standing beside her. There was *something* in her expression—something that made her forget Alice.

“May a kind and merciful heaven give me patience,” Mrs. Moore said with a long drawn out sigh. “Mrs. Titmouse ironed that dress beautifully only two days ago—and you have not worn it.” “That dress” was now a mass of wrinkles. Her mother was sorting the bundle. Under her breath she murmured—

“No wonder mothers grow gray!”

“Alice,” Flopsy said into the telephone, glad to avoid the cold glitter in her mother’s eyes, “I am helping mother—”

“Indeed?” Mrs. Moore raised her eyes to heaven.

“You see,” Flopsy went on in a rush. “We are going away in a few days. Do you mind—I’ll call you back in a few minutes?” Flopsy hung up and with a butter-wouldn’t-melt-in-her-mouth expression looked up at her mother.

“Flopsy, I am only going to ask one more favor of you. Just one. Will you please go over to Alice’s—go to Fleurette’s—go anywhere, but keep from under my feet. You are worse than useless this morning.”

Flopsy could scarcely believe her ears. But she wouldn’t ask her mother to repeat this order—it would be like tempting fate.

“I will try to get Mrs. Titmouse over to help

me,” her mother went on, and then turned to go into the kitchen. “I suppose, I can’t very much blame you after all this excitement. But, will you please—COMB YOUR HAIR!”

Flopsy walked slowly up the stairs. Her lovely bubble had burst. She felt very uncomfortable and guilty. However, her guilt did not weigh her down for too long for in five minutes she was out the door and racing up the street. She spied Mary Howard coming towards her.

“Oh—Yoo-hoo, Mary!” she yelled wildly and, as though Mary was the one person in the world she had hoped most to meet, she broke into a run.

Mary and Flopsy stood talking for only five minutes but in that short time Flopsy had not only asked her—but *urged* her to come up and spend a few days at Emerald Lake. She had told her all about the reporter who had called up and wanted her picture for the paper. Mary’s eyes had positively popped right out of her head. She had been even more impressed than Flopsy might have hoped. A reporter! Flopsy’s picture in the paper! My, but Flopsy was an important person! Mary was enormously flattered that such a celebrity should invite her to her summer cottage. She accepted the invitation at once and with great pleasure. Flopsy dashed on, leaving Mary abruptly. She had to see Alice immediately, Alice simply had to hear about the reporter’s calling her up—Alice had to be invited to Emerald Lake.

As the morning blazed away, Flopsy blazed with it—to new heights of glory. She was decidedly the most important personage in her small world. Lavishly and generously she tossed about invitations to her summer cottage. Before she returned home, she

had asked Mrs. Holt and Alice, also Alice's big sister; Mrs. Muldoon and Fleurette; Dottie Green and her mother. But at the Green's she managed to hold in on some of her generosity. She did not ask Dottie's young sister Margaret. No siree! What a pest Margaret was! Then she ran home in high spirits. What a wonderful morning it had been. And, wasn't she happy she had not asked Margaret Green! Everything was perfect.

When she reached her house her mother was waiting for her on the top step.

"Flopsy, where on earth have you been—I've been telephoning in all directions? You had just left Alice's—you had just left Fleurette's. Miss Hilton and Babbie were here, they were very sorry not to have seen you."

Every bit of happiness and joy within Flopsy promptly withered and died. She looked at her mother in dismay.

"Oh dear—isn't that awful!" she wailed. "I wanted more than anything to see Babbie. When will they come back?"

"Not all summer I am afraid, Flopsy. They are leaving tonight on a sleeper for Maine—"

"Maine!" Flopsy squealed in despair. "That's so far away. Oh dear, that's awful." She sat down on the top step and slowly wiped off her hot face with one arm.

Mrs. Moore sat down beside her, her expression was very sympathetic. She put one arm across Flopsy's shoulders.

"I know how disappointed you must be. Babbie was just as disappointed as you are. She was all eagerness to see you—"

Tears welled up in Flopsy's eyes. "I'll never see her again."

"Oh, yes you will, darling. Miss Hilton said you would—well, I don't know what she meant, but she said that she had some very happy plans for you and Babbie—"

"Plans?" Flopsy echoed. "What were they?"

"She would not say—but she promised to write you in a few weeks. She will be too busy next week. You see, she is taking Babbie to a girl's camp, where she herself is going to be a counselor. But as soon as they get settled, she is going to write you."

"Plans?" Flopsy's face brightened. "Maybe, she is going to take me out on the ranch, maybe—. If they wait too long, I couldn't go—I wouldn't get back in time for high school. But—" she broke off with a sigh, "I guess I better not count my bridges before they are hatched—"

"Pretty fancy they must be—I'd like to see them, very much," Mr. Moore's voice startled both Flopsy and her mother, he had come up across the grass and they had not heard him.

"What, are pretty—fancy?" Flopsy looked around in a puzzled fashion.

"The eggs from which those bridges of yours are hatched," Mr. Moore said solemnly. "Didn't I hear you say something about hatching out bridges? The eggs must be something worth seeing."

"Why, what are you doing home at this hour?" Mrs. Moore asked in surprise.

"Oh, I had to see Mr. Morton about the cottage—and by the way Flopsy, I asked your boy friend and his father up to the lake—I hear that he is quite a fisherman—and there is mighty fine bass fishing at Emerald Lake."

"My *boy friend*," Flopsy raised her eye brows. "I haven't one."

"Why, of course you have! Young Forbes, Bill, you call him."

"Bill Forbes!" Flopsy shrieked. "That big show off—that hunk of cheese."

"Now, now, before you blow up—look at this—" Mr. Moore laid a newspaper on her lap opened to one of its inside pages. "Cast your eye on that—it will cheer you up."

"Oh mother, listen to this—" Flopsy's words fell over each other in her excitement. "SURPRISE AT GRAMMAR SCHOOL GRADUATION—THRILLS AUDIENCE AT SCHOOL NUMBER NINE—TEACHER REVEALS ROMANCE." Flopsy's eyes leaped over these headlines to some pictures near them. There was one of Miss Hilton—and—Flopsy's face turned a pale sea sick green. She let out a shrill, feeble squeal.

"Catch her before she faints," Mr. Moore winked at his wife.

"Oh look—oh look!" Flopsy gasped. "Look at me! Where did that terrible reporter get THAT picture. Isn't it AWFUL? It makes me look cross-eyed. One of my eyes too, is bigger than the other. And one of my teeth is out. It's an old, old picture—I look six years old—And what a dopey looking dress." Her eyes filled with angry tears.

Mrs. Moore took the paper and one glance at Flopsy's picture was enough. Over her daughter's head she gave her husband a meaning look. Mr. Moore had taken this snap shot of Flopsy when she was nearly seven. He always carried it in his bill fold. He had liked it—even the missing tooth had struck him as cute and funny. He now grinned sheep-

ishly and guiltily. Mr. Morton was *not* the only person he had seen this morning, Mrs. Moore decided. Flopsy broke into a torrent. "We ought to sue that reporter. He is a double-crosser and a sneak. I am going to see Alice's father, he is a judge. I wish he'd put that reporter in jail for life. See what it says under my picture, 'She was in on the secret.' Well, he wouldn't dare let us in on the secret of how he got that picture, he wouldn't dare—I bet he stole it."

"Laugh at it," Mrs. Moore tried to cheer her, because Mr. Moore was now looking very uncomfortable. "Your eyes were not crossed in that snap shot—the newspaper has touched them up—or blurred them. Anyway, people always laugh at newspaper pictures."

"I bet they will—everybody will but me. They will all think it's a scream. But if anyone gets funny about it—I'll—" whatever her vicious threat might be, she did not state it, but stood up and stalked into the house haughtily.

"Whew!" Mr. Moore wiped off his forehead. "I guess I'll lay low. If you do not want to be a widow, my dear, you had better keep your suspicions to yourself. That girl who just walked into the house certainly had murder in her eyes, and I am not fooling."

Mr. and Mrs. Moore like a pair of conspirators crept into the house.

However, to their surprise during the rest of the day, Flopsy apparently, as her father expressed it, 'got a tremendous kick out of raging at a newspaper.' The telephone rang incessantly, and she blew up and stormed all over again every time that *awful* picture

was mentioned. She felt very much in the public eye and enormously important.

By night she was very weary and longed with all her heart for the day to end, just as hours before she had longed for it to begin. She would not for the world have admitted that she wanted to go to bed. The sun blazed on and on, and she simply could not go to bed by daylight. Her mother found her curled up in a forlorn little heap in the corner of the porch swing.

“Life has been a little too thrilling, too exciting for you, hasn’t it, honey?” Mrs. Moore sat down beside her.

“I was just thinking, that last night seems so far, far away—” there was a funny little catch in Flopsy’s voice, which she was trying to keep from quivering. What *was* the matter with her, she wondered? She had such a gone, lonely feeling.

“I understand, I know—” her mother nodded sympathetically. “You were in seventh heaven last night—and you’ve lived through more excitement in the last twenty-four hours than ever before in your life. Dead Sea Fruit, my dear. It happens to all of us. So we all feel when a radiantly happy moment comes to an end. Last night couldn’t go on forever you know—had to become only a lovely memory. You have been too busy all day long to realize that it was all over—but now you have come to the first realization—that it has gone. That’s why you feel a little—lost!”

“It is really the longest day of the year, it doesn’t only seem so—” Flopsy faltered.

“Well, it is all over now, the sun has begun to sink behind the hills. But cheer up, the longest day

of the year is also the first day of summer. And this summer holds many bright promises for you—there is so much for you to look forward to. Now, I'd go to bed and dream about all the nice things to come—”

Flopsy was only too grateful to her mother for suggesting bed. She kissed her, and Mrs. Moore held her warm body close and tight for a moment, in sympathetic understanding. Without a word Flopsy pulled away and dashed into the house and off for bed.

Chapter Two

First Visitors at Emerald Lake

THE first purchase Flopsy made in the country store at Emerald Lake was a pad of paper. She simply had to write letters, because if she didn't she knew very well she wouldn't get any. It was perfectly awful to walk over to the post office and wait in line, only to come away empty handed. Getting the mail was the event of the morning. There were so many cars and so many people. They came from all over, some from the cottages at Emerald Lake and others from the small nearby lakes. You'd feel so foolish if you couldn't walk away from the post office reading *something*—even if it were only a postal card.

It was to Alice and Fleurette that she wrote first, on that second day at Emerald Lake. She longed to write Miss Hilton and Babbie, but it was out of the question because she had not heard from them and did not know their address in Maine. Her letters to Alice and Fleurette were almost identical. It was a trick she had learned on other vacations—it saved so much thinking. Besides, if she thought of something very funny, it was a perfect shame to only use it once. She felt sure Alice and Fleurette would not compare notes, as the two girls had no great fondness for each other.

Dear Alice (she began the first letter),

Well, here we are at Emerald Lake. It is very pretty, if you care about scenery. I won't take the trouble to describe it, because I am afraid you'd skip it like you do in books. Our cottage is as cute as anything. It is a white and green bungalow. It has three bedrooms, a sunporch—that's where we eat! And a sleeping porch—that's where Dickie and Frankie sleep! But I won't describe it any more, because I hope you will see it soon.

We had a *terrible* trip coming up here. I thought I'd die! Frankie found a puppy the day before we left and he yelled *bloody murder* to take it with us. He said he'd stay home all summer alone in the house if he couldn't take it with him. It was quite cute, but it was a MUT. Daddy called it Heinze, because he said it had fifty-seven varieties in it. You never saw anyone as stubborn as Frankie. Well, I want to tell you that darn mut was a *Nuisance*. And, I don't mean maybe. We were all piled high with baggage and junk in the car. It was so crowded you couldn't move. And, Heinze kept leaping all over—and barking—and pulling at things. He loved to undo strings on bundles. He kept licking my face! Whew! And, then what do you think—that puppy got *car sick*. You know what I mean, he lost his LUNCH! Wasn't that dandy? That gave Dickie the idea—and he got car sick, too! Wasn't that peachy! And, I nearly got car sick, too. And, daddy got as mad as hops. Once when we stopped at a gas station to get gas, the man there thought Heinze was cute and daddy said "He is yours, my man—and a dollar bill goes with him." Frankie wouldn't get back into the car without Heinze and he started to run up the road to go home and daddy had to chase him. Daddy carried him back to the car and pushed him in. And Frankie yelled worst than ever. Then daddy got madder than ever and he turned the car

around and said he was going home. I got awfully nervous—he looked as if he meant it. But I guess he was only trying to scare Frankie, because all of a sudden Frankie stopped yelling. Dickie was another *nuisance*. First he wanted to sit on the front seat with daddy and mother, then he wanted to stand up in the back with Frankie and me. Once daddy stopped very suddenly and Dickie fell down, and he yelled. Mother said she was going out of her mind, and she didn't see why she ever thought of going away. But she didn't go—out of her mind I mean— And, I don't blame her in the least.

The swimming up here is peachy. There is a float out in front, and I can swim out to it. It's quite far out. There are hardly any kids here my age, so PLEASE come up SOON. And don't forget to write me. You will love it up here, something doing every minute. Please *write soon*. I can hardly wait to hear when you are coming.

Your loving pal,
Flopsy.

After she had finished this letter she made a copy of it. This second letter began "Dear Fleurette." She addressed two envelopes and put the letters in them. Then she went to her mother for stamps. But just as soon as the letters were sealed and stamped, she got into a panic. Supposing, she had put the wrong letter in the wrong envelope? And supposing the two girls exchanged them and found that the two letters were identical, wouldn't that make her feel nutty? She ripped the envelopes open and discovered that she had been quite correct. But she had made hash of the envelopes. She tried to get the stamps off, but made a more finely minced hash of them than

she had of the envelopes. She went back to her mother for more stamps.

“Flopsy, you can be so scattered brained,” Mrs. Moore shook her head. “Now, will you please pay strict attention to what you are doing? Put Fleurette’s letter in a new envelope, address it and bring it to me. I will stamp it. After that is done, we will get to Alice’s. And, by the way when you go over to the post office, take Dickie with you, and Frankie. They have been begging to go.”

Flopsy did not protest, for it was better to have the boys, small as they were, than no one. Dickie always attracted attention with his bright shining curls and dimples. Dickie was four and Frankie was nearly six. She enjoyed people talking to them. To tell the truth she was a little lonely. About half the cottages at Emerald Lake were not open—for it was a few days before the first of July—the day so many began their summer vacations. Besides, Flopsy discovered that *everybody* seemed to know *everybody* and had been coming for ages and ages to Emerald Lake. They did not pay much, if any attention to a small girl who promptly got a fiery red and covered with freckles. She did not mind in the least taking the boys to the post office!

The walk over to the post office was nearly a mile, and Dickie got tired on the way home. Flopsy and the two boys sat on some small boulders by the side of the road and rested. Dickie’s wild desire to walk over in the first place, Flopsy decided, was merely to get a lollypop. They all sat still—or rather, without talking, for “still” they were not, for the two boys were making a terrific racket sucking and crunching at their lollypops. The sun beat down upon them,

and upon Flopsy's face blossomed a new crop of freckles. The tender skin on Dickie's back was slowly but surely cooking.

"I wish," Flopsy said to herself, and then her eyes fell upon a broad patch of clover at her feet. She flopped to her knees in its midst, and began searching. Perhaps, if she found a four leaf clover, her wish would come true.

"What are you looking for, Flops?" Frankie asked. "A snake?"

"No, I am *not*." She was far too engrossed in her search to even take time to shiver at this unpleasant thought.

"A hop toad?" Frankie eyed his sister hopefully.

"I am looking, if you must know it, for a four leaf clover. If I find one I can make a wish and it will come true—"

"Will you wish for Heinze to come back?" he asked eagerly.

"I will *not*—that pesky mut! Oh look, look! Here is one. Look Frankie, look Dickie—see—one—two—three—four!"

"Make a wish!" Dickie yelped with excitement.

Flopsy held the four leaf clover, above her head and eyed it solemnly. She breathed in deeply. Then closed her eyes.

"I wish that some of the people I asked would come up today to Emerald Lake." She opened her eyes and looked up and down the road as though expecting that her wish would take effect immediately. However, she noted that four leaf clovers do not make prompt deliveries on all occasions. But her spirits were high; she felt sure her wish must come true and soon. She jumped to her feet, and signaled

to her small brothers to come along. She had to get ready for her guests.

"Come on kids, let's go—"

The boys jumped up. Frankie was very practical. "Who will come? And, when will they come? For lunch? And will they go in swimming with us?" He plied his sister with questions.

"You'll see—just wait—" Flopsy enjoyed this little game.

But in another instant it was not a question of *seeing* anything, so much, as *smelling*. The sweet smell of the fields became suddenly sour and *awful*.

"Glory!" Flopsy gasped, and put her fingers to her nose. "A skunk! Whew!"

"Whew!" echoed Frankie, and put his fingers to his nose and held on to it.

"Whew!" re-echoed Dickie. He glanced up at his sister and his brother and followed their example and held tight to his little button of a nose.

"Maybe," Frankie remarked, but still holding on to his nose, "that was a tricky four leaf clover, and it sent you a skunk instead of people—"

"It can't go in swimming with me!" Dickie said hotly. He had no idea what a skunk was, except its smell, which he most certainly did not care for.

In another minute they came upon it. For there, in the middle of the road, lay a small black and white animal with a bushy tail. A passing car had hit it. The boys let out yelps of excitement. They were torn between a desire to stand and view the "remains" and another to run and get away from the smell.

"Come kids, let's run—but hold on to your noses—" Flopsy broke into a run with her two

small brothers at her heels. "Don't take your fingers off your noses till I say—when—"

In a few minutes they subsided into a dog trot, but the two boys never took their eyes off their sister's face. They were waiting for her to say "when." Flopsy let go her nose—and the boys did likewise.

"Whew, not yet," and she pinched her nose again.

"Whew, not yet," they echoed and re-echoed, and likewise pinched their noses. Dickie thought it the most exciting game he had played in many a long day.

"Say, 'when,' " he begged.

Flopsy obliged him. Once again the summer air was filled with the fragrance of blossoming fields.

"When!" she shouted, and her hands dropped to her sides.

"When!" the boys shouted together. Down went their hands.

"Let's play it again," Dickie begged. "It was fun."

"Yes, let's!" Frankie turned and looked behind him. But the skunk was nowhere in sight, a turn in the road hid him from view. Dickie was insistent that they go back and smell the skunk all over again. "And, let's hold our noses and run." He darted away from Flopsy and started back up the road. She caught him and half dragged him along with her in the homeward direction.

"I'll never, never take you over to the post office again if you are going to act so nutty." Flopsy was exasperated.

"I dropped my lollypop—I want to go and get it," Dickie said.

“That little trick doesn’t fool me one bit—you just want to see that disgusting old skunk again. Besides, you can’t pick up your lollypop out of the dust—it’s all covered with dirt.”

Dickie sulked along with his brother and sister. He did not agree with her on two points. He *could* pick up his dusty lollypop, and the skunk wasn’t disgusting—it was fascinating. He made up his mind that he would return sometime and get a real look at it.

The boys dashed into their cottage, screaming with excitement. They attempted to tell the story of their experience, in broken and mixed-up sentences. Mrs. Moore stood still, laughing and shaking her head. She declined with thanks Frankie’s generous offer to lead her back and let her smell the skunk. His face fell with disappointment. Dickie was silently determined. He would see that skunk again.

Flopsy went into her room and began putting it in apple pie order. She, too, was determined. She was going to get her wish. She was going to have company. As she busied herself she wondered who it would be.

“Flopsy,” Mrs. Moore called “come out here and help me get lunch. Set the table.”

Flopsy came out of her room, wrinkling up her nose as she came. “Oh mother,” she sang out, “it hurts terribly to wrinkle my nose, it is terribly sun burned.”

“Then I wouldn’t turn up my nose at anything if I were you, that seems the only sensible solution. Speaking of sunburn, Dickie’s back is a sight. He is going to be very sore by night. We are to have a very simple lunch, I am afraid, because—” She did not



A skunk! They held their noses.

finish, but bent her head to watch the car which was coming up the roadway in back of the cottage.

“Why—I wonder if that car is coming here, most of the cottages up this road are empty. Goodness, I really hope it isn’t coming here. Why the licence number is one of those down our way. Goodness gracious, it is stopping!”

Flopsy ran to the window her heart pounding with excitement. Yes, the car was stopping. In fact it had stopped. A puzzled frown settled on her face. It was *not* Alice’s car, it was *not* Fleurette’s—and Mary did not have a car.

“It’s Mrs. Green!” Mrs. Moore gasped in amazement. “Well, I declare, I wonder how she ever found us!”

Mrs. Moore was surprised, but Flopsy’s surprise was more in the nature of a shock. For there, coming across the green in back of the cottage, was Mrs. Green, behind her Dottie, and behind Dottie—?

“Margaret Green!” Flopsy stormed. “Who asked her, I’d like to know? Well, I won’t speak to her, I won’t look at her. I won’t notice her. Of all the brass! She can go home. She is a big pest and nuisance.” Flopsy was in a towering rage. She turned and darted for the front door.

Mrs. Moore grabbed her by the tie at the back of her neck which held her halter waist.

“Flopsy Moore, tell me at once, did you invite Mrs. Green and Dottie here today?”

“Not today, I didn’t—I just said sometime. But I never, never asked Margaret—and I don’t want her.”

“I’ll push her in the lake for you.” Frankie came to Flopsy’s aid.

"Listen to me—at once. You invited Mrs. Green and Dottie. You are their hostess and you must act a lady. It is not your fault that they picked out a day when I planned upon having a very plain lunch, but it will be your fault if you make the visit unpleasant."

"Well, Margaret isn't a lady to go where she isn't invited. No one wants her here."

There was a knock at the back door—everyone who came by car always came to the kitchen door of the cottage. The front door faced the lake. There was no automobile road at the water's edge.

Flopsy never moved. She let her mother go to the door. She recalled bitterly how satisfied she had been that she had refrained from inviting Margaret in the first place. As her mother left her she gave her a warning look.

"Take her up by the wasp's nest and let them all bite her." Frankie was only too happy to please Flopsy if it meant an exciting experience for him to watch or share.

"Oh hush up!" Flopsy said crossly. There simply was no getting out of it. She could hear Mrs. Green's voice talking in the kitchen. Then Margaret piped up in her thin voice. Flopsy made an awful face.

"Well, this is a pleasant surprise!" Flopsy heard her mother say. And she tells me not to tell fibs, Flopsy thought darkly. Pleasant surprise indeed!

"Oh, Flopsy!" Mrs. Moore sang out, exactly as though she were out of ear shot. "Mrs. Green and Dottie are here—"

"But you didn't say Margaret—" Flopsy said to herself gloomily.

Dottie bounced into the living room her round

face all aglow. "Oh Flopsy, Flopsy! I brought my bathing suit—just as you said to! And I can stay all night, if you want me." Dottie was bubbling over with joy.

"Hello, Dottie," Flopsy tried to muster up some pleasure. "That's nice. Did you have your lunch?"

"No, mother thought we would get here in time. Are we late?"

"No, you are not late. Is that Margaret I hear?" Flopsy asked with meaning in her voice.

"Oh yes, but she's not going to stay over night, mother said, unless you ask her to." Dottie lowered her voice. "You don't *have* to ask her, Flopsy, and if I were you I wouldn't. She kicks awfully in bed—"

"Well," thought Flopsy, "I'd kick her right back, if she tried kicking me." Something in Dottie's manner softened Flopsy. Evidently Dottie didn't want Margaret to stick around too long. She began to cheer up a bit, besides, Dottie's shining face brightened up the room. It was nice after all to see her.

From the kitchen, Flopsy could hear Mrs. Green talking. "Your child gave us such perfect directions we couldn't get lost. I know it is an imposition to come up here so soon, but my husband wanted me to look the country over—we may take a cottage for August. I made a big chocolate cake and I have brought a pot of home made baked beans—"

Flopsy smiled, a warm sunny smile. The "chocolate cake" worked magic. But just the same she was not going to be too sweet to Margaret and that was that!

"Flopsy!" Mrs. Moore called. "Will you please set the table. Then you might take Dottie and Margaret down to the lake, I am sure Mrs. Green

would be quite satisfied to sit on the porch and just look at it." Mrs. Moore led Mrs. Green and Margaret into the living room.

Mrs. Green looked about with vast approval. "Well, Flopsy you *have* an attractive cottage—and what beautiful country this is! And, my, but you are sunburned!"

Flopsy nodded smilingly. Margaret came towards her self-consciously. The small eight year old girl looked up into the face of her sister's friend a little uncertainly. From under her arm she pulled out a big white box, and poked it at Flopsy, solemnly.

"Here is a box of candy for you and Frankie and Dickie—"

"Margaret knows you didn't exactly ask her up here, but she was so eager to come—besides, we couldn't very well leave her home alone," Mrs. Green said smilingly.

Every last bit of Flopsy's ill humor melted. She avoided her mother's eyes. She did feel just a little ashamed of herself. Her brothers let out whoops of joy. Mrs. Moore took Mrs. Green out onto the wide porch. Flopsy stood still holding the big box of candy.

"That was very, very nice of you, Margaret, and we thank you."

Margaret blushed with pleasure and gave Flopsy a grateful look. Dottie had insisted upon rubbing in on her small sister that she had not been invited. She turned up her pug nose at Dottie, and with her lips shaped a mocking, "See!" Through the screen door they could hear Mrs. Green's exclamations of delight. "Oh how lovely, lovely! What a heavenly spot. The view through those birches is beautiful.

Yes, indeed I shall be only too happy to sit still and just drink it all in—”

A warm glow of generosity surged over Flopsy. She wanted Margaret to be glad she had come to Emerald Lake and had brought a big box of candy with her.

“I am awfully glad you came Margaret—you will love it here,” she put her arm across Margaret’s shoulder. She turned to the others, “Come on kids, watch me set this table, I am good at it, I hardly ever break a dish.” She was swaggering about now, quite intoxicated with the joy of having guests at her summer cottage. However, she didn’t lose her head enough to let go that box of candy—it had to be guarded from the boys until after lunch. They were eyeing it greedily. A noisy hubbub followed her invitation to watch her set the table. Dickie tried to shout every one down.

“Oh Margaret, come and smell the skunk—it smells *awful*,” he yelled, but no one paid any attention to him. They were too hilarious. Mrs. Moore came into the sun parlor and gave a few directions. Two were to be placed on one side of the table, three on the other, Mrs. Moore and Mrs. Green at each end. Dottie was at Flopsy’s heels every second, paying Flopsy compliments which were music in her ears. Dottie thought her sunburn was *wonderful*. She simply adored freckles—she thought they were *precious*. She stared in open eyed wonder, when she heard how far Flopsy could swim. She chattered and chattered like a magpie as Flopsy ran hither and thither getting dishes for the table, and laying them down in a way that appeared very perilous. Flopsy never bothered to answer Dottie’s string of questions,

she just bobbed her head up and down or shook it from side to side.

“Did you get a letter from Babbie? Did you know that Alice Holt had two aunts who lived not far from Emerald Lake? Did she tell you that Janet was going to boarding school in the fall? Can you dive? When is Miss Hilton going to get married?”

“Now, children—” Mrs. Moore surveyed the table “now that is done, scoot, fly! Out from under my feet while I get lunch.”

Flopsy thrust the box of candy into her mother’s hands, with a warning whisper “Hide it.” Then scoot they all did! They raced single file down the narrow winding path through the birches to the lake. Flopsy was leading—and was shouting as she ran. She could not talk, she *had* to shout. Once on the small dock, she continued shouting, but now like a barker in a circus.

“Ladies and gentlemen this way, this way to see our canoe, our row boat! Emerald Lake! Like a rare emerald gem it is! Three and a half miles long, a half mile wide out here in front. To the right it’s nearly a mile wide. The great swimmer Flora Moore will swim across this lake some day soon, but she’s too smart to pick the widest part of the lake. No, siree, she takes short cuts. Only dopes take the longest hardest way—Now, friends cast your eyes to the left. There is a beautiful sandy beach where the folks from Emerald Lake may be seen every afternoon for bathing—There, is the celebrated float! See, see, the great Flora swim out to it this afternoon—”

“And, there’s a skunk—way up there—and he smells awful!” Dickie yelled louder than Flopsy was shouting.

"Let's see it," Margaret begged.

"Yes, come on. I'll show you—" Dickie started off the dock.

"Not now you won't—you'll be late for lunch." Flopsy grabbed him.

"After," he promised Margaret very solemnly.

"And, folks,—” Flopsy continued as though uninterrupted, “in this lake there is superfine fishing. Pay your money take your choice bass, perch, pickerel, or the lowly sunny.”

"Where you go in swimming—are there fish?" Dottie asked nervously.

"My, my, fish won't hurt you. Don't be afraid my child." Flopsy tried to play that she was patronizing, but giggled instead. What a scared cat Dottie always was!

"Daddy says bass *fight*." Frankie bobbed his head up and down emphatically.

"*Fight?*" Dottie's toes curled up in her shoes with fright.

"They only fight when they are hooked onto a line," Flopsy explained. "You crazy cat, imagine a little bass fighting you!"

Dottie shivered—she did not care to imagine a bass fighting her!

"Children! Children!" Mrs. Moore sang out. "Lunch!"

Shrieks of joy—and then a wild scramble up that path. And, what a lunch it was! Flopsy thought her mother had done a miracle and Mrs. Green had been a fairy godmother. They ate and ate, and laughed and laughed. It was a hilarious meal, and everyone left the table, "stuffed" as Frankie said. Then Mrs. Moore announced they must wait at least

an hour and a half before they went in swimming. But she gave in to their begging that they be permitted to get into their bathing suits and lie or play on the sand. When the time was up Mrs. Moore and Mrs. Green came down to the beach to watch them in the water. Flopsy felt very important. Dottie said she was simply marvelous, because she could swim. Dottie couldn't swim a stroke—and she had not forgotten that bass fight. She paddled about in the shallow water very gingerly. Flopsy strutted out into the lake with all the feeling of importance of an Olympic champion. She was pretty thankful, that some of the older boys and girls were not about today. That "fresh" boy, particularly who asked her the day before, just what she called her 'stroke.' Was it, he asked, the breast stroke to swing time? Or a jazzed up dog trot paddle? Today she could show off to her heart's content. She walked out as far as she could—it shortened the distance to the float, and then she began to swim. It *was* a breast stroke she used but every so often she flung one arm out of the water, to give the effect, she hoped, of a crawl. She hadn't fooled her audience of the day before, but she felt today's would be properly impressed. But there was one thing she did not know, and never knew—whether she could make the float or not. She puffed, blew, wheezed, splashed and spit out water constantly. And swam very very fast making very, very little headway. Today she made the float, as she had before, much to her delight and more to her surprise.

When she reached it, she had no wind left to pull herself up on the ladder at its side, but hung on to it and turned around and waved to those on the

shore. No one seemed to be watching her at this triumphant moment. She "yoo-hooed" and to her satisfaction, Dottie, Mrs. Green and Mrs. Moore waved their hands. Flopsy's "yoo-hooing" was nearly her undoing, for she swallowed so much water that she almost choked. She had a few seconds of awful panic. She held on to the ladder for dear life. After a few minutes, she started back for shore.

Another thing of which she was never certain, was when to attempt standing—for it was frightening to try to stand and discover, that the lake might as well be bottomless as far as she was concerned. Today she decided to take no chances, and perhaps spoil the beautiful effect of her performance—so she kept on swimming until she was quite near where Frankie was standing. She stood, smiling—no one, she felt certain could dream what an effort this feat had been. She walked up to the shore with a broad grin, and stretched out on the sand to wait for the deserved compliments.

"My, Flopsy! You *are* a swimmer!" Mrs. Green looked down upon her admiringly. Flopsy fairly purred with satisfaction. Dottie sat down next to her, and eyed her with good-natured envy.

"I wish I could swim like you! But I am so afraid."

"Well, you won't ever learn to swim if you are afraid—I am perfectly at home in the water," Flopsy bragged.

Mrs. Moore stood up. "Flopsy, I am taking Mrs. Green back to the cottage, I am very sure that she would be more comfortable on the porch, than sitting here on the sand. Bring the boys back with you. Boys!" she called. "Come out of the water and

stay on the beach until you come up to the cottage—”

In a half hour Mrs. Moore called them. They all ran pell mell, up the back road, and into the kitchen door in their wet bathing suits. There was much laughter and noisy confusion getting out of their wet things and into dry clothes. When they were dressed they discovered to their joy that there was a big plate of cookies waiting for them on the kitchen table, and the box of candy had been opened. They were, as always, ravenously hungry after bathing. With delighted whoops they fell upon that plate of cookies and nearly cleared it in a few seconds.

“Where is Dickie?” Mrs. Moore asked, looking about. “Isn’t he dressed? Dickie!” she called. But there was no answer. She raised her voice. “Dickie! Dickie!” she looked puzzled. “Where in the world can he be—is he hiding?”

“He wouldn’t hide long, if he knew we had candy,” Flopsy laughed. “Dickie! *Candy!* CAND-Y!” she shouted at the top of her voice.

But there was no answer. Mrs. Moore was now alarmed. “Children, did Dickie come back from the beach with you?” she looked from one to the other anxiously.

“He was with Frankie,” Flopsy said.

“He was running in back of me,” Frankie announced, in correction.

Mrs. Moore’s face turned white. “Flopsy run down to the beach at once—Frankie you run up the road, and call him, call him every minute. Run! Run!” Her commands were obeyed with alacrity. The summer air was at once filled with shouts of *Dickie! Dickie! DICKIE!*

“Let me get the car—we will find him in a second, he can’t have got far,” Mrs. Green begged.

“Wait—wait—until Flopsy gets back— Oh where is he?” Mrs. Moore was now possessed of a cold terror. She had no words of reproach because they had not watched him more carefully. She was much too frightened. Every second seemed endless. Then she saw Flopsy returning, on a run—and alone. She was signaling with her arms. “Not there! Not there!”

“Perhaps, he went back into the water—” Dottie suggested in an awe struck, frightened tone. Dottie always thought the worst.

“No! No!” Mrs. Moore denied in horror. “That couldn’t be—”

Frankie, too, had returned and he also had not seen his small brother.

“What will we do next?” Mrs. Moore was now nearly frantic.

“Please, please Mrs. Moore get into the car—” Mrs. Green entreated, and this time she did not refuse, and they all made a dash for it.

“Flopsy, you and Dottie stay here at the cottage and keep an eye out for him—please!”

Margaret and Frankie sat on the back seat. Margaret alone remained calm. She was chewing a chocolate caramel, and had smeared it all over her face and fingers.

“You know what I think—” then she broke off and began licking the chocolate off each finger slowly and deliberately.

No one cared what she thought. She herself got bored with licking one finger at a time, so she wiped the rest on her play suit.

“Mother,” she repeated. “Mother,” this time she was insistent. She wanted her mother to answer her.

“What is it, Margaret?” Mrs. Green turned her head, and spoke impatiently. “Please don’t bother me with chatter.”

“Well,” Margaret went on persistently and calmly, “I bet I know where Dickie went.”

“Margaret Green, if you do, for the love of goodness, tell us at once!” Mrs. Green snapped.

Mrs. Moore looked as though she were about to faint.

“Well,” Margaret repeated, as though it were all of no great consequence, “I think he went up to smell the skunk.”

“Please, please, let’s turn back and get Flopsy, she knows where that skunk is. Oh, she may be right. He has talked about it enough,” Mrs. Moore begged, and Mrs. Green, without another word, backed the car and turned around. They were again at the cottage. “Flopsy! Flopsy!” Mrs. Moore shouted.

Flopsy and Dottie made a dash for the car. Flopsy was calling, “We haven’t seen him.” Flopsy herself was now very frightened.

“Flopsy, get into the car, and show us where that skunk was—Margaret says she thinks he might have gone to see it again.”

Flopsy’s eyes brightened. “The road up to the post office. And, I bet that is where he went—” she was wild with excitement and hope.

Mrs. Green drove the car at a higher speed than the law allows, or than Mrs. Moore usually liked—but what of it?

In no time it seemed—Flopsy let out a yell of joy. “There he is! There he is!”

And there he was coming towards them in his bathing suit, trudging along and holding his nose as he came.

Mrs. Green brought the car to a standstill so suddenly, that the children fell in a heap on the floor. Mrs. Moore was out of the car in a flash and was running up the road towards her small son. She caught him in her arms, and kissed him a dozen times. When she had carried him back to the car—they all saw that she had been crying, for her eyes were filled with tears. Tears of pure joy, they were.

The first thing Dickie said was, “Come on Margaret and see the skunk! It smells—AWFUL!”

“Well,” Mrs. Moore said as she turned her head once they were back in the car and homeward bound, “well, Margaret, I am very happy and thankful that you came up to Emerald Lake today. You were the only one who kept her head and used it. Goodness knows when we would have found him. And, the cars race along that road—” she shivered at the thought. “And, I never thought of the post office road—”

Margaret smirked complacently, but said nothing. But she quite blew up with pride when Flopsy hugged her and said, “Gee, Margaret am I GLAD! I’ll say I am—” and she meant it from the bottom of her heart.

Chapter Three

More Visitors at Emerald Lake

WHEN Dottie said goodbye to her mother that evening as she left for home, one would have thought it was a farewell that might be for years—and it might be forever! She threw her arms about Mrs. Green's neck, and kissed her over and over. Her round face was positively tragic as her mother put the car into gear and closed the door. She stood still looking after the departing automobile, with the tears streaming down her face.

"I never stayed away from mother all night before in my whole life—and now I won't see her for three days and three nights." She swallowed a few hot tears, and her voice trembled ominously.

Mrs. Moore eyed her in alarm, she fully expected at any moment to have her break into loud lamentations. "*This*—is going to be a picnic—I don't think." she reflected to herself. But aloud she spoke in a quiet matter of fact way, "Flopsy, why don't you take Dottie out in the rowboat, you can have it now and daddy will want it after dinner for fishing."

But Mrs. Moore did not get the result that she hoped. Dottie turned white—and she sputtered, "NO! NO!" She shook her head violently to emphasize her protest.

Flopsy was thoroughly annoyed at her friend's terror. It was a reflection on her skill as an oarsman,

she knew very well. Just because once she had taken Dottie and three others of her classmates out in a rowboat at a school picnic, and just because she had not been able to row *fast* with five people in the boat—was no reason she couldn't do very well with only one passenger! She had been practising for two days.

“Oh goodness, Dottie, I can row *now*! I row like a whizz!”

Dottie shivered.

“Please Flopsy, I don't want to whizz in a rowboat.” To Dottie whizzing in a rowboat was even more appalling than creeping along.

“Let's sit on the dock and fish for sunnies.” Flopsy's mouth shut like a trap. Dottie was beginning to try her patience.

“I don't like to fish—excuse me Flopsy.” Dottie spoke falteringly. She was almost afraid to protest. She sensed the fact that Flopsy was feeling very superior—and that she thought her a scared cat.

“Well, how about taking a walk,” Flopsy said with a great show of condescending good humor.

“We can see little rabbits, and chipmunks, and snakes,” Frankie put in as an inducement.

“Don't faint,” Flopsy almost snapped, as Dottie's woe begone expression changed to acute terror. “We hardly ever see a snake—and they are harmless—only little garter snakes.”

Mrs. Moore felt that it was time for her to take a hand. She didn't want an unconscious child on her hands.

“Why don't you swing—in that fine swing under the apple tree?” she smiled beguilingly at Dottie. Almost all children loved swings. She hoped fer-

vently that Dottie was not going to be the exception.

Dottie nodded doubtfully. She had not the courage nor strength to protest.

They put Dottie on the seat first and Flopsy pulled it back as far as she could and then gave it a violent push. Dottie let out one long shrill wail. Mrs. Moore made a wild dash for the apple tree, her heart in her mouth.

“Merciful heavens!” she gasped.

Flopsy had managed to grab Dottie and stop the swing. Dottie tumbled off the seat onto her head in the grass and lay in a heap.

“It’s worse than an elevator, and I hate elevators when they go down.” Dottie sat up, and looked beseechingly at Flopsy. “I think I’d like to sit on the porch.”

They sat on the porch. There was apparently nothing else they could do.

Mr. Moore arrived a short time later, and managed by his presence to create a new atmosphere. He had brought Mr. Forbes along with him for a few hours of fishing. Mr. Forbes, Flopsy thought looked very much like Santa Claus—without any whiskers. His face was very ruddy and he was short and fat—and his hair was snowy white. By some chance though he did not look old, for like Santa Claus, he was too jolly and hearty to be an old man.

He chucked Flopsy under the chin, then patted her on the head, in a manner curiously like the Santa Claus in a department store, promising a child a present. “Next time, my child, I’ll bring Bill along—” he assured her.

“Bill’s no present to anyone,” Flopsy thought scornfully.

After dinner Flopsy did tempt Dottie down on the dock. She persuaded her that the men would do their fishing, yards and yards away—most likely on the far side of the lake.

The sun was setting brilliantly. The glory was reflected in the water, in the sky, over the hills—everywhere in sight—but on Dottie's face. She looked plaintively ahead of her in gloomy silence. She wanted to go home. She longed desperately for her mother.

"Margaret was very nice today." Flopsy tried to cheer her, and at the same time make up to her for the mean thoughts she had had about her young sister.

"Oh, yes, today she was nice." Dottie sighed. "But she's so fresh sometimes. She pulls and pushes me around like everything."

"Do you take it from her and let her get away with it?" Flopsy's voice was scornful.

"All I can do is to keep yelling until mother hears me and then comes and catches her. Then mother scolds her." Dottie spoke dejectedly. "I never was away from mother before—" she added with deepening gloom.

Now, Flopsy sighed.

Bed time came none too soon for Flopsy that night. She had never before had an overnight guest, and she had heard it was lots of fun—one never slept—but talked and laughed until dawn. They were to stay awake most of the night but they did precious little laughing. Both of the girls were badly sunburned—especially on their backs. They had to lie on their faces—and at first they giggled a bit over it—but it was too painful to bring forth much laugh-

ter. Suddenly Dottie pinched Flopsy's sunburned arm.

"What's *that?*" she squealed weakly. "That scary noise?"

"Oh—*that!* Those are bullfrogs down in the cove—" Flopsy answered a little sharply. "Now don't get frightened! They can't come up here."

Dottie shivered and groaned. She hated those bullfrogs. She pulled the sheet over her head. They sounded—all those bullfrogs like the voices of a hundred kinds of doom. After awhile the two girls drifted off into sleep. Flopsy was awakened some time later by Dottie's "patting" her face briskly. "Patting" was what Dottie called it—slapping, was what Flopsy called it at a later date, when she described the scene. Dottie was sitting up in bed, and she was shivering so, that the whole bed rattled. Flopsy at once sat up herself.

"What is it—what is it?" she sputtered, only half awake.

"Listen! Listen!—the bullfrogs came out of the cove—they are in the next room—all of them!" Dottie's teeth chattered.

Flopsy listened—now thoroughly awake. To her horror it was so! There must be bullfrogs in the next room. Bullfrogs croaking in the cove were right and natural—but in a bedroom? Oh no—it was more like a nightmare. Flopsy sprang out of bed, with Dottie at her heels. She made a dash for her door, screaming, "Mother! *Mother!* MOTHER!" Each "mother" was more shrill and penetrating than the last. The air of the summer night was filled with strange discordant sounds—bullfrogs in the cove—bullfrogs in the cottage, the

screams of two frightened girls—and then Mr. Moore's bass voice shouting, "Jumping Jupiter, what's up? Holy cats, what's broken loose?"

Mrs. Moore was out of her bed in an instant, "Flopsy, Flopsy, what is it?" she called in alarm.

"Mother, mother—there's a bullfrog in the company room."

"Keep still, Flopsy!" Mrs. Moore ordered sharply. "Listen."

Mr. and Mrs. Moore and the two girls were now assembled in the living room. They all stood still for a few tense seconds, listening. It was no bad dream after all—there *was* a weird noise coming from the company room. They all heard it. It did sound like a bullfrog echoing his friends down in the cove.

Mr. Moore put his head back and shouted with laughter. He roared and sputtered, and made enough noise to drown out all other sounds. What could be so funny? His companions stood blinking in amazement.

"A *bullfrog*, my eye! That's just Mr. Forbes snoring—" he sputtered. "That's a good one!" he ha-haed all over again. There was no telling how long he might have laughed if a shriek more ear piercing than any sound which preceded it, seemed to rip the roof off the cottage. Mr. Moore stopped laughing abruptly. The small gathering in the living room stood rooted to the floor their faces blank with dismay—or horror. What was it now? Then another shriek even more penetrating than the last rent the air.

"*My—back—hurts—*" came a clear and definite cry of distress.

“Dickie!” Mr. Moore announced grimly. “Another county heard from. *Now*, we are in for it. We are sunk.”

Mrs. Moore groaned. “We have awakened him. He is terribly sunburned. Now for a lovely restful night. Girls, go back to bed—put the bedclothes over your heads if you want to shut out the noise. I must get the ointment.”

At first, Dottie didn’t mind the uproar—it was more comforting to have everyone up and awake than to lie there in bed hearing strange unfamiliar sounds. The two girls giggled at first as they tried shutting out Dickie’s shrieks, for they never ceased any longer than for him to catch his breath, but then they gave up trying. Frankie woke with a roar of annoyance. “Keep—*quiet!*” he shouted.

Dottie and Flopsy sat right up in bed and held a conversation as though it were the middle of the day. They grew used to the din, which had been farther complicated by Frankie’s general denunciations. Flopsy told Dottie that she fully expected to be invited, before the summer was out, to Miss Hilton’s ranch in Rawhide. Dottie was properly impressed. She asked a series of questions—all of which Flopsy answered at great length. Dickie had suddenly ceased screaming, and Flopsy almost as suddenly dropped off to sleep. She had not realized it but she had been talking to herself for fifteen minutes. Dottie had been lulled to sleep by her chatter. They had only been asleep a short time it seemed, when they were awakened by Mr. Forbes’s hearty laugh. The sun was streaming into their room, and Flopsy sleepily glanced at her clock—it was five o’clock!

“My, I feel fine! What a night’s sleep! I slept like a top—now all I need is an hour or so of fishing before I go back into town,” Mr. Forbes’s voice boomed through the cottage.

A top? Well, thought Flopsy, Dickie did have a top once that sang and hummed—but it was a great deal more musical than Mr. Forbes’s “top”-like manner of sleeping!

Dottie was wide awake and her eyes were very bright. “Flopsy, you know—what? Well, I could go down to town this morning with your daddy and Mr. Forbes. I just thought of it. Wouldn’t that be a good idea?”

And no one urged Dottie to stay longer or change her mind. Mrs. Moore looked too tired even to speed the parting guest. Flopsy was almost as delighted to have her go as she had been glad to see her in the first place.

“I had a lovely time, Flopsy.” Dottie’s round face was beaming. Not once in her whole visit had she been so radiant. She sat fully a half hour in the back seat of the Moore’s car, waiting for the two men to get started. She was feverishly excited and half afraid that she might by accident be left behind.

“Good-bye, good-bye—good-bye—and thank you so much! GOOD-BYE!” The “good-byes,” seemed to fill Dottie’s cup of joy to the brim. They were the only things she had done gladly and happily since her mother had left her the night before.

The next week flew. Flopsy never could figure out where it went! No more of her friends had come up to Emerald Lake, but there had been no end of company at the cottage. Mrs. Moore’s friends

had just "dropped in" at any old time—and had stayed for hours—and many meals! Mr. Forbes had been up several times to go fishing, and each time he had come, he had patted Flopsy's head and jovially promised to bring Bill the next time—just as though Bill were the one person in all the world she most wanted to see.

Now she walked sometimes to the post office with Diana Dean. She thought Diana was simply wonderful. In the first place she decided that "Diana" was the most beautiful name she had ever heard, and secondly Diana was the most gorgeous girl she had ever seen outside of the movies. Diana was fifteen. It gave Flopsy a twinge of envy to notice that the sun had been as kind to Diana, as it had been mean to her. Diana's skin was a lovely rich golden brown, a brown that made her hair look like spun gold in contrast—and her eyes as blue as the sky. Her teeth were dazzlingly white against the color of her face.

The envy that Flopsy felt did not disturb her peace of mind, or detract any from the great pleasure that she had from being with her. She did not tell herself that Diana walked over to the post office with her for the same reason that she had taken Dickie and Frankie those first few days—because at the moment she couldn't find any one better. In the afternoon when they were out on the float during the swimming hour, Diana never noticed her at all but chattered and fooled with the big boys of eighteen—or sixteen.

Flopsy listened fascinated and spellbound. She longed with all her heart to be fifteen—and as bright and as "cute" as Diana. The two years be-

tween them in age seemed like a vast stretch of time. Fifteen was ages and ages removed from thirteen.

Diana went to a private school, she had never been inside a public school in her life. Flopsy proudly boasted of Janet Dudley who was going to a private school in the fall.

“What school?” Diana asked as though it were of great importance. Flopsy had to admit that she had no idea, and in admitting it felt foolish and just as though she had made Janet up out of her head. She wished Janet would come up to the lake, for she felt Diana would have to be impressed. Sometimes, she thought Diana looked down upon her as only a redhaired, freckled faced *kid*. Janet’s being her friend would give her some reflected glory.

One morning, just after she had come home from the post office and had parted with Diana, she sat on her porch swing, feeling very lonely and disgusted. Diana had had four long letters that morning, and she had read them all the way home after asking “You don’t mind, do you?” She had taken it for granted that she had not minded. But Flopsy had minded very much, for Diana had giggled over her mail and paid her scant attention. She was now deciding that it was about time that she heard from Miss Hilton or Babbie. They had said they would write in a few weeks—and it was a few weeks. The chances of being invited to the ranch seemed to be growing very slim. Besides, she was hopping mad—furious, at Alice and Fleurette—her best friends, because they had not answered her very funny (so she thought) letter.

After these gloomy reflections, she stood up, and

started to walk down to the dock. She would take the canoe out, for she was now permitted to use it on a quiet day, as she had made tremendous strides in her swimming this last week. She had just started down the winding path to the lake when she heard a car coming up the back road, and idly stood watching it—it was a big car driven by a liveried chauffeur. He was driving very slowly and apparently not sure where he was going for he leaned out his window and looked this way and that. Flopsy took a few steps forward—for there was nothing that she enjoyed more than giving any kind of directions—even when she was not in the least sure whether she was right or wrong.

“Flopsy! Flopsy!” a girl’s voice shouted from the car. Some one on the back seat was waving wildly to her. Then, she saw Janet Dudley’s face—all smiles. In another second Janet was out of the car and running towards her.

“Oh, Janet!” she shouted in delight and flew to her friend. The two girls hugged each other rapturously.

“Oh, Flopsy, I can stay nearly all day. I’ve brought my bathing suit. Mother’s playing golf and Nick—” nodding her head towards the chauffeur, “is coming back for me and if your mother will let you, we want you to come over to the hotel this evening and have dinner with us. It’s not far and we will bring you back—” Janet was quite breathless with excitement.

Flopsy was in seventh heaven. Janet looked *lovely*. She seemed a whole year older than when Flopsy had seen her last—only a few weeks before. Perhaps it was because Janet had just had a birthday

and was now fourteen. Diana wouldn't dare treat *her* like a kid, she felt sure. She was eager to show Janet off, as soon as possible.

After Nick had driven away the two girls walked with their arms about each other towards the cottage.

"My, but you are freckled! And sunburned!" Janet laughed. She laughed kindly, and without ridicule. Diana always laughed at her freckles in a way that Flopsy did not enjoy at all.

"Oh, I never get a decent respectable tan like other people—I get just like a boiled lobster." Flopsy grinned. "Oh, I am so glad you came early—you are in plenty of time for lunch. Tell me, have you seen Alice Holt lately—I am just *ripping* at her she never answered my letter—" She did not ask about Fleurette, because Fleurette and Janet had no warm feeling for the other.

"One day, I invited her over for luncheon. She said she had a letter from you and it was a perfect scream, she nearly rolled over laughing at it. (Flopsy puffed up with satisfaction.) But, I've hardly been home at all lately—we have been here, there and everywhere. Oh, wasn't that an awful picture of you in the newspaper?" Janet laughed. "I bet you boiled up."

"We were going to sue that darn old paper—but we didn't have time before we went away." Flopsy was none too pleased at the thought of Janet's seeing that picture. Janet of all people!

"You goose! How could you sue them?" Janet laughed again, and there was something a little superior in her laugh, which nettled Flopsy.

"Well, the reporter must have stolen that picture

—and stealing is against the law.” Nettled though she was at Janet’s manner she also was feeling very important discussing her newspaper experience.

“Oh, Flopsy, you are so funny! You say such crazy things. I am always telling my mother about you. I bet you make her laugh tonight. But sometimes you get mad when people laugh at you and sometimes you love it. Now, don’t get mad, if mother laughs—”

Flopsy was not at this very moment sure whether to laugh—or get mad. Well, she was glad to see Janet and Janet was her guest, so she decided it would be more hospitable to laugh, which she did in a forced fashion. She was leading Janet to the front door of the cottage. It was nicer to walk into the living room, than through the kitchen. Especially with people like Janet.

“Your cottage is adorable,” Janet commented generously. “It’s like a doll house. I love it.”

Flopsy gave her friend a swift sidelong glance. She wanted to be sure of Janet’s expression when she called her cottage a doll’s house. She *might* mean it as a compliment, or she *might* mean that the cottage was very small. Evidently Janet meant it as a compliment, so Flopsy smiled.

“It *is* little but it is cute, I think,” Flopsy said. “I wish you could stay over night—we have a company room.” This, was to let Janet know that they had an extra room, and that small though the cottage might be, it was not cramped.

At the first opportunity Flopsy cornered her mother. There was a burning question she must ask her. Was there anything especially nice in the house for lunch? Janet could not be treated to a

picnic lunch—when she had just invited her to a hotel for dinner.

“Flopsy, I’ve learned from painful experience these last few weeks to be prepared for company at any hour or at any meal. Don’t worry.” Mrs. Moore sighed faintly. “Oh dear, I must have daddy find me some one over in the village to help me get meals—for this is not exactly my idea of a vacation. But—” she hastened, “I am very glad you have Janet with you today—”

Flopsy’s heart leaped with joy. Here was something to parade before Janet at once.

“We haven’t a maid now, but we are going to get one at once.” Flopsy spoke just as she had heard her mother’s friends do, when they were playing bridge. It was very effective and impressive, she felt.

Janet proved to be a very different guest than Dottie. She was not afraid of anything particularly—but she did not want to go out in the boats. Row-boats were too pokey, and she, like Dottie, remembered only too well the experience at the school picnic.

Suddenly Flopsy remembered that she had not wanted Janet to come up to the lake until she had learned to make a beautiful dive. This was a disappointing thought. She had not dared to dive at all—there had been too many people around to laugh if she had taken an awful flop. But she could swim out to the float now, with ease and without puffing and blowing out water. And, she could climb up on the ladder and sit with the other boys and girls. She was now managing a side stroke—but it was still nothing to brag about—especially to any one like Janet or Diana.

That afternoon Flopsy escorted Janet to the beach—as proud in her strut as any peacock. Janet had a very smart bathing suit—the kind one saw in the newspapers and magazines. When they reached the beach they found Diana alone. She was lying on her face, sunning her back.

“Hi—there! Hello, Di-ana!” Flopsy shouted gaily.

Diana rolled over and then sat up. Flopsy saw at once that she *was* impressed by Janet’s appearance. She was delighted.



“Diana Dean I want you to meet my friend, Janet Dudley.” Flopsy was breathless with excitement. “I’ve told you about her lots of times. She’s the girl who is going to private school in the fall.”

“Hello there, Janet Dudley!” Diana grinned broadly. Yes, she *was* impressed with Janet. “What’s the school—Flora didn’t know?”

“The Ardsley School—” Janet smiled and threw herself on the sand beside Diana. She lay on her stomach with her head propped on her hands. “Do you know it?”

Diana copied Janet's pose and smiled into her face. Both girls ignored Flopsy.

"Do—I—know it? I'll say!" Diana laughed. "My aunts all went there. Funny, Flora couldn't remember the name it is so well known—"

"I never heard it—" Flopsy put in—but they paid no attention to her. "Janet never told me it *was* the Ardsley School."

"*Flora!*" Janet repeated after Diana, with a gurgling laugh. "Do you call her that? No one does!"

"I can't make out what on earth her brothers call her. Floppy or woppy or something dizzy. And, anyway I always do politely what I am told to—I was told to call her Flora."

"*Flopsy,*" Janet spoke with emphasis. "That is her name except in school—and thank goodness, we are not in school now—" Janet buried her head in her elbows and lay with the sun beating down on her back.

"*Flopsy!*" Diana echoed and burst out laughing. "For Pete's sake!"

Flopsy sat staring at the two girls with her eyes round, and her lips parted. She wished the girls would not discuss her as though she were nothing but a bunch of air. They were not paying the slightest attention to her.

"Golly, this sun is hot—come on, let's get going!" Diana jumped to her feet and dashed for the water and plunged in. She struck out with a powerful crawl—more like that of a boy than of a girl. Janet was at her heels. Flopsy stood staring after them, suddenly feeling strange and lost. Janet did not have the same powerful stroke that Diana

had, but she too swam with a crawl stroke, easily, gracefully, and swiftly. In a few seconds the two girls were sitting on the float sunning themselves.

“Hi there, *Flopsy!*” Diana shouted with a laugh. “Come on in—don’t be a landlubber.” She turned to Janet and lowered her voice. “You should see your Flopsy swim! She’s a scream—we have had more darn fun watching her!”

The air that summer afternoon was as clear as a bell and although Diana lowered her voice, these words came to Flopsy clearly and distinctly. She was deeply mortified. And more—she was hurt to the quick. But she was not going to let those girls know it—if she could help it. If they got any amusement out of laughing at her—she would set to work and make them laugh. She wished with a pang that she could swim the way they did. She wanted so much to share their fun this afternoon, on the same level—in the same way. She went into the water with a shout:

“Now girls, wait for me! You ain’t seen nothing till you have seen me swim—” she made her swimming as silly as she could. She heard their shouts of laughter. By the time, however, she reached the float, she discovered to her keen disappointment that they were no longer watching her—they were diving. They were not even as much as laughing at her! Neat, smart dives they made, too—without any effort or any attempt to show off. She sat on the float and watched them. She felt lonely. Strange too, because she now had two pals with her. At last the two girls were again sunning themselves. Flopsy decided to direct the conversation herself, but Janet managed to speak first.

"Where do you play tennis up here?" Janet asked idly.

"I play up at our private court. Come up if you care to—it is the only court at the lake," Diana answered.

"You haven't a spring board for diving?" Janet ventured.

"We have—*not!* And, this float is as old as the hills—it was made years and years ago. It's only a glorified raft," Diana complained. She wondered just how Flopsy was taking this because she knew that she thought the float was "marvelous."

"Do you like Emerald Lake?" Janet asked quickly. Something in Diana's tone made her wonder.

"I am simply fed up on it. I am bored to tears with it. We have been coming here since I was a baby. Mother likes it—but I hate it. I want to go to a big hotel at the shore. There is nothing to do here."

Flopsy looked up and down the lovely lake. Her eyes were moist. She felt hurt. She thought everything was "wonderful." She turned her head away so that the girls would not see her expression.

"I never saw you so quiet—Freckles!" Diana said suddenly. "I think 'Freckles' is a much better nickname for you than—Flopsy."

"Oh, she never has any freckles in the winter. Only a few cute little ones on her nose," Janet corrected very sweetly.

Flopsy sprang up and without a word jumped feet first into the water with a big splash. As she went down, down she didn't care much if she ever came to the surface again. Not until she hit the bot-

tom, did she think perhaps it would be preferable if she did try to get to the top. Janet's few words of praise had been too much for her. She had almost felt like crying before Janet had uttered them—and now she was crying. As she came to the surface her eyes were filled with tears, but no one would have guessed it—for her whole face was too wet. She did not intend to have the girls know how she felt. As she struck out for the shore, she heard Diana say, "It's dumber than ever today—for the boys got it into their crazy heads to take an all day hike. I wish they were here—they'd like you."

Flopsy didn't want to listen to them another minute, for all of her they could stay out on the float for the rest of their lives. When she reached the beach she sat down and forlornly shaped little piles of sand between her two hands. Her mind was not on what she was doing. Over and over she made her little mounds of sand and absent-mindedly pushed them over—this performance went on for nearly half an hour. She never once looked up—nor did the two girls out on the float pay her the least attention.

She never quite came out of her gloom until she got into her new white linen dress. It was a pretty dress, tailored and with a dark blue sailor collar. She cheered at the thought of riding in a car driven by a chauffeur. Janet, strange to say, had not noticed at all how quiet Flopsy had been—she was far too taken up with her own thoughts. She had enjoyed talking with Diana very much.

"Flopsy, you must take a wrap—you know how cold it gets as soon as the sun goes down, especially riding in a car," her mother warned.

Flopsy protested at first but gave in, she was still too listless to put up a prolonged argument. The sound of the approaching car too, decided her. She must do as she was told, and hurry, for she did not want to be late. Janet was at this minute thanking Mrs. Moore very prettily for her hospitality. Mrs. Moore fervently hoped that Flopsy's manner's would be as charming as Janet's.

"You look very sweet," Mrs. Moore whispered into her daughter's ear. "And if you are only half as good as you look, I will be happy."

Most of the way to the hotel Janet chattered about Diana. Flopsy squirmed—she did not want to hear Diana mentioned—ever! Quite suddenly the sun went behind a heavy black cloud and the air became very chilly. Flopsy did not even find that her wrap was sufficient. Janet ordered Nick to close the windows. The two girls shivered and giggled the rest of the way. It was positively cold when they reached the hotel—cold and bleak and very unlike a summer day. Flopsy felt out of place in her white dress for everyone at the hotel seemed to have got into heavy sport clothes and sweater dresses.

Flopsy had never been able to make up her mind whether she liked Mrs. Dudley or not. Mrs. Dudley was always very, very sweet, and very, very polite. But what was it that made one uncertain? Flopsy knew she was never altogether comfortable and at ease in her presence. Her eyes were so black and they seemed to go right straight through you. Today she wondered when Mrs. Dudley came to meet them, if she could see the little brass safety pin on the strap of her slip? It had given away at the last minute, and she had had to pin it.

“My, you children looked chilled through—frozen, especially you, Flopsy,” was the first thing Mrs. Dudley said. This, Flopsy felt was some kind of criticism. She shouldn’t have looked “frozen.”

For a long, long time afterwards Flopsy would shiver—but not with cold, when she looked back upon that dinner at the hotel. She never deliberately recalled it. And, it was not for many months that she mentioned it to her mother.

The waiter had laid a cup before her. She looked at it in great surprise. She thought it was very funny to be given a cup of coffee first of all. Besides, she was rarely permitted to take coffee. She leaned over and put two lumps of sugar in it—and then looked about—there was no cream on the table. She stirred her “coffee” and wondered if she should ask for cream. Mrs. Dudley was taking her “coffee” without cream apparently. She sat staring at her cup curiously—it was a very funny cup—it had two handles.

“Go ahead, Flopsy, take it—it will warm you up. And do excuse me if you don’t like my calling you ‘Flopsy.’ That is all Janet ever calls you.” Mrs. Dudley smiled that smile of hers that made Flopsy so uncertain. She took a sip of her “coffee”; it tasted very, very peculiar. So she leaned over and put another lump of sugar in it.

“Why, my dear,” Mrs. Dudley exclaimed, “do you like sugar in your bouillon? You funny child!”

“My—?” Flopsy’s face went blank. “My—?” she repeated. “Why, I thought it was—coffee—” she gasped.

“The first thing on the—?” Mrs. Dudley started to ask a question. She looked decidedly surprised. Then she smiled. She was making an effort to keep

from laughing. "I will have the waiter bring you another cup—you couldn't like that. Not possibly."

At that moment Flopsy did not need anything to warm her up, for she was fairly burning up with mortification. She had never seen a bouillon cup before—they had soup plates in her house. She felt as though she had made some hideous mistake. She eyed Janet coldly and envied her. Envied her—and did not like her. Janet was looking so amused. She wished with all her heart that she was back at the cottage at that very minute eating a noisy confused and almost always happy meal with her two small brothers and her parents.

Mrs. Moore was bewildered when Flopsy got back to the cottage that night. She could not make her out. Usually she was exuberant after any new experience. But now she was very quiet. There was no drawing her out. She did not want to discuss the evening and she wouldn't.

"I do hope," Mrs. Moore asked anxiously, "that you told Mrs. Dudley that you had a lovely time—and that you thanked her—" She very much hoped it, but she had her doubts at the moment. There had been a cold glitter in her daughter's eyes, a strange grimness in her manner when she had asked about Mrs. Dudley, that was ominous. If she had heard that Flopsy had deliberately tripped Mrs. Dudley up, she would have been horrified—but not surprised.

"Certainly, I told her I had a very delightful time, that the dinner was wonderful. I thanked her for inviting me. I thanked her for sending for me and for taking me home. I told Janet I had a marvelous time. I told Mrs. Dudley we were

charmed to have Janet over for the day. I said everything polite I had ever heard of in my whole life. But I didn't mean one single word of it—and Janet gives me a big *pain*. And I am going to bed, mother. So good night." She kissed her stunned and bewildered mother and haughtily left the room.

"Well—I *never!*" Mrs. Moore gasped, so thunderstruck that she couldn't think of another thing to say.

Chapter Four

Flopsy Gets Some News

THE next morning Flopsy woke with a very definite determination. She was not going to sit around and wait for Diana as she had so many mornings in the last week or so. She was going to walk over to the post office alone. She was going to ignore Miss Diana Dean—and that was—*that!* She hurried through her morning tasks—clearing the table, helping with the dishes and making her bed. Mrs. Moore watched her feverish activity, wondered and worried. She hoped before long Flopsy would let her know what was in her mind, and what had happened the day before.

“Aren’t you going to wait for Diana?” Mrs. Moore asked in all innocence. She suspected Diana had something to do with the situation.

“No! I am *not!*” Flopsy fairly snapped. “She gives me a PAIN.”

“Well?” Mrs. Moore ventured hopefully. Maybe, now she would have an explanation. “I seem to remember that you used some such expression about Janet.”

“And I meant it.” Flopsy spoke emphatically. “She moans and groans about things. I don’t mind people’s getting mad—but I hate moaning and groaning. All day yesterday she kept telling Janet

she didn't like this and that and everything. She doesn't like *anything* at Emerald Lake. I got sick of listening to her."

"Oh!" Mrs. Moore began to understand. "Oh, I wouldn't pay any attention to that. I never went anywhere on a summer vacation that there wasn't someone who spent the time wishing she were somewhere else. And, if she could get to this 'somewhere else,' she'd still be complaining. Some people expect perfection for their holiday."

Flopsy opened the screen door and smiled faintly. She was in no mood for "whys and wherefores." And too, she hadn't the time, for at any minute Diana might pop in.

"Good-bye, mother, I must hurry, or Diana will be here."

Mrs. Moore went about her work more contentedly. She thought that she had solved the mystery of Flopsy's strange behavior. Diana had been belittling the things which she enjoyed. This was always an unpleasant experience for anyone.

Flopsy fairly tore up the road. She did not mind in the least being alone. She was going to surprise Diana—and that thought pleased her—she wanted to give Diana a BIG surprise! And, to her own greater surprise the postmistress handed her a pile of mail that morning. For the moment she was sorry that Diana was not there to see it, for too often she had come away empty handed, or with a few circulars. Diana always got mail.

Flopsy counted her letters. There were five letters and two post cards. She sat down on the post office steps and looked them over. Three of the letters were for her mother—and—goodness! Two

letters and one postal card were for her! Her eyes shone and her heart pounded. There was one very fat letter—it was fatter than any of her mother's. It was addressed to "Miss Flora M. Moore." On the back of the envelope was scrawled, "from B. Hilton, Camp of White Pines, Lake Minnitonka, Maine."

She wanted to shout, "Mother! Mother! I have a letter from Babbie." But, of course she had to curb this impulse, it would be *crazy*—everyone about would think she had gone stark loony! She was almost too thrilled and too excited to open Babbie's letter. She would save it until last—until after she had read the rest of her mail. Save it, as she always did something especially delicious to eat. She wanted to keep the taste of Babbie's letter with her for a long time. No other letter must come after it. Her other letter puzzled her for a few seconds. She had seen that cramped, precise handwriting before. Oh, it was Mary Howard's! Why was Mary bothering to write her? She hadn't given Mary a thought for a long time.

Then she looked at her postal card. Fleurette! It was a picture of School Number Nine—that school from which they had just graduated. Fleurette had sprawled all over it, in her big funny writing. For a fraction of a second Flopsy was annoyed. Fleurette had a big nerve sending her only a post card, after she had written a long funny letter. But she read the message almost at a glance and her annoyance vanished at once. "Dearest Flopsy! You *crazy NUT!* I am simply *dieing* to see you. We are coming up to your lake in a *few* days. I can *hardly wait*. Loads of *love*, Fleurette." There were lines, heavy

black lines underscored under almost every other word. Flopsy giggled. What a silly looking card! It was just like Fleurette though—she was a crazy nut herself. What a swell time they'd have together! She could always laugh with Fleurette—and fight with her, but either was exciting.

Flopsy tore open Mary Howard's letter still wondering and not particularly interested—but she had to open it before she read Babbie's.

Dear Flopsy: (she read)

My mother and I want to thank you for your kind invitation to visit your lake. We really wanted to accept your invitation very much but something very unexpected happened. My mother's sister, who lives in England, is coming to visit us for a month. She is my Aunt Jennifer. My Uncle Hilary, and my two little cousins, Daphne and Sybil, are coming too. So, you can see that we can't come and visit you this summer. Perhaps, some other summer. Once again, we want to thank you for your kind thought, and mother wants to be remembered to your mother. We hope you all have a happy summer.

Your Sincere Friend,
MARY HOWARD

Flopsy's face was a study when she was reading this letter. She looked quite as blank as she used to in school when Miss Hilton tried mental arithmetic tests on the class. She read the letter over again. Then, suddenly she remembered that she *had* invited Mary to their cottage. She had forgotten it completely.

"And, she gives me a pain, too—" Flopsy added Mary to the list of undesirable friends that she was

compiling in the last twenty-four hours. "Just wait until I show this to Fleurette, and she sees what goofy names her relations have. Won't she laugh! She always said Mary was batty—and this proves it."

Now, she was ready for her precious letter—the most treasured of all, and still she hesitated to open it. She was undecided whether to open it there on the post office steps—or wait until she was alone in some lovely and secluded spot—where she could read it in peace—and where she would not hear a babble of voices about her. She was rudely awakened from her happy speculations, by a familiar voice. Someone hit her on the head with a playful whack.

"Why, hello there—*Flop-sy!*" There was a decided emphasis on the name "Flopsy." It was Diana, and the emphasis and the laugh which accompanied this nickname decided Flopsy at once. She jumped to her feet and stared at Diana coldly.

"Hello!" she answered shortly. "I've got to hurry. I have some very important letters to read." She turned on her heel and walked off. It was easier than she thought it would be—to be haughty to Diana. At the moment nothing—or no one was important to her but Babbie.

Diana was almost struck dumb. She stared after Flopsy with her mouth open. For the first time she thought of Flopsy other than as a freckled-faced kid, who liked to trail after her. And, she was disappointed too—because she wanted to talk about Janet. Janet had suggested that she might go over to the hotel with Flopsy, as the Dudleys were staying a few more days.

As Flopsy hurried along the homeward road, she remembered a rock under a tree—way up the road

—and yet off it. There, she would sit in peace and read Babbie's letter. Once there and hidden from passers-by, she tore open the envelope. Her heart was pounding with excitement. Would Babbie mention those "plans" that she and Miss Hilton had spoken of that day they had been at the house? For weeks now she had dreamed of what they might be. Eagerly her eyes sought the answer to her hopes—

My Dearest Flopsy:

You must think I am awful not to have written you long before this. Every day, I have thought of you, and almost every day, I have started a letter to you. But you have to be at a camp, to know how many things keep happening to interrupt. You just never can finish a long letter.

First of all I want to tell you this—although there are such wonderful girls here—you are still my best friend.—

Flopsy stopped reading, and drew in a long deep breath of contentment. She went back to her letter—

Molly and I will never forget what you did for her those last weeks of school, when she was sick and worried, and how hard you worked to make her graduation a big success.

Oh, I must tell you this right away. Molly says you don't have to call her Miss Hilton—you can call her Molly. You see, she isn't going to be a teacher any longer. Would you like to?—

Flopsy stopped again. She drew another long breath and puffed up with pride. Imagine, calling Miss Hilton—"MOLLY." Wouldn't her friends be envious?

The funniest thing happened, you could imagine. Do you remember that story in the newspaper about the graduation?—

She did, indeed! She'd never forget it!

Well, it was copied in lots of other newspapers in many cities. And, one day we received a letter that was forwarded to us up here in Maine. Or rather, Molly did. It was addressed to Miss Mary Ames Hilton. And, what do you suppose?

Flopsy shook her head from side to side, just as though Babbie were there and asking her this question. She couldn't suppose. She hadn't any notion of what was coming.

The letter turned out to be from our great, great aunt. Did you ever in your life hear, of anyone's having a *live* great-great aunt? I never did before.

She wrote to us because of Molly's middle name. Her favorite brother's girl's name was "Mary Ames." And, she was my grandmother. I hope I am not boring you. It's very complicated but I hope I am making it clear.

My great-great aunt's name is—Clarissa Ames. She says that she is an eccentric old lady of eighty-six. And, that she is always writing to the newspapers about all sorts of things—but this is the first time any good came of it. This, she wrote in her second letter when we were all sure that she was really our "Aunt Clarissa."

She wants to leave Molly and Mother some money right away. She wishes that Molly will have a lovely wedding that she can dream about all her days. She says the craziest thing for a lonely old person to do is—to leave money after them—for people to fight over. People who never cared whether she was alive and who

were only glad to hear she was dead. She wants to enjoy the pleasure of giving it.—And, some day, before long she is going to tell us why she is a lonely old maid. She says it is a romantic story, and she wouldn't dream of telling it—except to some one in a romantic mood, and Molly must be, because she is going to get married. I'll write you the story when I hear it, because it is sure to be interesting.

Please don't laugh at me when I tell you that I've been an awful scared cat about some things up at camp. What do you think frightened me the very most at first. At night I was so afraid of the trees! These big tall pine trees seemed to be crowding in about me. You see, I am not used to trees at all—I never was in the woods before in my whole life. Out in Rawhide, we could look for miles and miles across the plains and never see a tree—only the cactus plants. At first, even in the day time I felt shut in by the trees. This camp is so different from the wide stretches of plains I was used to. Another thing I was afraid of was the lake. I had never been near a river or a lake before. I never saw so much water at one time. Molly is going to take me over some day to the coast of Maine, and see the ocean. I never saw the ocean either. I don't think I will ever be able to swim, and I am even afraid stiff to go out in the rowboats. Don't laugh at me. Please don't!

But how I love the horses—the wilder the better. Some of the girls are afraid at first of them, but I am never happier than when I am riding. So maybe this evens things up a little.

This letter is getting longer and longer. Molly has a plan—But she told me not to tell you yet, because she wants to write your mother about it first. I know what it is, but I promised not to tell you. I hope you will love it as much as I do. Molly sends her love to you and wants to be remembered to your mother. And

when you see Alice Holt, be sure to give her best wishes from us. I liked her because you do, and so does David. David Stewart is Molly's fiancé, you know.

Now, I must stop.

Lots of love from your true friend,

BABBIE

When Flopsy got through reading Babbie's letter, she discovered that she had to untangle one finger from a curl on her forehead. She had been winding a lock of hair around and around on her finger. After a long deep breath, she began everything all over again—Babbie's letter, and the twisting of her curl. Before she left her lovely and secluded spot she had read her letter three times, and three times she had automatically unwound the curl from her finger. She stood up and again drew a long deep breath. She looked up into the radiant summer sky. Across its broad blue expanse was etched long wispy clouds. What a beautiful world it was!

Flopsy's feet had wings as she flew up the road. She must tell her mother at once about Babbie's letter. She would not have to read it to her—she would recite it, for in her three intense readings she had learned it by heart.

"Mother, *how* could a person have a great-great aunt?" Flopsy was at the chattering stage, for the letter had been discussed from almost every possible angle but this one.

"Oh, that is quite possible. Nieces and aunts are often very near of an age. Babbie's Great-great Aunt Clarissa might not be much older than her grandmother. Don't you remember how impressed you

were when you heard that Dottie's big sister had a baby, and that Dottie and Margaret were aunts?"

Flopsy scarcely heard this explanation, in her mind was a more burning question. She had already asked it—but it must be asked over and over again. What could Molly Hilton's plan be? What *could* it be? She had decided now—that it could not be a trip to their ranch in Rawhide.

"I bet I guessed it," she burst out suddenly.

"Guessed—what?" her mother teased.

"Guessed the plan. I bet they are going to invite me to Maine! May I go? Oh, I hope I can! And then I could teach Babbie how to swim and teach her not to be afraid of boats, and help her not to be afraid of trees. I'd love it!"

"Yes, my dear, I am sure you would enjoy it," Mrs. Moore said with a knowing smile. "But, don't forget Babbie could teach you something, too. She could teach you to ride a horse, for instance."

"Oh—that!" Flopsy tossed this off lightly. "That's *nothing*! You just have to sit on the horse. That couldn't frighten me."

"You've never been near a horse," Mrs. Moore ventured.

"Well, I've seen people ride horses in the movies, millions of times—and it looks as easy as pie. I'd love it just as Babbie does. I only need to help her about swimming and the boats—she won't have to bother about teaching me anything—"

"I trust Babbie relishes being taught more than you do!" Mrs. Moore smiled. She was standing by a table on the porch, and absent mindedly picked up Flopsy's letter from Mary and her card from Fleurette. She glanced over first one and then the

other. Flopsy had been too excited over Babbie's letter to give them a second's thought after she had tossed them on the table.

"Now, you might help me, this minute, Flora Moore, if you don't mind." Mrs. Moore held up the letter and the card. "Please, excuse me if I have read your mail—I did it half unconsciously. You never told me that you asked Mary Howard and her mother up here. And, Fleurette says—'*We* will be up soon.' Would you be kind enough to let me know who '*we*' might be? I don't like prying into your affairs, but I wouldn't mind knowing what to expect in the way of guests. You see, I do have to help a little getting ready for them and feeding them when they do come."

Flopsy sat blinking—her brow furrowed. It was an almost impossible feat to get her mind off Babbie's letter and concentrate on what her mother was saying.

"And," Mrs. Moore went on, "I have a letter from Mrs. Hall. You don't know her," she added quickly, knowing that Flopsy would ask at once who she might be—anything to stall for time. "She says that she might drop in some day this week. Of course we still have a visit from Alice to look forward to—"

"Well, Alice has never written me, so I guess she's not coming." Flopsy attempted to soothe her mother for she felt that she was a little disturbed.

"I doubt it very much. Anyway, you really ought to have Alice if you had anyone—you have known her longest and most of the time you consider her your best friend. Now that I have learned that you asked Mary Howard and her mother, will you please tell me whom you asked with Fleurette?"

“Well—” Flopsy hesitated. She was not sure. It was all very confusing. Certainly she had no recollection of asking Mary and her mother. Had she asked anyone with Fleurette but her mother? She could not remember. “Why I just asked Mrs. Muldoon—I think—” she faltered.

“You *think!*” Mrs. Moore echoed. “You think? That is not very reassuring. Daddy couldn’t find anyone to help me over in the village. Company! Company!” Mrs. Moore went into the cottage and let the screen door slip from her hand and bang just the way she had told the children not to do.

Flopsy felt rather ill-used for the minute. She did not want to be bothered discussing anything but Babbie’s letter. However, her mother’s impatience did not depress her too long, for almost immediately she returned to her day-dreaming.

That night at dinner, Mr. Moore announced:

“Well, my darling daughter the great day is near at hand. Rejoice!”

“What great day?” Flopsy asked eagerly. Had her father more news of Babbie?

“Mr. Forbes is coming up again this week, and he is definitely, positively, and absolutely, going to bring Bill this time. We are going over to the Shaded River to do some trout fishing. And we will leave Bill here with you so you can have him all to yourself—”

“All to herself!” Mrs. Moore wailed. “Very likely that will be the day Mrs. Hall arrives with several people and Fleurette Muldoon with several more—”

“Poor child! So you can’t have Bill all alone—” Mr. Moore shook his head sympathetically.

Flopsy looked from her mother to her father in dismay.

“Flopsy has asked about half the town up here, I do declare—she can’t remember whom she has asked and whom she forgot or didn’t have time to ask—”

Flopsy was glad at the minute that her mother was doing the talking. She was too exasperated at the thought of Bill Forbes’s coming to even comment upon it.

“Flora, my child, have you by any fortunate chance as great a talent for drawing as you have for music?” Mr. Moore asked with a wicked gleam in his eyes. Flopsy had no ear for music, as she sang off key persistently. Never even by accident did she ever hit it.

“Now what?” Mrs. Moore put in quickly. “Now what mischief is brewing? What are you up to—”

“Well, I can do pretty smart printing if I do say it myself and I thought it would save a lot of unnecessary speculation, if I printed a very large sign and nailed it to a tree down on the main road. I will tell you in a second what I would have on it. I would like Flopsy to draw a hand with a pointing finger. Then something like this could be printed: THIS WAY TO THE MOORE COTTAGE. TURN RIGHT FOLLOW THE UPPER ROAD. EVERYONE WELCOME AT ANY HOUR OF THE DAY—OR AT ANY MEAL. THE MOORE THE MERRIER.” Mr. Moore grinned. “That last part there is a pun—”

“A pun?” Mrs. Moore repeated. “Well— Oh, yes, I could see that that was what you meant,” Mrs. Moore laughed. “Puns are not often very funny, and

it would be even less funny if all these people land on me at once. Well, if they do come, I'll send the young people down to the Glen for a picnic luncheon—"

"Oh!" Flopsy's eyes brightened. "Can we cook down there—there are a lot of fire places. I've always wanted to cook but—"

"But your hard-hearted mother wouldn't let you. What a cruel mother you have to deprive you of the joy of cooking—" Mr. Moore shook his head as though it were very sad.

"I meant out of doors—" Flopsy quickly corrected him.

"This is all very funny, but today is Wednesday, and if all these people do come this week, they may hit the same day—"

And Mrs. Moore was right—they all did. Mr. Forbes arrived early Friday morning. The Moores had scarcely finished breakfast when they heard the prolonged toot of his automobile horn. He got out of his car with Bill at his heels. Mr. Forbes wore his waders for trout fishing. Bill carried his basket and the fishing reels.

Bill greeted Flopsy with a grin and a short "Hello, there!" then he subsided into a self-conscious silence. He avoided meeting Flopsy's eyes.

Mr. Moore got up from the breakfast table and hurried to his room to get into his waders. Mrs. Moore asked Bill if he would like some more breakfast (Mr. Forbes had said that they had had a wopping big one!) and Bill accepted her offer with a grin. Frankie and Dickie sat as close to him as they could without actually getting into his lap. Flopsy felt completely out of everything. No one seemed to

know that she was living. She sat and and stared at Bill as though he were some strange creature from another world. You'd never have guessed that she had seen Bill Forbes every day of each school year since they were in the kindergarten—except when they had their turn at measles, mumps or chicken pox.

There was very little opportunity for conversation even if either one of them wished it for Mr. Forbes and Mr. Moore were shouting back and forth to each other. To Flopsy and Mrs. Moore it was all a gibberish—they had heard it many times before but they never had understood. Mr. Forbes was shouting about the “flies” he had with him, “Royal Coachmen” “Quil Gordon” “Cahill” and “Wickman’s Fancy”—and Mr. Moore was calling back about “Dry flies and wet flies” and “casting up stream” and “casting down stream.”

“Do you understand all that?” Mrs. Moore asked Bill. “Are you a trout fisherman too?”

“Sure,” Bill answered and then remembered his manners, “Yes, Mrs. Moore. But, trout fishing is—” and Bill fished around for a polite name for something that gave him a pain in the neck. He didn’t catch one so he bit off a big piece of toast and jam, and didn’t finish his sentence.

“But you are going fishing on the lake?” Mrs. Moore smiled sympathetically. Trout fishing, had the same effect on her. “Now Frankie and Dickie, move over, you are practically in Bill’s lap.”

Bill nodded vigorously, in answer to her question. His mouth was too full to speak. However, he again recalled his manners and tried to answer politely—but nearly choked in the effort.

“Yes—Mrs. Moore—bass—” he sputtered, with his face a fiery red.

“Well, Flopsy I am sure will be only too glad to row you about, unless you prefer to do your own rowing?”

“That’s all right, I can row myself swell!” There was a decided emphasis on this last. Flopsy had just told herself that she did NOT want to row Bill Forbes around the lake—but it annoyed her that he was so emphatic that he didn’t want her. She stood up and walked into the living room. She wasn’t just going to sit and stare at him—he wasn’t a treat to her eyes.

Mr. Moore and Mr. Forbes were now ready to be off.

“Well, Bill it’s up to you and your little auburn haired friend to get the dinner tonight for we won’t be back until long after dark,” Mr. Forbes called back.

Bill glowered and said nothing. Flopsy made a face in her room. She had gone to it presumably to make her bed, but actually to get away from Bill. She heard her mother tell her brothers to take Bill down to the dock and show him the rowboat. As she heard the door bang and their shouts of joy, at the task before them, Flopsy smiled grimly to herself. “Good riddance and I wish he’d jump in the lake while he’s about it.”

She sat down on her half made bed and wondered. She wondered if Diana would think Bill was *anything*. Would she think he was worth considering, worth fooling with? Bill, certainly would never take any prizes for beauty, but there was something about

him that made most people like him—especially grown people. They said he was a “dear boy.” Just why, she couldn’t for the life of her see. He was an awful torment, he had a snub nose and his hair stuck out over his forehead as though it were wired. She went back to her bed-making, still undecided about Diana. If she knew for certain that Diana would think Bill was “cute” she would mention him to her and then spend the whole day keeping him away from her. She was never going to let one of her friends get near Diana Dean again—if she could help it. But Diana might easily think Bill was nothing, in this case it would be better to skip mentioning Bill altogether.

“Flopsy! Flopsy!” she heard Diana calling outside her window “Going over to the post office?”

Flopsy came out to meet her quite unsmiling. Diana had tried her best to be sweet these last few days for she did want to be invited over to Janet’s hotel. But Flopsy had changed the subject each time Janet’s name was mentioned. This morning Diana began by telling her that she was going off for the whole day and that she did hope Janet wouldn’t pick this day to invite them to the hotel. Flopsy was delighted—she wouldn’t have to give Diana another thought the rest of the day.

“Oh, Janet’s gone home by now,” Flopsy answered taking an almost wicked joy out of the situation. “Besides, I couldn’t go to the hotel. I have company—a boy from home. He is out fishing now—” She was bragging just as she had heard Diana do on many occasions. She hoped though with all her heart that the fishing was good and that Bill would stay out on

the lake until after Diana got away. Diana might not think he was anything to brag about—and no more he was, she thought.

“Oh! Oh!” Diana teased. But she was surprised again, she never expected Flopsy to have a boy visiting her any more than she had expected her to have a friend like Janet Dudley.

Flopsy had another card from Fleurette that morning. She read it aloud absent-mindedly. “Hello, Pal! I am a comin’ round the mountain *tomorrow*. Can’t wait to see you. Fleurette.”

“That means today, I bet,” Diana commented looking over Flopsy’s shoulder at Fleurette’s huge handwriting.

“Oh, my goodness! I bet it does!” Flopsy broke into a run.

“Do you want her when you have your boy friend?” Diana teased.

Flopsy didn’t deign to give this exceedingly silly remark the slightest attention. She dashed pell mell up the road. She must tell her mother at once. When she got in sight of her cottage she stopped short. There were three cars parked behind it. One she knew was Mr. Forbes’s, for the men had gone off in the Moore’s car. The other two? “I bet,” she thought, “I won’t have to tell mother.”

Just then she caught sight of a figure rushing towards her, with both arms waving in the air like an animated windmill. It *was* Fleurette! Flopsy let out a shout of joy. In another minute the two were in each others arms.

“Oh, boy! Am I glad to see you!” Flopsy was bubbling over. “Now I can have some real fun. And, have I a lot of funny things to tell you. You’ll just

die laughing! Wait till you hear the names of Mary Howard's uncle and aunt and her cousins. Wait till you hear about Dottie Green. And JUST WAIT—till you hear all the exciting news about Babbie!”

“Listen!” Fleurette ordered, as they walked back to the cottage “Wait until I tell you something. My mother has red hair now—don't you remember it used to be yellow?”

Flopsy stood stock still—she was dumbfounded. She just stared at Fleurette. What a calamity. Poor Mrs. Muldoon!

“Yes, it's red—redder than yours—lots.” Fleurette went on. “She had a permanent wave and it turned her hair red.”

“Isn't that *awful!*” Flopsy exploded. “Those people ought to be put in jail.” At the moment she couldn't think of a greater disaster than having yellow hair turned into red.

“It's pretty,” Fleurette corrected. “I love it. I love your hair too—and my father always loved red hair—”

Flopsy gave Fleurette a sharp side long glance. Was her friend trying to be funny or was she being just mean?

“Honest, Flopsy!” Fleurette spoke earnestly and then changed the subject. “My Aunt Carrie came up with us and your mother has some other company. Mrs. Hall and a Mrs. Whoosit or Whatsit—and does she look like a big crab. I don't know what she will do when she sees that you have red hair too. She just stared and stared at mother's. And what a face!” Fleurette pulled her mouth down sourly in derision.

Flopsy's heart missed a beat. She sensed her mother might not be too happy with Mrs. Muldoon and this crabby Mrs. Whoosit or Whatsit. She often wondered what her mother would think of Mrs. Muldoon. But she felt her mother would like her because she was jolly and laughed a great deal. She decided that she would keep away from the cottage as much as possible.

"Well, I won't stick around if that Mrs. Whoosit is like *that*. Anyway mother said we could go down to the glen for lunch and cook out of doors—it's a lot of fun. And did you hear that that dear, sweet, cute Bill Forbes was up here too—he's fishing right this minute?" She added this last with a mocking gusto. She was not surprised to notice that this news pleased Fleurette mightily. Fleurette thought boys were a lot of fun.

"Let's us go too—I'd love it—" Fleurette's eyes brightened.

"Well, we can't go out in the rowboat—we will have to fish from the dock—Bill's got the rowboat. We can catch sunnies and blue gills."

When Flopsy walked up on the porch, she saw at a glance that her friend Fleurette had definitely not been up to her old trick of exaggeration. Mrs. Muldoon's hair was very red—fiery red—and Mrs. Whoosit's face was very sour—just crabby. At that moment, Flopsy decided that her mother had the sweetest face, she had ever seen anywhere. Usually, she never gave it a thought—she just took it for granted. After Flopsy had been introduced to Mrs. Whoosit (whose name turned out to be Mrs. Lowell) and to Fleurette's Aunt Carrie, she grabbed her friend by the arm.

"We are going fishing," she explained, "down on the dock."

"*That* is a splendid idea." Mrs. Moore smiled gratefully. "The boys are down there and you can keep your eyes on them. I never feel too happy when they are there alone."

"Oh, mother can we have our lunch in the glen—and cook out of doors? Mr. Forbes says Bill is a good cook—he's been on so many fishing trips. Can't we? You said we could?" Flopsy asked eagerly.

Mrs. Moore nodded and laughed. She smiled towards her guests.

"You don't have to tease me, Flopsy. I have made all arrangements for you to do just that. I have a coffee pot, and a frying pan all ready for you. The coffee is in a cheese cloth bag—the Hamburg steak is all made up into cakes—the onions all sliced. I have rolls, fruit, cookies—"

"My!" Mrs. Muldoon approved heartily. "Now, that's what I call real sensible. We can get the kids out from under foot. And Carrie and me will turn right in and help you get our lunch. You've got plenty of company—too much for one day, I'll say!"

"You don't need to consider me," Mrs. Lowell's tone was icy. "I am on a diet. I eat little or nothing. I won't be a trouble to anyone!"

"Well, that will be dandy for Mrs. Moore provided—she has the particular little or nothing you eat, in the house—otherwise you and she will be out of luck."

Mrs. Lowell exchanged a look full of poison with Mrs. Hall.

"Now, scoot along kids—and have a good time." Mrs. Muldoon waved her hand. "Fly!"

Flopsy led the way to the back porch where there were two old fishing rods belonging to her father.

"Oh, boy, does that Mrs. Lowell give me the shivers!" Flopsy giggled. "You know, I bet Mary Howard's aunt looks just like that. Wouldn't you think an Aunt Jennifer would be like Mrs. Lowell?" she asked as she handed Fleurette a fishing rod.

"Aunt—*what?*" Fleurette squealed.

"Mary Howard wrote me a letter and she said that she had an Aunt Jennifer and an Uncle Hilary. And, she has two cousins, one is Daphne and the other Sybil."

This was much, much too funny to take standing up—the two girls all but rolled over as they shrieked and roared with laughter. They were nearly hysterical in their mirth. At last, with aching sides, they stood up.

"Jenny-fur—Hi-lar-y. Jenny-fur—Hi-lar-y," Fleurette sing-songed between spasms of laughter. The girls raced around the cottage, waved to the grown-ups on the porch, and tore down the path to the lake.

"Look!" Flopsy pointed. "Look down there, see those two blue gills—they are just waiting to be caught." She pointed down into the clear, shallow water off the side of the dock.

"How-do-you-do down there—I am glad to meet you! I know your names—one is Aunt Jenny-fur—the other is Uncle Hi-lar-y! You poor fish!" Fleurette leaned over the dock and saluted the two unsuspecting fish.

"Please, don't start me laughing again. I just ache," Flopsy pleaded with a giggle. "Oh for Pete's sakes!" her smile vanished.

"What's the matter?" Fleurette asked in quick concern.

"We haven't any bait." And as an idea came to her, she pointed to her two brothers, who were sitting on the end of the dock, their eyes fastened on that distant rowboat in which Bill was fishing.

"Well, you couldn't use them for bait—except for whales," Fleurette giggled.

This struck Flopsy as enormously witty—and she went off into gales of laughter again. "I am weak—" she groaned. "All worn out from laughing." At last she got herself under control. "That wasn't the exact idea, but near it. I want them to get worms for me the way they do sometimes for daddy. Listen, Frankie," she called, "get Fleurette and me some worms. We haven't any bait."

"No, I won't." Frankie did not turn his head. "I want to watch Bill. And, I don't know where there are any worms."

"That's just nutty. Bill is out too far—you can't see him. And, you do so know where there are worms. Up under the apple tree."

"I don't want to get worms," Frankie repeated stubbornly.

"I think you are just mean—Fleurette is company. You have to be polite to company and you know it."

This line of reasoning made no impression on Frankie. His mother had told him to be courteous to company, but she had never said this courtesy included digging worms for them. Besides, his whole attention was riveted upon more important company—Bill Forbes.

Flopsy made a motion with her hands that suggested that she would like to ring her brother's neck

and possibly at the same time chew him up, for she gnashed her teeth.

"I bet Bill has some bait. Let's call him—" Fleurette suggested, eager for an excuse to get Bill nearer to them.

"I'll get worms!" and Dickie stood up and marched off. "I'll get you a big bunch."

"Isn't he darling!" Fleurette looked after Dickie who was trotting along in a very businesslike fashion on his short fat legs. This approval of Fleurette's was partly to make Frankie feel ashamed of himself for not being obliging. But Frankie didn't care a rap what she thought—he wasn't going to leave his grandstand seat to get worms for her, or anyone.

Flopsy and Fleurette cupped their hands to their mouths and shouted at the top of their lungs, "BILL, HEY THERE—BILL!"

Bill heard them, for sounds over the lake carried farther than anyone ever realized. He drew up his oars for a second and then began rowing very fast. When he got near them, he stopped and held up two beautiful big bass.

"How's that?" he shouted. Then he noticed Fleurette. "Hello Fleurette! Welcome to our city!"

Bill was in an altogether different humor, than when he had gone out on the lake. He was only too well pleased. He wanted an admiring audience for his performance as a fisherman.

He stepped out of the rowboat so carelessly that he very nearly fell between it and the dock. Fleurette was disappointed she would have richly enjoyed seeing him fall into the lake.

"What can I do for you girls?" he asked with a swagger.

"We want some bait; we want to fish from the dock," Flopsy explained.

"Bait? O.K." He jumped back into the boat in an even more uncertain manner than he had got out of it. "I've got plenty. Dad bought some on the way up." Since he noticed that Fleurette thought he might fall in the lake, he did his best to give her a real thrill. He wobbled the rowboat until it seemed a miracle that he and his catch didn't go overboard. Then he got back onto the dock using only one hand, in the other he held his can of bait. He very much disappointed the girls by accomplishing this feat without a mishap.

"Hold out your hand, Flopsy," he ordered.

Scarcely realizing what this might mean, she held out her hand obligingly. Bill dug into his can and before she knew it, she held a handful of worms.

"Oh—o-e—!" she let out a thin wail of horror. "Oh, glory!" Her stomach turned over at the sight and feel of the squirming, twisting worms. She shrieked wildly, now fully conscious of what he had handed her. She let them go—let them drop to the dock. She shivered and shivered. She shut her eyes and her mouth moved as though she were going to be sick. Fleurette went off into peals of laughter. Frankie was jubilant, he never had seen anything even half so funny in his whole six years.

"You big dope, you!" Bill roared with rage. "Holy cats! Look what you've done." He got down on his knees and began scooping up his treasures. "For the love of Mike, did you HAVE to do that?" he asked in outraged disgust. Two long worms had fallen between the boards of the dock into the water.

“Aunt Jenny-fur’s going to get a free lunch—” Fleurette shouted. “See her—see her!”

Suddenly Bill himself thought this was all very funny, for after all he had only lost two worms. He leaned over the dock to watch Aunt Jenny-fur making for her lunch. Flopsy could not come out of her experience so quickly, she was still squeamish and uncomfortable.

Bill had no intention, however, of “sticking around” with two girls fishing from a dock for sunnies, and he made for the boat again with a “Hi, I’ll be seeing you.”

Fleurette looked after him in dismay. She didn’t give a rap for fishing unless she had an audience. She was looking forward to putting on a good show for his benefit. Flopsy had another idea.

“No you don’t, Bill Forbes,” Flopsy ordered. “You’ve got to put those worms on our hooks. I never want to touch one again.” She shuddered. “I’ll dream about them tonight.”

“O.K., you big sissy!” and condescendingly, he took their lines and baited them. “Afraid of a nice, big juicy night-walker, are you? Tch! Tch!” He hold one long squirming worm near Flopsy’s cheek. She let out an ear piercing shriek that went up and down the scale.

Fleurette was delighted. She hooted with laughter. This *was* fun! She did wish Bill would not go off in the rowboat. But he went just the same. She looked after him regretfully. She and Flopsy sat on the dock dangling their lines for nearly an hour.

“I think those worms you fed those darned old fish were breakfast, dinner and supper for them. And I bet Aunt Jennifer’s on a diet,” she observed. “Let’s

call Bill back." She looked across the lake to the row boat from which Bill was casting.

Just then, they heard Mrs. Moore's whistle. Flopsy knew it and knew, too, it meant lunch. She jumped to her feet, and let her line go. It fell into the water. To their amazement, "Aunt Jennifer" came right up to the hook, snapped and pulled at the bait, and made off with it.

"Whoever said fish were dumb?" Flopsy laughed uncertainly. "Some one's got to get that rod back, Daddy will want it again. Anyway, we can't take the time now—that was mother's whistle for lunch. We have to call Bill."

Fleurette jumped to her feet. This was all to her liking. Together the two girls—bellowed at the top of their lungs, "Bill-ll! Bill-ll! Willie—Willie—Bill-ll! Will-yam—Will-yam!" They kept right on shouting until he got to the dock.

"Did you call me," he asked sweetly. "I thought I heard some one call Bill."

At the news that lunch was at hand, Frankie, Bill and the girls dashed up the path—pushing and shoving each other as they ran.

Mrs. Moore met them and ordered them to the back porch. And as she handed out the supplies, she asked:

"By the way, Flopsy, what did you send Dickie home for? He's been sitting on the porch crying. He says you told him he *had* to have a worm and he couldn't find one. His heart is broken."

"Why—" Flopsy began but she never finished. The gale of laughter which followed, would have drowned out anything she might have said. Poor Dickie!

The glen to which they went was, to Flopsy's imagination, an enchanted spot. The glare of the sun never fully penetrated it, but came shimmering through the branches of towering pines. A winding brook made music as it babbled over its stony bed.

Bill Forbes amazed every one and perhaps himself most of all. He became master of ceremonies, chief cook and bottle-washer. He made the fire, cooked the onions and the Hamburg steak, supervised the coffee. He gave orders right and left. "Get me twigs—do this—do that—don't do that or this." He constantly reminded them that the place *must* be left clean and in order. "You can't leave the place like a lot of dirty stupid picnickers would. You have to be a good camper." (He was quoting, unknown to them, his father, who had pounded this into him.) The two girls, Frankie and Dickie were overcome with admiration. The major accident of the luncheon was Dickie's upsetting half a bottle of milk and soaking his sun suit. Otherwise it was a repast beyond description. They were keyed up to the highest pitch of happiness.

They stayed in the glen until it was nearly time to go in bathing, and then with warwhoops they raced over the moss and pine covered ground, and out of this enchanted spot.

Fleurette confessed to Flopsy that she couldn't swim a stroke and wished she had water wings. Flopsy knew where there was an old inner tube for a car tire, and at Fleurette's request, did not tell her mother she had borrowed it. "My mother's scary," she commented.

If Mrs. Muldoon was "scary," Fleurette certainly



"Watch me, this is going to be a peach."

was not! She put the tube around her middle and insisted upon trying to go out to the float. Bill and Flopsy half dragged her most of the way. Mercifully, for her mother's peace of mind, she did not see her utterly reckless daughter. Mrs. Muldoon insisted she was much too fat to wobble on high heels down to the beach. Flopsy was overjoyed—radiant. This was what she had been looking forward to all summer—her own “crowd” on the float. She stood on the edge of it, and posed for a racing dive as she had seen Diana do.

“Watch me, this is going to be a peach,” she shouted.

“A beaut!” Bill agreed and gave her a violent shove that sent her flying and into the water with a tremendous splash! It was so sudden, that she had one ghastly and awful second of thinking that she *must* drown. But she came spluttering, snorting, panting to the top. Bill and Fleurette were convulsed with laughter. She felt proud of herself—oh, it was wonderful—gorgeous fun—if she could live through it! She climbed up on the ladder, made a dash for Bill and paid him back in full measure. She tripped him up and over he went with a yell of surprise. Then they were off! For nearly an hour they rough housed. Even Fleurette took part in the *mêlée*; when the other two threw her overboard, inner tube and all, she would climb back and give them what they gave her.

“You sure can take it!” Flopsy sputtered. She was now so winded she couldn't talk. She had to sputter.

Mrs. Muldoon's hair had been yellow last year, this year it was red, but if she could have seen her daughter's trip back from that float, it would have

changed color again, and in a trice. This time it would have turned white from stark fright.

They were all too intoxicated with excitement, too hilarious, to give Fleurette's safety any particular concern. Twice it seemed as though she were going to slip through the inner tube and take a quick trip to the bottom of the lake. Once she clutched Bill tight around the neck, and nearly took him under. It was only a miracle that there was no real calamity to mar a perfect day.

When they got back to the cottage, Mrs. Muldoon was waiting in her car to take them all over to the village for ice cream, lollypops and candy. "Get into your clothes, kiddies," she ordered. It was an order obeyed without a word of protest.

"Well, Flopsy, I've some news for you. Good news, I hope! I am leaving Fleurette here for a few days—"

There was a whoop of joy that fairly tore the roof off the car!

Chapter Five

Alice, Flopsy and Two Horses

FLEURETTE stayed for two days. The first morning the sky was gray and the air was chilly, and there was a feeling of rain in the air. In the afternoon, the heavens opened up, and it poured cats and dogs. Of course there were no walks and no boating. The two girls did not stay in swimming long, for, although they thought it was fun bathing in the rain, they shivered until their knees and teeth rattled like castanets.

As a compensation for their disappointment, Mrs. Moore reluctantly consented to Flopsy's making fudge. She very much doubted that the fudge would be any solace or comfort to anyone. Only once before had Flopsy made fudge and the memory of that undertaking was not cheerful. However, it might keep Fleurette from getting homesick; it might prove the mildest form of mischief, too, that the girls could get into. There was something about Fleurette that sharpened Flopsy's enjoyment of the fantastic. Yes, she might make fudge!

As far as Mrs. Moore was concerned, the fudge making proved to be worse than any mischief she could have imagined. The small kitchen was in the most horrible disorder in no time at all. It seemed almost unbelievable that anyone could use so many pots, pans, bowls, spoons and cups, in preparing any-

thing less than an eight course dinner. The only limitation to Flopsy's extravagant use of cooking utensils was the fact that the owner of the cottage had provided for no more. The fudge had to be tested every few minutes, by dropping a little from a spoon, into a cup of cold water. Each time Flopsy tested she used another spoon and another cup. The fudge had to be stirred constantly, and after each stirring, she laid the sticky spoon on the table and took a new one. When at last she decided that it simply must be cooked, she poured it into a buttered dish to harden. Which, one must add, it did not! Then, the whole process had to begin all over again. The fudge was poured back into a nice clean saucepan, and re-cooked. More spoons, more cups, more saucers! Flopsy more exasperated than she would admit, blamed all her difficulties upon her two small brothers—they got in her way. Furiously, she ordered them out of the kitchen. Fleurette was having a wonderful time—she sat on a chair, chattered, giggled and at times laughed outright. Flopsy was a scream! Mrs. Moore knitted before the fire in the living room, and tried to keep her two small sons from arguing over everything or nothing,—tried to keep them from wanting the same picture book, the same game or the same chair at the same time. She tried to discourage them from asking incessantly, "When will the fudge be done?"

"Flopsy!" she called. "Don't you think if you talked less, things might go easier for you? Not a criticism—just a suggestion!" she called cheerfully.

"Oh, it's coming—*this* time," Flopsy sang out gaily, but made a long face at Fleurette, and added in a low tone, "I *hope!*"

Three times in all that fudge was cooked over. And in the end it never hardened at all. Flopsy brought it into the living room in five small bowls, each provided with a spoon.

"It tastes nice, though," Flopsy chirped airily, and not in the least daunted by this way of serving candy.

"Yes," Mrs. Moore hesitated, "but may I ask if you have left me any sugar? And if that strangely attractive odor I smelled awhile back might mean it had at least once stuck to the pan?"

"I think—" Flopsy began and then proceeded to do some very rapid thinking. "That was when I spilled some on the stove. Was it sort of a burned smell?"

"It was indeed!" Mrs. Moore said emphatically.

The next day it rained without a let-up from morning until night. Flopsy and Fleurette put on wet bathing suits and started down for the beach. Mrs. Moore called them back. Fleurette had sneezed a half dozen times that morning. That afternoon they toasted and burned marshmallows and popped and burned corn over a roaring fire in the living room. In the evening, the girls played checkers and card games and found everything and anything that turned up or transpired uproariously funny. Mrs. Moore had to admit that Flopsy and Fleurette were having a hilarious time, but she herself was growing weary of the incessant chatter and bursts of laughter. The two boys squabbled over practically nothing.

"Don't you love Bedlam?" Mr. Moore asked pleasantly. "When I spend my last years in a lunatic asylum I'll feel as though I were right back at Emerald Lake."

It rained the third day until late in the afternoon,

when the sun suddenly blazed out, through the last shower of rain. The sky was resplendent with a double rainbow.

Not since Noah left his ark, was there greater rejoicing that a deluge had ceased.

The next morning Fleurette went down to town with Mr. Moore. Flopsy couldn't bear to see her go. She had had a marvelous time with her. She sat for a long time on her back porch looking into space, and feeling completely lost and forlorn.

However, her grief was to be only a passing one. She received a long letter in the mail that morning from Alice Holt. Alice was coming in two days to get her, and take her over to see her two aunts, who lived fifteen miles away. Alice's Uncle Tom would take them in his car.

The morning they were to arrive, Flopsy walked up and down and up and down the road looking for them. She hadn't seen Alice Holt, her best friend most of the time, for three weeks. She was looking forward eagerly to going visiting at some one's house. It was a rare experience for her.

Mrs. Holt was with Uncle Tom and Alice, when they finally came. She was not to stay with them, but was leaving the two girls in her brother's hands.

"Now, what are you going to do with these girls? I don't altogether trust you. You've never grown up—" Mrs. Holt asked of her brother. "For goodness' sake, don't think of anything weird. Remember, I am responsible for some one else's child!"

"I was going to take them up in a plane, and practice parachute jumping."

"You will never do anything of the sort," fairly

shrieked Mrs. Holt. "You keep those children on the ground. Thank heavens, there are no canoes either to be had—"

"All right, then—I promise you—no parachutes—no canoes."

They were now driving into a quaint old town, with wide streets, heavily shaded by magnificent elms. Most of the houses were white, and as it was rose-time, the ramblers, white and pale pink to deep red, covered fences, arches and the sides of the houses themselves. Flopsy began playing a little game with herself.

"Maybe it's the next one—maybe the third one. Maybe—"

"We are almost there; Aunt Alicia lives just the other side of the town." Alice broke into her reverie. "In a very big house. But it's a farmhouse. You will love it, Flopsy."

"Oh, I know I will." Flopsy caught in her breath with sheer joy at the prospect. "I *love* farmhouses. I never was in one."

It was a fine old place. It had been in the Holt family for generations. Big and white it was—rambling and low. It had, in the years, been added to many many times.

"I love it," Flopsy burst out. "It looks like a storybook house."

"It is," Mrs. Holt said, smiling. "There are many stories told about it."

Aunt Alicia was a dear old lady. She and her sister Georgiana or "Aunt Georgie," had never married, and had lived here all their lives. Aunt Alicia was like a little bird, with bright shining eyes and somehow or other she gave one the impression of

fluttering wings! Aunt Georgie was short and round and very solemn.

“Alice, take your little friend and show her about the house until dinner is ready. We have dinner in the middle of the day, you know, out here.”

The house had been in the beginning, a small box-like affair, with only two stories, and then another “box” had been added to it, this one with three stories,—then another “box” with three stories,—then another “box” with two stories,—the fourth “box” had had three stories, the last addition was only a story and a half. A wide veranda ran almost around the house—a veranda without a railing and only one short step up from the ground. What a house to explore! Alice led the way as an excited and proud guide; Flopsy was at her heels, tingling from head to foot with the novelty of it. Behind a door in the low-ceilinged living room, there was an unexpected flight of stairs leading to a bed room. In all, there were five staircases, for each addition had its own. There was no way of getting from one addition to another except by going out upon the veranda, and going in another door!

After a delicious dinner, Mrs. Holt left the two girls in charge of Uncle Tom while she borrowed his car, and drove over to the country club with a final warning to her brother.

“Well,” Uncle Tom sat on the edge of the porch with his long legs sprawling ahead of him, “well!”

Flopsy and Alice exchanged glances of expectancy. What had Uncle Tom in the back of his head?

“Well!” he repeated for the third time, looking up into the sky, with a very innocent expression. “I’ve got an idea!”

“Oh, what is it!” Alice sprang to his side and sat

down beside him. "Tell us, tell us," she pleaded.

"Guess!" he tormented, still gazing innocently up into the sky.

"Oh, I couldn't, I couldn't! Tell us, please tell us!"

"Horses!" he said shortly.

Alice was puzzled. What did he mean? *Real* horses—was he using slang to tease her?

"*Real* horses?"

"The realest horses you ever saw. A leg at each corner, tail behind, one head in front—eat hay, and go like the old Harry."

"What for?"

"What for—what?"

"What for are the horses?"

"To ride—for pretty little ladies to ride. My dear young ladies have you never ridden a horse?"

Flopsy's eyes were very wide—her lips were parted breathlessly. She thought of Babbie.

"Oh, Uncle Tom, are you going to give us a horse to ride?" Alice fairly squealed.

"Most certainly not. Your mother would parboil me in oil if I did. I have no intention of *giving away* two horses on this summer day, *but—*" he drew a long breath, and continued with a flourish, "but I am thinking of hiring a horse for each of you for one hour, how would you like it?" He lowered his head, and watched from under his eyebrows. The two girls were at first so surprised that they only stared at him.

"Did you ever get on a horse?" Alice turned to Flopsy after a few minutes' silence.

"No—I never did," Flopsy answered slowly and a little cautiously.

"Well, how about it?" Uncle Tom went on. "I

expected more excitement and turmoil over my suggestion. Don't tell me that you don't want to go."

"I'd love it," Flopsy managed to say almost as though she meant it. She must mean it. What would Babbie think of her, if she didn't?

"So would I—I'd love it," echoed Alice—her enthusiasm was not quite as well done as Flopsy's.

"Well, it's this way," Uncle Tom explained. "A fellow I know over in the village, has just bought a half dozen horses, for the guests at the hotel to hire. It's perfectly safe. I am going along to take care of you. They really are very, very safe. Lots of the youngsters up in the town have tried them, and to date, there have been no casualties!"

Flopsy's face brightened at the assurance that Uncle Tom was to be with them. Her knowledge of horses was meager, for no one in their town owned a horse, not even the butcher, the baker, or the grocery man. Oh, yes, the milkman had a horse, but Flopsy was not up inspecting or making acquaintance with people or animals at the time the milkman's horse was conspicuous on the streets.

"Let's!" Flopsy jumped up, eager now for an adventure.

"'At 'a girl. Let's go! Tell your aunts I am taking you off. I'll be waiting for you. Step on it!"

The two girls dashed into the house to tell Aunt Alicia and Aunt Georgiana. Both girls were in a flutter of excitement, and the two aunts were equally excited. Ought they permit the girls to go off with Tom. He was so *heedless!* But there was no stopping them.

"How do you steer a horse?" Flopsy giggled as she went out to meet Uncle Tom. "I suppose it's

like steering a rowboat, you pull on the side you want it to go."

Alice squealed with joy, "You crazy cat! You don't steer a horse. But if you did—and if you steered it the way you did that rowboat once, I'd hate to be near you."

Flopsy laughed so hard she had to lean against a balustrade to keep from tumbling over. That *had* been a funny experience once it was all over!

"Now, girls," warned Uncle Tom, as they walked over the road to the stable, "don't please, get me in dutch. These horses are O.K.—safe—and all that. I can't understand how it happens you never were on a horse for that matter. Don't you live in the country?"

"No, no, it's a town! We don't have horses in it."

"Well, then, this is sure to be the experience of your young lives—something to write home about."

Flopsy's heart was far from light as they walked into the stable yard. She and Alice kept making funny faces at each other, rolling their eyes skyward—crossing them, and waving their heads from side to side as though dizzy.

"Well, here we are! Here we are!" Uncle Tom led the way into the stable itself.

Flopsy sniffed with utter disgust—the fragrance of the stable did not appeal to her at all—nor in fact, was she attracted by the row of horses. She gave Alice a nudge, and with her hand to her head gave her best and most elaborate imitation of Charlie Chaplin staggering around after a blow.

"Which horse do you want?" Uncle Tom waved his hand in the direction of the stalls.

Neither of the girls looked as though they wanted any of them.

"You pick out one, Uncle Tom,—a nice tame one for today," Alice suggested.

"Well, I never in my life saw such girls. I expected you to beg me for the wildest one!"

"I bet Babbie or Miss Hilton would like a wild horse," Flopsy commented aloud, and then promptly decided she must be a good sport or Babbie might, if she heard about it, be disappointed in her.

The stable boy lead out two horses—and as he saddled them, the girls stood by and inspected them with great curiosity.

"What do you grab on to?" Flopsy asked, after a few minutes deep speculation on the subject.

"You don't grab! For heaven's sake! What a sweet prospect I am in for—" Uncle Tom was almost regretting his "brilliant idea." "Come now, Alice, I'll help you mount—Joe, you help Miss Flopsy."

Uncle Tom tossed Alice into her saddle, mounted himself, and then turned to look at Flopsy and Joe. Flopsy, despite Joe's advice and aid, was climbing up the side of the horse as if it were an apple-tree.

"For the love of Pete," he roared with laughter, "you are the craziest kid."

Flopsy, very red in the face, sat upon her saddle, and took the reins Joe handed her, as though in a trance. Suddenly she looked down—all the way down to the stable floor, and in a wavering voice, which she intended to sound light, said, "Isn't this a *high* horse?"

Uncle Tom went off into another roar of laughter. Flopsy was afraid to turn her head to see what Alice

was doing. She felt as though she were sitting astride the dome of the Capitol.

“And he’s very wide,” she added.

Just then the horse under her took a step forward, and Flopsy’s eyes opened with dismay. It felt so funny when he moved—so wobbly!

“It’s quite nice, isn’t it, Flopsy?” Alice called over to her. Flopsy managed to turn her head and look at Alice.

“Yes, only I wish my horse wasn’t so high and so wide, and he feels so funny.”

As if in vigorous protest, Flopsy’s horse tossed his head around and looked at her with one indignant outraged eye, and then gave a violent neigh.

Flopsy, as she said afterwards, “just passed out of the picture”—for she let out a feeble little yell, and grabbed the horse around the neck.

Uncle Tom, two stable boys, and the owner of the livery stable, howled with laughter. Even Alice managed to laugh with some small degree of naturalness.

“Listen,” sputtered Uncle Tom, “don’t grab your horse—or the saddle. And don’t be afraid.”

“Won’t he bite?” Flopsy gasped. “I think I’d like another horse. This one doesn’t like me—”

“Joe,” Uncle Tom ordered from his own mount, “lead the horses out of the stable. Now, Flopsy, relax. The horse is not going to bite you. No harm is coming to you, I promise you.”

As Joe led the horses out, Flopsy managed to regain her nerve for a few minutes, and with a great show of bravery, began to talk.

“What’s my horse’s name?” she asked pleasantly—as though it mattered!

"Pigeon," Joe answered, "and the other one is Satan!"

"That's nice for you, Alice," Flopsy tossed the remark off as lightly as she could. "You've got a devil for a horse."

Alice laughed, but her laugh didn't ring with any real mirth.

"Now, girls, come on. I'll lead the way. Let them go, Joe."

Satan followed slowly with Alice on his back, looking very prim and uncomfortable. Pigeon was standing stock still in the middle of a patch of grass.

Flopsy had turned her eyes to gaze after Uncle Tom and Alice, but when she looked down at her horse again, she let out a wail of horror.

"What's my horse doing? Where's his head?"

There was nothing before Flopsy in the shape of a horse—nothing but the front rim of the saddle.

"He's eating grass—pull up his head! Pull it up!" Joe came to her side, tears running down his face with laughter.

"Miss, you got to let a horse know you are boss. You can't let him get away with anything he wants. Here hold the reins so." Joe gave the distraught Flopsy the reins with a few words of advice. Flopsy yanked the horse's head up as high as she could.

"Come on, Flopsy," called Uncle Tom. "Come on!"

"What's he doing *now*?" Flopsy groaned. "Oh, he's going over to that tree. He's eating the leaves. Goodness!"

"Come on, Flopsy," Alice yelled. "Come on."

"I can't help it if I've got a hungry horse. It's not my fault," she shrieked back. "He keeps turn-



"Make him turn his head around!"

ing his head around and looking at my feet. I bet he'll eat them next. Make him turn his head around, he'll eat my foot," and she grabbed Joe by the hair.

With Joe's assistance, Flopsy managed at last to get out of the stable yard and catch up with Alice.

"You're a scream," Alice began. "I've nearly died laughing at you."

"Well, you've got a decent horse. Mine is crazy." Flopsy retorted irritably. "I don't like these hired horses."

The two horses were now side by side walking slowly up the road towards the village.

"Use the whip a little, get some pep into those animals," Uncle Tom yelled.

"I will not," Flopsy answered, almost sulkily. "I want him to walk."

"*Now*, where are they going!" Flopsy gave a faint shriek. The horses, side by side, for no apparent reason, were climbing a small embankment into a broad field.

"I don't want to go into this field, do you Flopsy?"

"What a crazy horse! Turn your horse around. Mine seems to want to go with yours."

The two girls pulled and tugged at their reins but the two animals in a most deliberate fashion kept right on walking through the field.

"Whoa—whoa!" Flopsy commanded. "Whoa, you crazy disgusting horse."

"You should pull on the other rein!" Alice ordered. "My horse is following yours—it's your horse's fault."

"It is *not*, it is your old horse." Flopsy was so "riled up" that she didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

"Girls," bellowed Uncle Tom, "where in the name of goodness, are you going? Come out of that field."

"Ye-ah," Flopsy laughed weakly. Her stomach felt positively hollow. "I'd come out of this field if that darn old horse had an inch of brains."

Joe had been watching the horses and he was now rolling over and over on the grass, and howling with laughter.

"Joe, you idiot!" called Uncle Tom. "Get up and go after those girls, and bring them back on the road."

Joe sprang to his feet and dashed after the girl's horses.

"They are the stupidest horses I ever saw. You can't make them do anything," Flopsy explained to Joe.

"It's because they think you are too easy. They are smart—them horses—not stupid. They know right well you never was on a horse before," Joe said as he led the two horses back to the main road. "Be firm with them."

"How long have we been out?" Flopsy asked abruptly.

"About twenty minutes. The boss ain't a crab—you can have them more than an hour, and he won't charge you nothing more."

"Oh, dear," Flopsy slumped in her saddle.

"I quite like it," Alice said sweetly.

"Yes, *you* do, with Joe holding on to your horse's reins and pulling him along," Flopsy retorted.

"Where were you girls heading for?" Uncle Tom came back to meet them. "What were you riding across the meadows for?"

"Don't ask us!" Alice answered. "They are the silliest horses—Flopsy's horse follows mine—or rather, mine wants to follow hers."

"Come on, try and keep them on the road," Uncle Tom suggested. "It's really the place for them." For a few hundred feet, Uncle Tom stayed with the girls directing them, then he went ahead again. They were now passing a few houses, all of which were perched on terraces.

"There—they are acting crazy again!" Flopsy cried—now almost on the verge of tears. "I can't see any sense to it." The two horses had decided again to leave the road, and climb up one of the terraces. "Alice it *is* your horse's fault—make him turn around. Oh, gosh!" she shrieked. "Look where they are going! These people don't want these darn old horses in their backyards. Call your Uncle Tom."

"Uncle Tom," Alice screamed frantically. "Come on and get us."

The two horses were calmly and deliberately making their way into some one's backyard!

"There's a well! I bet this horse is thirsty now, and wants a drink. If he tries to get water out of that well, I'll—" Flopsy grabbed the front of her saddle. She was almost speechless with fear. The well did seem to be the very thing the horses were seeking, for they went right to it. Probably it looked like a huge pail to them.

"Oh, dear," Flopsy gasped in a weak, faint voice, "Isn't—it—terrible!" Her horse was looking down the well.

"Did you think the horses were going down that well, you little geese?" Uncle Tom said, as he and Joe came to their rescue. "And do you know

that you are in the Widder Page's backyard, and if she catches you, you, not the horses, will be the ones to go head first down that well. You better get out of here double quick, *I am telling you!*"

"Do you think we wanted to come in here?" Alice asked crossly.

Joe and Uncle Tom got the girls out on the main road again, and this time they discovered that they had collected a crowd. One woman was standing by her gate rocking back and forth with laughter. She threw her apron over her head, and let forth peal after peal of boisterous mirth.

"Let me off—" Flopsy cried rather wildly.

"Now, girls, we'll get away from this mob soon. Stick it out—be good sports. Here, Joe, give Pigeon a good start—" With this, Joe promptly gave Pigeon a sharp wallop on the flank, which made the horse spring into the air, and then sent him galloping up the road. Flopsy threw her arms about his neck, and lay right down on it, too exhausted to do anything else. Every time she left her saddle, as Pigeon sent her into the air, she almost wished she didn't have to return to her saddle, it was so hard. It was exactly like being bounced up and down on a stone wall. Pigeon at last calmed down and walked quietly, every so often turning his head over his shoulder to look at his rider. Uncle Tom and Alice were now beside her.

"This horse keeps giving me the dirtiest looks," Flopsy complained. "He hates me!"

"You are a funny kid," Uncle Tom roared. "Now, I promise I won't leave you again, Flopsy. That was really an awfully sharp wallop that that idiot gave your horse." Uncle Tom rode for over

half a mile between the two girls—guiding their horses—and giving them advice about riding.

“Come, now, let’s break into a trot. This is an awful poky way to ride.”

The minute Flopsy’s horse broke into a run, and she began bouncing up and down on her saddle again, she let out a wail— “Let me off, please.”

“And me—” Alice echoed. “Let’s rest.”

Uncle Tom sighed. “I’ll tell you what—I’ll help you both dismount and tie your horses at this fence—then I’ll go on for a few miles and come back and get you—will *that* do you?”

The two girls were instantly jubilant and bubbling over with good humor. Uncle Tom dismounted and helped them climb down from their horses (for it couldn’t be said that they “dismounted”).

“Now,” he said, as he slipped the horses’ reins over the top of a picket fence, “I hope you two tenderfoots are satisfied. Wait for me—and perhaps you will make a better showing, and ride back in finer form than the way you came out here. Heaven knows it couldn’t have been worse!” He mounted his own horse again and with a bow and a flourish, dashed up the road and out of sight.

The two girls sat by the roadside giggling over their recent experience—for they could laugh now!

“Flopsy!” Alice gasped in horror, staring over Flopsy’s shoulder.

“What *do* you see?” Flopsy was petrified with fear. “What are you looking at?” She was too afraid to move to see what it was that Alice was staring at in that terrified fashion.

“Your horse has gotten loose—look—look!” Her voice was shrill.

Flopsy turned her head, gingerly, slowly. She was very weary of looking at her horse. Well—there he was—eating grass (still hungry it seemed)—just a few feet away from her, with his reins trailing behind him in the dust. Uncle Tom had not tied him—only slipped the reins over the top of the picket fence, and Pigeon with hardly a tug at them, had pulled them off, and was cheerfully eating a coveted bit of grass a few feet beyond his reach.

“Oh, glory halleluiah!” Flopsy squealed and then with a sudden spring, she made a brave dash for the end of the reins, grabbed them, tied them fast to the latch of a gate—in fact, wound it up with the latch so hard and tight that it would take some skillful fingering to untie it!

“I am going,” she announced to Alice. “I am going back to the stable. Stay if you like and wait for Uncle Tom—but—I—am—going—”

And with that, she flew down the road, with Alice at her heels. The two girls, hot, breathless and tired after a mile and a half’s run, tumbled into the stable yard.

Joe was playing mumble-de-peg near the stable door, and at the sight of the two girls, he sprang to his feet in alarm.

“What’s happened—where are the horses? Are you hurt? Anybody killed?”

The two girls flopped down on the ground and with a long drawn sigh of great relief, Flopsy answered, “No, they are all right. They are tied to a fence in front of a farmhouse miles up the road. This road. You can easily find them.”

Without another word, Joe flew into the stable,

got a horse and dashed up the road amid a cloud of dust.

“They surely can go like old Harry,” Flopsy commented, as they watched the vanishing Joe.

Chapter Six

Alice Holt Spends the Night and Flopsy Hears of a Plan

MRS. HOLT did not come back to the old farmhouse until long after supper. Flopsy was anxiously waiting her return. She wanted Alice to spend the night with her at Emerald Lake. Aunt Alicia and Aunt Georgie were quite willing to say "yes" but they felt that it really was not their place to say it. Mrs. Holt smiled down at the two eager faces that met her on her return.

"We have millions of things to talk about." Flopsy was all aglow. "We haven't told each other *anything*. And, I have not seen Alice for ages!"

"Well—" Mrs. Holt spoke somewhat drily, "I hope your cottage walls are thicker than most, for I can see right now that Mrs. and Mr. Moore will have small opportunity to sleep—with the chatter, chatter." Then she smiled. "Yes, I suppose when Uncle Tom takes Flopsy over to Emerald Lake tonight, he can leave Alice and call for her in the morning."

"Oh boy!" the two girls shouted in unison. And then, realizing that they had said the same thing at the same time, they pressed one thumb against the other's and took a wish. "Horses!" shouted Alice.

"Nuts!" groaned Flopsy. She should have said "horses" too, or the wish wouldn't come true.

"*Nuts*—is right! You'd think you would have thought of horses," Alice snickered, "after this afternoon!"

Mrs. Holt stood at the side of the car as the two girls got into the front seat with Uncle Tom. She looked worried.

"Now, Tom, for heaven's sake, be careful, I beg of you. I have just heard some of the high spots of this afternoon and they made my hair stand on end. I want Alice to learn to ride, but I would never pick out anyone as feather-brained as you, my darling brother, to teach her."

Uncle Tom grinned broadly. "You didn't hear that those girls were *riding*—did you? I never would have called it riding—they were merely weighing down two poor old nags for a few minutes."

"Drive slowly! Carefully! Cautiously!" Mrs. Holt called after him.

The two girls ignored Uncle Tom. They had many things to talk over. In the dark, they could not see the fun dancing in his eyes.

Flopsy burst into a picturesque and exaggerated account of the night Dottie had spent with her. Alice enjoyed it enormously as both girls had always agreed that Dottie was a "big scared cat."

"I hope you don't get an idea in your head that there are bullfrogs in the next room." Flopsy laughed foolishly and in high good humor.

"In the next room?" Uncle Tom put in. There was mockery in his voice. "In the next room? Well, Flopsy you are losing a rare chance. You should not have told this to Alice—you should have *put* a

frog right in her bed. That's the ticket. That's what we used to do at camp—a small frog would do—or a mess of tadpoles—or even a toad. Of course, you can't go ahead with this little trick now because Alice would be looking for something. It is only a scream when the person is surprised."

"Well," Flopsy giggled, "it wouldn't be *too* funny, because I have to sleep in that bed too. And anyway I'd pass out if I ever touched a frog." She shuddered.

"Horses, frogs, tadpoles and toads—all out! I'll try to think of some kind of an animal to really give you a big laugh—"

"Oh, Alice, I just thought of something. Speaking of camps made me think of it. I got a long, wonderful letter from Babbie. She's up at a camp in Maine. And what do you think she told me? She said I could call Miss Hilton—*Molly!* And how do you like that?"

Alice did not like it at all. Although Flopsy could barely see Alice's face she knew from the edge in her voice when she spoke, just what her expression was.

"I think it would be just plain every day *fresh* if you did."

"Oh, I don't, Alice, not if she *asked* me to," Flopsy protested. To herself, she thought, "She's jealous—that's all."

"Well, I still think it would be fresh. 'Molly' is a nickname, anyway, and it would be awful to call your teacher by her nickname. I'd never call her 'Molly'—*never!*"

"She didn't ask you to—" Flopsy said, and quite

to herself. "And, why do you always have to get snippy?" she added, still to herself.

Aloud she spoke smoothly. She did not want to start an argument.

"Babbie asked about you. She said David Stewart liked you and me." This, Flopsy felt, ought to soothe Alice and keep her from getting too mean.

"You have a nerve calling him—*David*." But Alice laughed as she once again reproved Flopsy. Her laugh was good-natured. She was pleased that she had been included in the letter. "I hope we are invited to the wedding. I only went to one wedding—I was a flower girl—and that was ages ago."

"Wouldn't that be wonderful! I never thought of it. I never even went to a wedding." Flopsy's eyes were luminous in the dark. "I'd love it. They ought to ask us, oughtn't they, Alice, because we were such good friends of Dav—Captain Stewart, I mean—and of Miss Hilton?" Excited as Flopsy was she did remember in time not to call Captain Stewart, David, again. She did not care to have Alice squelch her. "Squelching is one of the best things, Alice does," she thought to herself. "Perhaps," she went on aloud, "that was part of the plan Miss Hilton has for me."

"What plan?" Alice picked her up quickly.

Flopsy could have bitten off her tongue. Why had she mentioned the plan to Alice. It had been such fun imagining all sorts of lovely things it might be. Alice never let her imagination run riot the way she let hers. Alice was always practical and down to earth.

"Oh, nothing, just a plan. I don't know what it

is. She didn't say—" Flopsy faltered. Oh, dear, suppose Alice threw cold water all over her bright hopes and spoiled them altogether!

"Don't be so mysterious, Flopsy Moore. What plan?" Alice persisted.

Poor Flopsy, never in her life had she been able to keep a secret for long, never had she been able to resist Alice when she was determined to get an answer to her questioning.

"Oh—Babbie said Miss Hilton had a plan for me—" Flopsy blurted out, with a sinking feeling. "She's going to write mother about it."

"*OH!*" was all that Alice said. It was enough. It was a large "Oh," it had a world of meaning in it. Flopsy's heart went down to her boots. Alice asked no more questions about the plan. She was going to show Flopsy that she wasn't in the least interested.

"You should see Fleurette Muldoon's mother. I met her the other day at the store. She's dyed her hair a fiery red. She looks like a freak, if you ask me." Alice broke a painful silence with an almost as painful comment. She knew that this remark would in all probability annoy Flopsy a little. Flopsy always stood up for Fleurette and her mother.

"I didn't ask you," Flopsy retorted. "And, anyway she didn't dye her hair. It was a permanent wave that turned it that color." Flopsy's voice shook with indignation. "How do you get that way? I have red hair and I am not a freak."

"A permanent wave! I am laughing!" and Alice laughed. "I suppose that's one of Fleurette's goofy stories you fell for?"

“Now, hey there!” Uncle Tom protested. “Meow—Me-ow. What a precious pair of cats you two girls are! I expect to have you scratching each other next. I am getting very uneasy. Me-ow—ME-OW!” his prolonged me-ow amounted to a piercing wail. The two girls laughed in spite of themselves. After all they really did not want to spat. They were out for a good time.

“Say Flops, I heard that you had Janet up here.” Alice’s voice was friendly again.

Flopsy shivered. Oh, dear! From bad to worse. She did not want to discuss Janet Dudley’s visit under any circumstance. She wondered if Janet had met Alice in the last week. What had Janet said about her day at Emerald Lake?

“Have you seen Janet?” Flopsy ventured, fearful of the answer.

“Oh yes, for one minute. She’s getting very high hat. She’s changed an awful lot this summer. She says you had a simply *adorable* girl up here as a friend. She raved and raved.”

Flopsy drew a long deep breath of thankfulness. Janet’s “raving” about Diana would annoy Alice, she knew. Alice thought Janet was wonderful and it would make her jealous to hear her rave about another girl. Now, Flopsy reasoned, Alice would surely be on her side, as far as Diana and Janet were concerned. To make sure she decided to rub it in as much as she could.

“Oh, yes, Janet was simply *wild* about Diana. She thought she was precious, darling, wonderful, marvelous. And, when she found that Diana’s aunts had all gone to the same private school Janet is going to in the fall, why she—”

“Oh, nuts!” Alice snorted. “Janet’s getting to be a pain in the neck.”

Flopsy was delighted on all scores. This was too perfect. She felt like hugging Alice. She completely forgot their earlier skirmish. She had squirmed every time she thought of Alice and Janet’s meeting after that day at Emerald Lake and that visit to the hotel. Now, she didn’t need to give it another thought.

“By jinks!” Uncle Tom exploded. “Don’t tell me that Janet is going to be put on the pan now? Me-ow-ow—” and then he gave a very vivid likeness of two cats spitting and fighting on the back fence. The girls were now in high good humor and they laughed uproariously.

“Say, girls, in all seriousness what are you going to say about me when my back is turned and I leave you behind?” He made his voice suddenly high and squeaky in mocking imitation of two girls. “Well, if Uncle Tom *had* to dye his hair—why did he have to pick out that sappy looking color?—And my, did you notice how high hat he is about it, his nose is always turned up?”

They were still laughing when they saw the lights of the Moore’s cottage. The headlights from Uncle Tom’s car lit up the road way ahead of them.

“Goodness!” Flopsy exclaimed as they got nearer. “We have company again. I bet a cookie that it is Mr. Forbes. I hope he hasn’t brought Bill with him this time.” There was an insincere ring in Flopsy’s voice.

“Oh!” Alice chirped up, with a note of excitement. “Does Bill Forbes come here? And does he bring up the other boys, Milton and Frank?”

"You are just going right back with your Uncle Tom, aren't you honey, if there are going to be boys around?" Uncle Tom patted his niece on the arm solicitously.

The girls giggled.

"Bill Forbes was up here one day," Flopsy answered laughing, "But he didn't bring any of the boys with him. Did you hope he'd bring Frank?" Flopsy teased.

The two girls left Uncle Tom with scant ceremony. They dashed towards the cottage after they had left the car, and banged its door.

"Don't come too early in the morning for me!" Alice shouted.

"Hey, that's mean of you," he called after her. "I wanted to get up at dawn and come for you."

Alice laughed but she did not turn back to answer. She knew that her Uncle Tom was the laziest man in the world and hated getting out of bed at any reasonable hour.

When the two girls burst into the living room, they were surprised to see Mrs. Moore sitting by a lamp reading. She was quite alone.

"Who is here?" Flopsy burst out after she had kissed her mother, and her mother in turn had greeted Alice. "And where's Daddy?"

Mrs. Moore smiled and put her finger in a silencing gesture to her lips. "Listen."

From the company room came the weirdest snorting and croaking. Flopsy recognized it at once.

"Mr. Forbes—Mr. Forbes! That's the way he snores Alice, don't you remember I told you about it." She snickered. "But why did he go to bed so early?"

“He and Daddy are going off tomorrow morning at four-thirty. And it’s not so early, my darling daughter. It is nearly half past eleven. I was just beginning to worry about you. How about having a glass of milk and a piece of cake or some cookies and scooting off to bed. Don’t make a face Flopsy—take ginger ale—I know what a crank you are about milk—”

Mrs. Moore and the two girls went out into the kitchen, and for the next half hour between gulps of ginger ale or milk, or mouthfuls of cake the girls giggled out their story of their experience as riders.

“Ah!” Mrs. Moore ejaculated with a smile. “It seems to me that I recall someone—could it be you, Flopsy—saying that riding a horse was easy—nothing to it? And, Babbie needn’t teach you anything—you were going to do all the teaching.”

Flopsy grinned sheepishly and decided that this moment was better than most for going to bed. She was eager anyway to get into bed for she and Alice had decided to talk all night. Alice had a lot to tell Flopsy about the teachers they were to have when they went to the high school in the fall. She had met a sophomore—and she had heard “plenty” from her.

“We might as well talk,” Flopsy whispered as they got into bed. “You can’t possibly sleep with Mr. Forbes making all that hulabaloo.”

“Well,” began Alice with a relish, “Louise Schultz—she’s the sophomore I met—said that the freshman English teacher is Miss Weston and she looks just like a doll and she’s very young. She lets the kids get away with murder—they can do *anything!* They yell and laugh and make an awful

racket but she never gets mad, she just stands and stares at the class and says, 'Oh, dear, *what* will I do?' Louise says she is a riot. You have a swell time in her class and you never learn a thing!"

"That must be swell," Flopsy put in.

"And then there is Miss Wilson. She teaches algebra and Louise says she wears a WIG!"

"Who wears a wig—Louise or the Miss Wilson?" Flopsy asked trying to be funny. She had snuggled down into the bed with a sigh of contentment. She felt as though she were up to some real mischief. She knew very well that at this point, her mother would end the conversation with, "Now, Flopsy, that's not nice or kind and stop it at once."

"Don't be silly!" Alice snickered. "Miss Wilson, of course—the kids say when she gets excited she pushes the wig back and forth—once she pushed it so far back on her forehead that Louise got terribly nervous, she was sure it was coming off altogether. Then there's a Miss Whoosit or something, and the shop teacher has an awful case on her, he keeps coming into her room and talking and Miss Whoosit looks up into his face with a soupy expression. And then she walks to the door with him and sings like this, 'See-you-to-ni-ght!'" Alice mocked wickedly.

On and on and on went this conversation for two hours. The girls had pulled the bed clothes over their heads so as not to be heard. Mr. Forbes' snores proved to be very helpful as no sound in the cottage had much chance of being heard above them.

"I hope I see this wonderful Miss Diana Dean in the morning." Alice changed the subject abruptly. "I'll just act as though I were Mrs. Astor or Mrs.

Rockefeller. I can be very snippy if I want to be—she won't dare show off in front of me."

Flopsy heartily agreed with Alice on one point—she certainly could be as snippy as anyone she had ever seen.

"Oh, you will see her all right—she's all over the place," Flopsy promised. She would enjoy seeing Alice with Diana. At this point Flopsy suddenly remembered that she had not told Alice about Bill Forbes' visit. She burst into it and talked twenty minutes without a break.

"I like Fleurette—" she concluded, and with a faintly apologetic air, added, "but she can be a crazy nut, just the same." Flopsy waited for a second. She fully expected Alice to pounce down her throat, with a snort of agreement. She was already surprised that she had managed to get this far in her story without a few sarcastic remarks from Alice. But she had had to tell about Bill and she could not relate the experiences of that day and leave Fleurette out of it. It would take more skillful maneuvering than she was capable of. Alice did not answer. Alice remained silent on Fleurette for the first time since the girls had met nearly a year and a half before. It's a miracle, Flopsy thought. She sat up in bed and looked down upon Alice intently. Alice was sound asleep! She had not apparently heard one word of this story. And, probably it was just as well.

The next thing Flopsy knew was that the blazing morning sun was streaming into her eyes and making them blink. Alice, at almost the self same moment, opened her eyes. The two girls smiled and then stretched.

"Oh," Flopsy gasped, "I am paralyzed. I can't

move. I bet I've got infantile paralysis!" She groaned in horror at the thought.

"Well, if you have, you gave it to me, I can't move either!" Alice exclaimed in alarm. "Let's stand up and see if we can walk."

The two girls fell out of bed and stood on their feet.

"Oh—o-e-o," Flopsy wailed, "isn't it awful? I am all pains. But I can stand up, at least."

"Heavens!" Alice squealed. "I can't get my knees together, it darn near kills me, Flopsy. You try it."

Flopsy promptly tried it and moaned.

"Oh, we are going to be bowlegged for life, I bet. Mother!" she yelled lustily. "Come here quick—please!"

Mrs. Moore came to the door and opened it. Her eyes went wide with blank surprise at the sight that met her eyes. The two girls were trying to walk about the room—and were walking bandylegged, and groaning as they moved.

"Whatever in the world?" she gasped. Then she laughed until the tears came to her eyes. She leaned against the door jam to steady herself.

Flopsy stood still and stared at her mother in amazement and reproach. Whatever could be so funny? She and Alice were suffering acutely and her mother said or did nothing but laugh. A thought came to Alice suddenly and she too burst out laughing and fell back on the bed, rolling over and over in her mirth.

Flopsy fixed her eyes first on her mother's face and then on Alice. Well, what was it all about, anyway?

"Oh, Flopsy!" Mrs. Moore's eyes were twinkling

with keen amusement. "Have you forgotten that you went horse back riding for the first time in your life yesterday? And, just wait until you sit down—"

Then Flopsy laughed, but not gaily. At the moment it didn't strike her as the funniest thing she had ever heard in her whole life, because she really did hurt.

"It's too bad your father isn't here—he would have a wonderful time teasing you."

From then on the two girls amused themselves exaggerating their aches and pains. They groaned and moaned and giggled.

After breakfast was over, and the housework done they went out on the lawn near the cottage and put on the best act they could under the circumstances. They walked about very bowlegged, with their hands pressed on their knees, and let out loud lamentations as they moved in this curious position. Frankie and Dickie rolled over and over on the grass convulsed with laughter.

Suddenly they heard the prolonged toot of an automobile horn. Flopsy stood still and looked about. Her silly expression changed at once to dismay. A roadster was parked not far from them and Diana Dean was hanging out of it laughing her head off. She was with Andy Norton—a boy of seventeen, who had been steadily trying—and had succeeded—in getting Flopsy's "goat" ever since she had been at Emerald Lake.

"Oh, the dickens!" Flopsy snapped and gave Alice a warning look.

Alice stood stock still and stared.

"It's Diana Dean," Flopsy hissed in Alice's ear.

“Hi there!” Diana called gaily. “That’s a cute game you were playing. What do you call it? I am the roving photographer this morning. I took a snapshot of it, do you mind?” Diana held up a camera. “I was on my way over to the village to have the roll developed and I just had one picture left. I promised to take the first interesting thing I saw—”

Flopsy walked slowly towards the car with a disgusted look on her face. Alice did not move—she was still staring.

“Who is your pal?” Diana laughed. Flopsy did look so funny in her annoyance. Andy shot her a wide grin as he started the engine running.

“You wouldn’t like to shoot us would you, Flopsy, or break the camera?” he taunted.

“Alice Holt,” Flopsy answered Diana crossly, and ignored Andy completely.

Diana nodded towards Alice, and called back over her shoulder, “Hello Alice Holt, I’ve heard a lot about you.”

Alice nodded in her stiffest, snippiest manner—but it was lost on Diana, for the car was now tearing down the road.

Flopsy walked back to Alice and sat down without a word. She put her hands about her knees, and remained grimly silent for a few minutes. Alice followed her example. Flopsy rolled her eyes around.

“How do you like—*THAT*?” Flopsy snorted.

“Just ducky!” Alice said dryly.

“And, you were going to meet her like Mrs. Astor! Imagine Mrs. Astor’s walking around bow-legged. I ask you!”

"I should have said I was going to meet her like Mrs. Astor's horse."

Both girls laughed—but not heartily. They had heard funnier jokes. They were thinking of Janet Dudley. She would laugh heartily all right, all right, when she heard it.

"I don't think she'll ever see Janet again—" Alice looked after the car which was now only a dot in the distance. She was trying to cheer herself and Flopsy.

"You—*hope!*" Flopsy said with emphasis.

"But Janet did tell me that she was going to spend the month of August with a cousin at Narragansett—and it's almost August now."

"Oh—that reminds me—we are going home soon ourselves. Why, in a week," Flopsy exclaimed. "It doesn't seem possible. Now, don't let's think of Diana again. Let's have some fun. We can go in swimming right now—when that smarty Diana is down in the village. She annoys me when I am in swimming at the same time she is."

The girls jumped to their feet and dashed for the cottage. Flopsy was in a very warm and generous mood at that moment as far as Alice was concerned. She let her have her best, new, and cherished bathing suit, while she herself took the old faded one.

They were just out of the water and were walking up towards the cottage when they heard the toot of Uncle Tom's car. He sat back and stared at the two girls in amazement, when it came for the moment of good-byes and parting. He could scarcely believe his eyes. Only the night before he had been almost afraid to leave them together. He

had had visions of their eating each other up and now they were saying farewells, for all the world like two loving and devoted friends about to be torn from each other by a cruel fate.

“Well, you’ve got me stopped!” he exclaimed—but didn’t explain. Nor did they care a rap what he said or thought for they were too overcome with the overpowering thought that they would not see each other for a week.

Flopsy was stiff and lame for the rest of the day and in no very good humor. She decided that she longed to go straight home—she had all of Emerald Lake she wanted. And she was not looking forward to meeting Diana again. Not on a bet!

She followed her mother around, remarking every few minutes, “I am tired of Emerald Lake. There are no girls here my age.”

“Well, Flopsy,” Mrs. Moore commented dryly, “if you could suggest just what I could do about it at a moment’s notice—perhaps I could help you a little.”

The next morning Flopsy tore out of the cottage in a panic, she was so afraid that she might run into Diana. She was going for the mail alone. When she got to the post office the first person she saw was Diana, but as she saw her first, she took precious good care that Diana did not see her.

There were no letters at all for her this morning, but there were several for her mother. As she glanced them over her eyes opened wide with surprise. One letter was from Maine. Printed in one corner was “Camp of White Pines.” Miss Hilton! Miss Hilton had written her mother. Diana could

go and sit on a tack, what did she care about her now? Her feet had wings as she flew up the road.

The moment she had waited for all these weeks was at hand. Now, she would know "the plan." Oh, if she could only open the letter on the way—but she had better not. It was addressed to her mother—but it was about her. It *had* to be about her!

Mrs. Moore did not hold her in suspense for long—she sat right down and tore the envelope almost as eagerly as Flopsy might. For Flopsy's excitement was electric.

DEAR MRS. MOORE (she read aloud),

At last, I am able to write you fully of the plan that Babbie and I have been cherishing for Flopsy all summer. I don't think my young sister could have stood the suspense much longer—

"Nor someone else I know," Mrs. Moore put in with a smile.

"Please, mother, I can't breathe," Flopsy implored.

It seemed (Mrs. Moore continued reading) a bit silly to speak of it at all until I could write and tell just what it was all about. But I am sure you will understand when I say that the delay can be blamed on some people none of us know.

Flopsy's eyes were fairly popping out of her head. Couldn't her mother read faster?

We want so much to have Flopsy come up here to Maine and spend two weeks at the camp. The delay in telling this has been due to the fact that Babbie did so want Flopsy in her particular shack. And, I am sure

Flopsy would enjoy it more, too. One of the girls has been threatening right along to leave camp for two weeks and visit relatives in Portland. But her relatives, with the perversity relatives sometimes show, had not set the date for this visit—until an hour ago. It is all signed and sealed. She is going to be in Portland the second and third weeks of August. So that leaves an empty bed in Babbie's shack. And, Mrs. Moore, Babbie begs you to let Flopsy come. Please! Please!

"I can't hear any more—I am too thrilled!" Flopsy jumped up and flew to her mother's side and tossed off light and glancing kisses over the top of her mother's hair. If she could have got the whole wide world into a small enough space she would have kissed it too. "Mother, mother, isn't it wonderful!" her voice quivered with ecstasy.

Mrs. Moore took her daughter's hand and patted it in sympathy. She was sharing all of Flopsy's joy—she understood this moment of rapture. Her eyes were glistening with bright tears of happiness. She *had* been so anxious that Flopsy would not have any disappointment—and that all her rosy dreams and high hopes would not be shattered.

"Sit down, dear. The letter is not finished. You really ought to listen to it. Miss Hilton means this for you as well as for me."

"I'll *try* to listen," Flopsy promised vaguely.

We have just fallen heir (Mrs. Moore continued reading) to a very nice little fortune, and it will be the greatest pleasure to send Flopsy her tickets to and from Maine. Please do let me!

We hope Flopsy can take the Bar Harbor Express on Wednesday, the eighth of August. I have been

planning all summer on taking Babbie over to Portland so she may see the ocean for the first time—so I feel this would be as good a time as any. We can meet Flopsy at the train in Portland.

Now, about clothes. She will need but few. She can bring her gym bloomers and some middies—this is more or less a regulation costume at the camp. Shorts for warm days, a bathing suit, and a number of sweaters—for it gets very cold sometimes after the sun goes down. Then, maybe a poncho—and of course, rubbers or rain boots. A little summer dress for Sundays . . .

Flopsy jumped up again.

“I catch on to the idea. Don’t read any more mother. Let’s talk about it—or I will explode. We have so much to talk about.”

Mrs. Moore smiled warmly. She shook her head with amusement. “Yes, we may as well talk—but the last part of this letter is very important to me, my darling daughter—if I am to get you off to Maine in shipshape and in order.”

Flopsy had said “we” must talk, which strictly speaking was very far from what she meant. She meant—let *me* talk. She chattered incessantly and went around in circles.

“Mother!” she exclaimed after an hour of rattling on and on. Her face was very serious at the moment. “Mother,” she repeated solemnly, “I want to ask you something very important. Do you think I ought to call Miss Hilton—*Molly*? Do you really?”

“What do you think about it, honey? How do you feel about it?” Mrs. Moore asked quietly.

“Well,” a shadow fell over Flopsy’s face, “I

don't know. Somehow, I don't want to. You are my mother. I don't want to call you by your first name. And Miss Hilton is my teacher—the only teacher I ever loved. She is Miss Hilton to me. And, when I get to be one hundred—she will still be Miss Hilton—” Flopsy's voice broke.

Mrs. Moore nodded. “Yes, I see how you feel, my darling child, and you might tell Miss Hilton how you feel—if she asks you again. She will understand too, I am sure and will be satisfied.”

Mrs. Moore wondered during the course of the day, if Flopsy might come down to earth at any time during the next two weeks—or whether she would remain blissfully perched on her rosy cloud. After all there were pretty important every day things to be done. For one thing—they were still at Emerald Lake, and she knew well from past experience that the “take off” from a summer cottage could be very complicated and confused. The problems that Flopsy had presented every few moments were not particularly helpful or constructive.

“Mother!” she called as she was setting the table for dinner. “What was your mother's first name—grandma's name?”

“Why?” Mrs. Moore asked in surprise. “Well, it was Hortense—Hortense Dexter.”

Flopsy frowned as she laid the cutlery about the table.

“What was daddy's mother's name?” she asked after a pause.

“Her name, I believe was Clara. Clara Drake, before she was married. Whatever have you on your mind now?”

Flopsy's frown deepened.

"Hortense! Clara!" she repeated to herself. She didn't like either. She didn't care much for her mother's name. It was Charlotte—and her father called her Lottie—and made fun of it.

"Mother, haven't we any cute, pretty, snappy names in our family?" she beseeched. "Tell me all you know."

"Whatever are you up to? What on earth is on your mind?" Mrs. Moore repeated. But she called some more names as she busied herself getting the dinner.

"Well, there's Aunt Ellen, but we called her Nellie. And Aunt Carrie. And Daddy had a sister, Mary, but he called her Minnie—"

Flopsy shuddered. "Worse and worse!" Flopsy groaned from the other room. "I never heard of a family that had just plain names. Or if they were half way decent—they made them ugly."

"Please let me in on your secret. Perhaps I could help you."

"Well, I have decided on something. I am sick and tired of the name 'Flopsy.' I want to change it when I get to camp. And, I thought it would be nice if I took a name that was 'in the family.' I have heard people talk about 'names being in the family.' I wanted Babbie to tell all the girls my new name before I get there. I would write her about it right away. I wanted a cute, darling name that would make them think I was a cute girl. Now, I guess, I'll have to think up a name by myself." She sighed.

"That is a serious problem!" Mrs. Moore commented dryly. "And, I suppose you have quite made up your mind that Babbie has never mentioned her friend 'Flopsy' to the girls about her. You are be-

ing very humble and modest if you think that! Somehow, I feel that Babbie has talked about you a great deal."

"Yes," Flopsy's eyes brightened, "I bet she has. I bet she has talked and talked about me. Maybe—raved about me! I guess, I won't change my name after all—"

"This last guess, is more like you, Flopsy Moore. It is more like you to—well—" Mrs. Moore laughed and did not finish. She didn't want to say "brag a little."

A short time later Flopsy's mind, grasshopper fashion, leaped to another problem.

"Mother!" her brow was furrowed. "I just thought of something else."

"What is it now—?" Mrs. Moore asked patiently.

"If Babbie has talked and talked about me—I'd hate to have those girls see my bathrobe. It's—everything—worn out—and faded. And my bedroom slippers are a sight. And, I bet the girls wouldn't think my pajamas were cute either!"

"Flopsy, my dear, trust me please. I am not going to let you go away a thing of shreds and patches," Mrs. Moore shook her head. "Since Miss Hilton has been kind enough to get your tickets, I think your daddy and I can manage to send off our only daughter on her first real visit away from us, in a fashion so as to be a credit to the Moore name."

That night after Flopsy got into bed she called her mother to her. She sat up in bed and pulled her mother down holding her very warm and tight.

"You are very happy, aren't you, my darling?"

"Oh, yes, oh, yes!" Flopsy's voice broke suspiciously.

Mrs. Moore patted her daughter's head. "You will have lovely dreams, tonight I am sure."

"I never went away from you for two weeks before, I never went away for two days—" Flopsy said in a still small voice.

Mrs. Moore sat down on the bed.

"Flopsy, do you remember Dottie Green—you aren't going back on us are you?" she asked lightly. "I thought you were eager to go to Maine. You remember, that you thought Dottie was—baby—"

"Oh, I am! I am! I'd just die if I couldn't go—" Flopsy broke in on her mother. "But I just this minute thought I'd never been away from you so long. I'd never, never be such a baby as Dottie was—NEVER!"

"So I imagined." Mrs. Moore spoke crisply. She leaned over and kissed Flopsy again. Somehow, she sensed this would be her daughter's first and last moment of homesickness. She knew full well how determined Flopsy could be when she wanted anything, and she knew that she wanted to go to Maine and see Babbie more than anything else in the world. "Happy dreams!" she added. And, they were happy—bright—and as lovely, gay and confused as a crazy quilt made without a pattern.

Chapter Seven

Flopsy Takes a Journey

FOREVER after, when Flopsy looked back upon that last week at Emerald Lake, she never could figure out just where it had gone. She had imagined right after she received the invitation to Maine that the time before her departure would be endless. But it disappeared before she knew it. There were countless things to be done—so many arrangements to be made. Her mother wrote to Miss Hilton, Babbie wrote to Flopsy, and Flopsy wrote to both.

The most surprising thing of all was that that last week at Emerald Lake was a very happy one. And, in the end she almost regretted leaving it, in spite of the bright promise ahead of her. Diana Dean had given a big party around their huge out-of-door fireplace, and had invited all the young people. She had suggested to Flopsy that she could ask Janet to come. But Alice Holt had written that the Dudley home was all shut up, and no one knew where they had gone. It was with great relief and satisfaction that she imparted this information to Diana. And, it was with as keen a satisfaction that she heard Diana's own information. That snap shot that she had taken of Alice and Flopsy was a blur.

"It's impossible to tell who, which, what or where it is!" Diana said with a laugh.

“That breaks my heart!” Flopsy answered with a grin.

The longest, the most endless period of that whole two weeks was that last hour before the Bar Harbor Express drew in at the depot at Portland, Maine. Flopsy had never been on a sleeper before, and like almost every one who travels on one for the first time, she wondered why they were called “sleepers.” She decided that they ought to be called “wide-awakers.” Most of the night she was peering out into the whirling, blurry darkness, which was occasionally lightened by the lamps of a depot. She felt very grown-up and experienced traveling alone and at night.

When the darkness began to disappear in the gray light of dawn she was thrilled by the strangeness of it all. She was now looking out upon scenery many miles from home, and she was farther from her family and home than she had ever been in her whole life. She felt as though she had traveled half around the world. She would not have been too surprised if she had seen some llamas from South America wandering about, or the minarets of Turkey—or Chinese coolies pulling rickshaws. There was nothing particularly fantastic or foreign in the landscape that met her eyes, but she felt it ought to be different, because she herself felt so strange.

Although she had had no sleep to speak of, she was wide awake and intoxicated with excitement when the train pulled into Portland. She had been ready for a long time to get off, and was in fact the first person in her car to get to the platform. Her heart was pounding to the tune of the puffing engine, and almost as loudly. Supposing? Suppos-

ing? Supposing Miss Hilton was not at the depot? Her eyes were wide with fright at the possibility. The porter helped her off the train and before this dreadful thought had time to strangle her, she felt Miss Hilton's arms about her, and then Babbie's!

Babbie grabbed up her suit case and started off with it. Miss Hilton stopped her.

"Now, Babbie don't show off! You want to impress Flopsy with how strong you have grown. That suit case is bulging and it looks heavy." Miss Hilton laughed and called a porter.

"Now, we must have some breakfast and we better get it right here in the depot—we don't want to waste time, we want to get back to camp before dinner. Miss West the head of the camp loaned us her old Chevrolet and we are driving back and we have sixty miles to go." Miss Hilton led the girls to the restaurant.

"How brown you are! How brown Babbie is!" Flopsy burst out. She couldn't get her wits together. She was chattering. "You look like Indians."

"And, how freckled you are, Flopsy," Babbie laughed. "They are darling. You look so cute—"

"If you think I have freckles now, you should have seen me the day I came from the lake. This last week, they have got a million times fainter." Flopsy's spirits were so high that she did not mind talking about her freckles. She did feel so strange. Neither Miss Hilton nor Babbie seemed in the least familiar. Well, of course she had only seen Babbie once before in her life, and she had never been with Miss Hilton except when they were teacher and pupil.

While they sat at the table eating their breakfast,

Babbie began to chatter, and never stopped talking for the next hour, except for brief interruptions and questions from Flopsy. Her brown eyes were luminous with excitement and happiness. She had so, so much to tell Flopsy. Miss Hilton looked down into her small sister's glowing face and her heart warmed. It was so very good to see her so well and such a picture of joy and life.

"Oh, Flopsy we saw the ocean! I never saw it before. It thrilled me. We had to take a boat and go all around Casco Bay until we came to Orr's Island—and then I saw it! It was beating against the stern and rockbound coast just as it is described in the song about Thanksgiving. And, we saw Longfellow's home and went all through it," Babbie said all in one long breath.

"Do eat something, you little chattering magpie! You have a long trip ahead of you yet," Miss Hilton warned.

"Was it near the ocean?" Flopsy asked Babbie, scarcely noticing that Miss Hilton had spoken.

"Oh, no, it's in Portland. Oh, Flopsy, I must tell you about the girls in our shack. But first, you mustn't think a 'shack' is a tumble-down thing. It's a darling bungalow all made of logs. It hasn't glass windows, just wooden shutters, we only close when it rains—"

"Oh, I can't wait to hear about the girls. I am bursting to know," Flopsy begged, for once in her life keen to be told things and not the one to do the telling. "Please tell me."

"Just one minute, girls, wait until you get comfortably seated in the car," Miss Hilton shook her head with a rueful laugh. The two girls had scarcely

eaten anything. She led them to the car and they followed as though in a dream. She knew she couldn't expect much of either of them.

"Now, Babbie, begin—please tell me about the girls in our shack," Flopsy entreated once they were seated on the back seat of the Chevrolet.

"Now, Babbie, go ahead," Miss Hilton called over her shoulder with a teasing laugh. "Talk, talk to your heart's content."

"Well—" Babbie began with great relish, "first of all, I must tell you our shack has a name. You must think it is the best shack in camp. Even better than the one Molly is in." She made a saucy little face at her sister's back.

"Hey there," Miss Hilton called. "I don't remember giving you permission to say that!"

Flopsy thrilled at this jesting. Surely, she must think Babbie's shack was the best in camp—for wasn't she to be in it for two weeks?

"Tell me, please," Flopsy begged. Oh, if Babbie would only talk faster and faster.

"Our shack is Tinkerbelle. And Molly's is called Robin's Nest. But don't ever let her say it's better than ours—"

Flopsy nodded violently in agreement.

"Well," began Babbie again, "we have five girls in our shack. Elsie Turnbull was there, but she's away. You heard about her. You are to have her cot. And our counsellor is Miss Lindy."

"The nicest counsellor in camp that little wretch will be telling you next, her very own sister not excluded." Miss Hilton couldn't resist teasing.

The girls laughed. And, Flopsy nudged Babbie to go on. She was simply *dying* to hear more.

"But Miss Lindy is a darling! Her right name is Miss Clarinda Campbell. She's only nineteen. She's so funny sometimes, and she was too, too easy at first. We just did anything. I reckon, Miss West felt ready to cuss us—"

"Babbie!" Miss Hilton interrupted. "Miss West would just love to hear you say that of her—she's not a cussing cowboy!"

"Well, I know what people look like when they are cussing and she sure did look that way! I reckon right down inside her she was."

"What did you do?" Flopsy was thrilled. "What did you do to make her feel like cussing?"

"We talked and laughed after 'taps,' and we made an awful noise during rest hour. Oh, all things like that. And when the water was too cold we sneaked out of the morning dip. Miss West gave us a very nice lecture—the words were nice, but I still think she was cussing inside."

"And—now you are perfect?" Flopsy asked a little disappointed.

"Oh, goodness, NO!" Miss Hilton turned her head again. "Don't get depressed, Flopsy, with the thought that you are going to spend your two weeks with little models of perfection. For you are not. There is a wide, wide gap between the uproar that came out of Tinkerbelle those first days and perfect peace and quiet."

"And it surely riled Marcella Todd those first few days, how bad we were. Oh, Flopsy, I thought it was such fun. I'd never been bad like that before—"

"Who is Marcella Todd?" Flopsy asked quickly.

“Well,” Babbie drew a long breath, “I reckon, I better get going and tell you about the girls. And Marcella Todd is a good beginning. We are all thirteen years old. Some of us are nearly fourteen. Marcella Todd is the nearest to it—and she’s the biggest girl by far in the shack. The littlest is Tommy Adams. Now, don’t ask about Tommy now—I’ll come to her later. I must tell you about Marcella Todd—she’s very, very important. First of all, you must never, never dare to call her ‘Marcella’ all by itself. You simply **MUST** call her ‘Marcella Todd.’ Her whole name is Marcella Todd Townsend. How do you like that?” Babbie stopped to permit this to sink in properly.

“It’s *what?*” Flopsy squealed. “And you have to call her all of that? Did anyone ever try to call her ‘Marcella?’”

Babbie laughed. “Tommy called her ‘Toddie’ one day.”

“What did she do?” Flopsy asked with keen interest.

“Oh-o-e!” Babbie giggled. “You’d have to know Marcella Todd first to imagine—how she looked. She didn’t *say* much! But you got the idea right away, that you’d better never, never try it again.”

“Is she goofy or something?” Flopsy asked in genuine amazement.

“No,” Babbie went on, “but she’s very, very serious. She cried for two days and two nights when she first came to camp. That is partly why we made so much hullabaloo. We reckoned if we were silly and funny, it would make her laugh and she’d forget to be homesick. But she never once laughed.

And, she hardly ever does now. And another thing you must never, never touch her things. She hates that. She's very neat."

"Well," Flopsy spoke with emphasis, "something tells me I won't like her."

"Well, something tells me you won't either. But you have to try. That's the camp spirit, Miss Lindy says. You have to try and like people who are ornery. I am trying every day to like her. And now I almost do—"

"Now, Flopsy, there is another side to Marcella Todd," Miss Hilton put in. "She's had a very different life from most children. She hasn't any sisters or brothers and she never went to school, she had a private tutor—"

"And Babbie didn't go to school and she's not like that!" Flopsy looked warmly into Babbie's face. Babbie no longer seemed strange and far away, but close and very real.

"Now, Babbie, tell Flopsy about Tommy," Miss Hilton put in quickly. She didn't want Flopsy to take an active dislike to Marcella Todd, for she had a decided picture of her former pupil, when she did take a dislike to anyone.

"Oh, Tommy Adams!" Babbie's expression changed completely. "Oh, you will love her right off. She's so funny and full of life. Oh, Flopsy, her father must be a millionaire at least! They have a Chinese butler or cook or something—Chinese—"

"A Chinese rug, possibly?" Miss Hilton put in. "What a description! Come, come Babbie, do better than that!"

"We will skip that part," Babbie said with a giggle. "I have it all mixed up. Anyway, they have

gardeners, cooks and lots of servants, but she acts as though they didn't have any money. The first few days at camp, she wanted to spend all her time helping Peter paint canoes and caulk the rowboats. We call her 'Tommy' because she is a tomboy. She is little and chubby, with short curls all over her head. She hates being neat, but she tries to please Marcella Todd and be a good sport about her, but she really thinks it's wicked fun getting in her hair. That's what I heard Miss Lindy say," Babbie repeated.

They had now left the beautiful state highway, and the old Chevrolet was bumping along over a terrible road, full of ruts made by the snow and ice of a severe winter. Babbie's words were bounced out of her and sounded as though she were talking right through a bad attack of the hiccoughs.

"Poor old Sweet Petunia, I hope she lasts through until we get to camp," Miss Hilton fairly wailed.

"Sweet Petunia—that's the name of this Chevie," Babbie explained. "Everything in camp has a name—Oh—!" the two girls bounded up and hit Sweet Petunia on her roof.

"My neck's broken, but don't stop," Babbie giggled.

"Hold everything!" Miss Hilton warned.

"And—Flopsy you will like—(hic) Betty Graham (hic) she's a good sport—she's been coming to camp for six years— Oh, Glory!" Babbie sputtered out as she bounced up and down. "So has—Tommy—(hic)." She was giggling and holding one hand on her head.

"We have four miles of this girls and if Sweet Petunia holds out she's the best sport in camp!"

“My bacon and eggs are jumping up and down my gullet,” Flopsy gasped. “But go on—tell me some more.”

Between “hics,” “Ohs” and giggles, Babbie went right on. She was wound up, for never in her short life had she had such a golden opportunity. Those years when she lay, or sat so quiet and still out on the ranch after her accident, she had to *hear*, or *read* about the life beyond her room, now she was imparting news—not receiving it. Things were always happening in camp every minute and she had been part of it all.

“Oh, glory halleluiaah, holy cats!” she burst out in the middle of a description of a camp entertainment, as she bounced first to the roof of the car and then she and Flopsy, tumbled off their seats onto the floor. The two girls lay giggling in a heap. Miss Hilton stopped the car.

“A hospital—or the camp? Which shall I drive to?” She turned her head about in alarm.

“Camp!” Babbie gasped. “Drive on, James!”

“This was a short cut—I thought!” Miss Hilton started the car again, with a sigh.

“Well—” Babbie drew a long breath after the two girls were back upon the seat again. “Well, I think I’d rather have a bucking horse than a bucking car, any day. Oh, that reminds me, Flopsy, you will love the horses we have at camp. I have one special one, I make believe it’s mine. Her name is Demon. There is one, though, I’ve picked out for you. It’s the one Elsie Turnbull always rode, but she’s not here and you can have it,” Babbie promised eagerly. She looked full into Flopsy’s face to see the joy that this announcement would give her. To her com-

plete surprise, there was no joy in the face near her own—only blank dismay.

“I-a—now!” Flopsy faltered. “I don’t think I’ll ever learn to ride.” She felt ashamed even as she admitted this. “I tried a few weeks ago with Alice Holt.”

“Oh!” Babbie was disappointed. “But you can learn, really and truly you can.”

“Really and truly I can’t, Babbie!” Flopsy shook her head ruefully. “But maybe I’ll try, just before I go home,” she promised, putting off as far as possible that dark moment. “And then you will see how dumb and nutty I am about horses,” she offered with a gallant effort to be a good sport. Evidently, from all she had heard “being a good sport” was the most important thing about being at camp.

“Well,” a shadow fell on Babbie’s face, “I suppose you will love the water and the canoes and I don’t think I’ll ever like them. It’s funny isn’t it? It’s too bad, we couldn’t have liked just the same things—but I reckon, it can’t be helped.”

Flopsy did not feel ashamed any longer. There was something Babbie couldn’t do either—but she didn’t want Babbie to be sorry though about anything. So she at once told her about her experience with a horse—and she told it just as foolishly as she could, making it sound too, too silly. She didn’t care in the least now, if the joke was all on her as long as Babbie laughed again. And laugh she did! Babbie’s brown eyes were dancing and she had to hold her sides with her laughter.

“Oh, Flopsy!” she looked into Flopsy’s face with frank admiration. “You are the funniest person I ever, ever knew.”

Flopsy glowed from head to foot. It was such fun having Babbie think she was a "scream."

"You can go out in the canoes, I reckon—" Babbie said generously. "And lots of the girls can't. You have to first take a canoe test. And you will pass, I just know. Maybe you can take a canoe trip and stay out over night. The girls think it's wonderful.

"A canoe test?" Flopsy echoed.

"Yes—you have to (hic). Oh, dear, the road's getting bumpy (hic) again. You have it in two parts (hic). One day, you have to (hic). Oh, Pete! Isn't this AWFUL!"

"Have to—what?" Flopsy persisted as she bounced up and down.

"—Have to swim around fifteen minutes (hic) without touching anything. Oh, glory! Will we ever get to camp?"

"We will, if Sweet Petunia does," Miss Hilton promised.

"But that's not all of it (hic) there's more," Babbie went on. "The last part is the hardest— Oh—but it's not as hard as this roof!" She and Flopsy almost went through the roof this time. Miss Hilton stopped the car.

"Listen to me, honey," she called to Babbie. "Tell Flopsy all about the canoe test right now, and get it over with. It gives me jitters hearing you try to tell something willy nilly, between bumps." She took off her hat and tossed it over her shoulder to the back seat. She leaned back and wiped off her forehead wearily.

"Never mind, I guess I can wait," Flopsy said obligingly.

“Go ahead, I’ve got to rest. And so has Sweet Petunia.”

“Well,” Babbie began with a laugh, “you put on all your clothes over your bathing suit—your middy, your shorts, and you wear socks and sneaks. Then you sit up in the bow of the canoe, a counsellor sits at the stern. And then you paddle, around and around and up and down and up and down, and then bingo, without any warning the counsellor tips over the canoe. Then there you are in the water. You have to take off your clothes, except your bathing suit, and put them in the canoe, *tie* them in. You have to get the paddles—they always go floating off—and you have to bring the whole works in, and if you forget anything or get frightened you can’t go out in a canoe—” Babbie drew a long breath.

“O.K.” Miss Hilton sat up straight again. “Now you have the low down on a canoe test. How about a little silence back there, as we shoot the shoots again? We haven’t much more of this—*I hope!*”

As the car jounced and banged around over the horrible road, Flopsy thought over the canoe test. She was going to take it just as soon as she could, although her heart pounded a bit at the thought. Yes, and what was more she did hope she could take a canoe trip and sleep out-of-doors—it sounded thrilling. But perhaps it was merciful that she had to keep quiet at the moment—she might have been tempted to brag, and she’d better wait and see about this test before she did any elaborate boasting.

They were back on a main highway again. All three simultaneously drew a long deep breath of thankfulness.

“Oh, Flopsy, we are near camp. I’ve hiked here,”

Babbie cried out excitedly. "Before we get to camp, I must tell you about Great-great Aunt Clarissa Ames. It's so thrilling."

Great-great Aunt Clarissa Ames, so it seemed, had written "Molly" a unique letter. Which would she rather have—five thousand dollars right now. *Now*, so that she could have a pretty wedding and a nice trousseau and perhaps give her mother some of it, or wait until Aunt Clarissa had died and get seven thousand dollars? If she took the five thousand, Aunt Clarissa said, she herself would have the pleasure of hearing about the wedding, and the pleasure of being thanked. She would have the joy of being appreciated while she was living. If Molly waited until she was dead, she'd know with her dying breath that Molly didn't care to thank her in person, and that she wanted the extra two thousand more than to say "Thank you." Molly had decided she wanted to thank her eccentric but kind old kinswoman, more than anything else. She fully realized that it would give the old lady a great deal of pleasure and happiness to hear all about the wedding. Aunt Clarissa had insisted that she was very romantic about weddings.

"Oh, Miss Hilton was right!" Flopsy said impulsively. "And your Aunt Clarissa is just like me—I am dying to hear about the wedding when it comes."

"You—" Babbie began, her eyes bright with a knowing smile.

"You chatterbox!" Miss Hilton called over her shoulder, and although she winked good naturedly, at the same time she gave her head a warning shake.

Babbie put her fingers over her lips, as though to

silence herself—her face all puckered up with mischief. Flopsy looked from one to the other. What was up? There was something they were not telling.

“Whoopee!” Babbie shouted as she almost jumped off the seat. Her eyes glowed and two bright spots burned on her cheeks. She grabbed Flopsy’s arm. Her excitement raced through her body and out of her fingers into Flopsy’s very being. Now what?

“Antwerp! We are coming into *our* town. See, Flopsy, we are almost to the camp. There is the store we buy our ice cream cones and candy. It’s Mr. Brown’s—the I.G.A. store. Oh, Flopsy, you are nearly in camp! It’s three miles now by the road, but five miles by the Old Gray Goose. The Old Gray Goose is the camp motorboat.”

Flopsy was tingling from head to foot. She was about to enter a new world. Her mother, father, Emerald Lake, Diana, Alice and Fleurette, were suddenly as far away as though they were on some other planet out in boundless space.

“Oh, I hope you like it!” Babbie’s warm radiant face was close to her own. “I love everything. I was afraid of the trees at first—now it’s fun to know the difference between a white pine, a hemlock or a balsam. I love to hear about all the flowers, ferns and the birds—Oh, Flopsy, you will love it too!”

Suddenly there was a persistent toot-toot of an automobile horn. A small bus was edging close to them. Some one was shouting.

“Hi there, Miss Molly! Hi there!”

“Oh, Mr. Perkins!” Miss Hilton brought Sweet Petunia to a standstill. “If I am not glad to see you. Sweet Petunia has been ready to blow up or fall to pieces these last five miles.”

“Miss West said I was to hang around and catch you. I am a takin’ Sweet Petunie right over to the service station this minute. And you are to go over to camp in the Old Gray Goose—Josh be there waitin’ fer you—”

Miss Hilton and the girls were out of the car in a trice. Mr. Perkins grabbed Flopsy’s bag. The cars were left by the roadside, and Mr. Perkins led the way towards the dock. Flopsy caught then her first glimpse of the lake.

“Oh, Mr. Perkins, I want you to meet Flopsy Moore. Flopsy is to be with us for two weeks.” Miss Hilton smiled down at her small guest.

“My, ain’t that elegant now. Please to meet you Topsy. Well, I swan—they must have called you Topsy, because you ‘just growed up,’ not on account of your hair. Who ever heard of Topsy with a head of red hair?” He hurried along chuckling as he went.

“*Flopsy*—not Topsy,” Babbie shouted. “Flopsy, FLOPSY!”

“I git it,” he laughed and shook all over with mirth. “Got ferst off. Topsy. My, that’s a good one.”

“Skip it!” Babbie said under her breath. “Don’t pay any attention to him—he’s deaf.”

In a few minutes more the two girls and Miss Hilton were in the camp motorboat the “Old Gray Goose.” Flopsy went right to the bow—she wanted to see everything the instant it came in view. The lake was not in full sight now, they were on a small inlet filled with pond lilies, rushes and cat tails. Mr. Perkins left them to his son Joshua, who was to run the boat over to camp. He was as silent as

his father was talkative. He gave his passengers a bare nod, and started the engine. In a few minutes, the boat was out of the inlet, into the lake proper. Flopsy held her breath at the width and expanse of it.

“Oh, Flopsy, don’t you love our lake? I do hope you will think it’s even more beautiful than Emerald Lake. It’s so wild. There are no towns on the lake only three camps—you can’t even see them from the water—the forests are so thick. Doesn’t it thrill you because it is so wild?” Babbie’s voice was throbbing with the love of the things about her.

The boat tore up the lake sending up a high spray that moistened Flopsy’s cheeks and glistened like dew-drops on her hair. She was beyond speech. Her eyes were round like two saucers and her lips parted as though to drink in this intoxicating mist. As the lake whacked-whacked the boat with a rhythmic sound, in Flopsy’s ears rang, and repeated over and over, the opening lines of *Evangeline*. “This is the forest priméval—the múrmuring pines and the hémlocks.” So, they had once scanned those lines in school, and now she was scanning them with her eyes as well as ears. For along both shores of the lake was a dense forest of ancient pines and hemlocks.

“The very first thing you must do, Flopsy, is to get into your camp clothes. You feel so strange in street clothes around camp. What time is it? I’m wondering where all the girls will be when we get to camp.” Babbie turned to her sister.

“An hour still to dinner,” Miss Hilton looked at her watch.

“Oh, dear, the girls will be everywhere—scattered

all around. I wanted Flopsy to meet them right away."

"Why no, this will be the end of the seniors swimming hour." Miss Hilton tried to cheer her sister. "Betty and Tommy might be on hand."

Flopsy was hearing little or nothing of what was being said. The sound of the motor drowned out their voices, and its persistent chug-chug, together with the movement of the boat was almost lulling her to sleep.

Long, long after, when Flopsy looked back upon those weeks at camp she never could patch together clearly those very first impressions. They were all blurred and mixed up. She could recall the shouts of girls at their swimming hour, the first sight of the eight foot diving tower and her quick decision that she would as soon jump off the Empire State Building as to try diving from it. Yes, Miss West had come to the dock to meet the Old Gray Goose, but try as she would she could never, never recall saying anything to Miss West. Had she been polite? She would shiver a bit over this vague memory. Wouldn't it have been AWFUL if she had said nothing at all?

Babbie had insisted that she get into her bathing suit at once and take a dip, for it would refresh her after her long and dusty trip. It was the dip that brought her sharply to her senses and made all the other pictures sharp and clear and unforgettable. As she plunged into the waters of the lake, she gasped, sputtered and pounded her chest. She decided at her earliest opportunity to look Maine up on the map again. From this icy bath it seemed that Maine must be a lot nearer the North Pole than she had thought.

After she had come out of the water, Babbie left

her in the shack to get into her camp clothes. Babbie wanted to bring her shack-mates to meet her guest. After Flopsy got into her clothes she flopped down on the cot nearest her and looked about. Surely, there could not be a prettier shack in the whole camp than Tinkerbell. The six cots all presented a different appearance—some were spread with bright cretonnes and piled high with pillows, others were covered with gay blankets. The one on which she was sitting was the plainest, for over it was just an Indian blanket. In the open window spaces hung birch bark baskets filled with ferns and trailing vines. The girls were taught how to take the birch bark so as not to injure the tree. On the window sills were huge window boxes, and vases of wild flowers. Everything from one end of the shack to the other was in apple pie order.

What was Miss Lindy like, she idly wondered. Miss Lindy's cot was in a niche by itself, shut off from the others by a brilliantly colored curtain. She drew in a long deep breath of contentment, a breath that was sweetened by the perfume of the pine laden air.

"You are sitting on my bed and putting your things all over it," a voice very near her shattered her pleasant reverie. Was some one trying to be funny, shot through her head—some one making believe that she was the father bear discovering poor little Goldy Locks on his bed? She looked up with a grin, into a face above her. Oh! Oh! This tall, stocky girl staring down at her was definitely NOT playing anything, she was not acting out the Three Bears. Flopsy's grin vanished at once—for a second she just stared at this strange girl with grave eyes and long brown pigtails.

"We have inspection every day and we get credit for keeping our shack neat. And so far Tinkerbelle has never once won the pennant. I want Tinkerbelle to at least win it once! You are in Pine Cradle? You have won lots of times—why do you want to spoil our chance?" This girl spoke patiently as though she were talking to a small child.

Flopsy jumped to her feet in confusion. "I—am—Flora Moore. I—am Babbie Hilton's friend," she sputtered out.

"Oh! I am sorry. I thought you were the red-haired girl in Pine Cradle. Welcome to Tinkerbelle! I am Marcella Todd Townsend. I want you to call me 'Marcella Todd.'" Marcella Todd held out her hand. Flopsy took it, scarcely conscious of what she was doing. *Welcome* to Tinkerbelle, indeed!

In the next second there was the sound of rushing scampering feet and with a shout three girls tumbled in the shack through the door opposite the one Marcella Todd had entered. A small girl with curly head dashed up to Flopsy and grabbed her hand and yanked it up and down like a pump handle.

"Welcome, Flopsy Moore, to Tinkerbelle, to our camp and to our hearts! I am Tommy Adams and everything I have is yours except this strained wrist I got playing tennis." Tommy leaped on one of the beds turned a somersault and sat up. "How do you like that for a welcome, wasn't it a pip?"

The shack was a din now of chatter, giggles, laughs and shouts. Flopsy had met her shack mates, for Betty Graham had come in at the same time with Babbie and Tommy. Close on their heels, Miss Lindy herself had appeared. She had come in with a grin showing all her pretty dimples, commenting



"You are sitting on my bed."

as she came, that Betty had forgotten to go to the well for water for the shack—and then she had stopped short and had rushed over to her guest and had given her a hug and a pat on the back. Suddenly a shrill whistle rent the air. With one accord the girls tore out of the shack, with Flopsy at their heels, down the pine covered winding path to the out-of-door dining room which was built over the water.

After the grace chanted by the entire camp of girls, they tumbled into their chairs. Then came a big shout from one end of the dining room to the other. “STAND UP! STAND! FLOPSY MOORE, STAND UP!”

Flopsy was pushed to her feet by Babbie on one side and Tommy on the other. She was as white as a sunburned, freckled-face girl could be. As she stood and faced that room full of girls, her knees were shaking, and she only saw them all in a mixed up blur. But she nearly burst with importance and pride as they sang lustily, “Just a song of welcome—just a song of cheer, just a song to say we’re glad your here,” to the tune of *Love’s Old Sweet Song*. She fell back into her seat midst a burst of furious applause. After that she did not know what she was eating, or what was being said to her. She couldn’t wait to tell her mother about this welcome, for it was certainly something to “write home about.”

Rest hour—a short hike over to Antwerp late in the afternoon—supper—Babbie playing on her guitar and singing cowboy songs, before a campfire in the early evening—all passed in rapid succession. What a day it had been! Not so many hours before, and yet worlds away, she had waited breathless and un-

certain on the platform of the train at Portland. Now she was a part of the life at Camp of White Pines and was ready to tumble into a cot along side her shack mates in Tinkerbelle.

Miss Lindy sat on the edge of her bed, just after the sad and yet wholly soothing and sweet notes of taps had floated over the camp, silencing the confused and happy din of fifty girls chattering and laughing in their various shacks.

“Now listen to me, honeychile,” Miss Lindy patted her blankets. “You may hear sounds in the night, you won’t understand—but they are right and proper. There’s a bird that flies over this lake called a loon, it sounds rather weird at times. Sometimes it sounds like some one crying, sometimes like some one laughing. Crying or laughing, it’s high above you and perfectly harmless. Then the red squirrels scamper over the roof or walk along the window ledges. And they too are harmless. And so is the dog in the neighborhood that barks, a short funny little bark. Don’t be afraid if he doesn’t seem to bark like a dog!”

Miss Lindy certainly thought she was soothing any fears Flopsy might feel about her first night at camp in the woods, but she was doing no such thing—quite the contrary! Flopsy was grateful for all the blankets over her, and when Miss Lindy left her she pulled them right over her head. Blankets always made her feel *safe* in the dead of the night, safer and more secure than a whole row of soldiers or policemen. What if a red squirrel fell off the window ledge into bed with her? She shivered at the thought, and decided she’d yell bloody murder, even if he were harmless! Or supposing that loon decided

this was as good a night as any to cry? A weird cry Miss Lindy had said. Weird cries appealed to her even less than a red squirrel as a bed fellow. And less than either was that dog which didn't bark like a dog. Dogs ought to be natural, bark like dogs and nothing else. And if he wasn't a natural dog—for Pete's sake **WHAT** was he? "Oh, glory," she groaned and drew the blankets closer and decided to lie awake and listen for him. The first sound, however, that she heard was the rousing notes on a bugle of reveille. The sun was blazing through the pines and making beautiful patterns on the shack walls.

And so, for three days and three nights, taps followed reveille and reveille, taps. The days had no beginning or end, they melted away in one whirl of breathless happiness.

Chapter Eight

Sunday at Camp

BABBIE loved Sunday at camp—it was a day set apart. There were no arranged hikes or trips, no contests, no lessons in arts and crafts, and no swimming instruction, just a quiet swimming period. Flopsy had been almost afraid that it might be a long, dull day, but instead, it was a very happy one.

“It looks like Sunday and it feels like Sunday,” Flopsy drew in a long deep breath of satisfaction, after breakfast on a radiant Sunday morning. The sky, lake, woods and distant fields were bathed in a glorious blue gold light, and over all prevailed a Sabbath peace. The birds singing in the woods had no lively competition on Sunday, for there were no wild hilarious shouts, no riotous games.

“No inspection—that’s one thing I like among others, about Sunday,” Babbie had announced. Although she liked Tinkerbelle to be a neat and pretty shack, and was orderly, the daily inspection meant a good deal of sweeping, dusting and picking up—even around the outside of the shack. Beds had to be made *right*, floors had to be spotless—even under beds and in corners; water pails had to be sunned, and then filled again with water, and clothes had to be put neatly out of sight, for every little point

was taken into consideration in inspection. No girl who neglected her shack duties could ever win a degree. But on Sunday, beds were made, clothes put away, but not in that furious burst of industry that prevailed on weekdays.

About eleven o'clock the girls went to their shacks, got their Bibles and several pillows, and prepared themselves to take the trail through the woods. There was no church building within many miles of camp, but there was a church waiting for them in the heart of the woods. The winding trail to this woodland church was very narrow, and the girls had to walk single file. The fifty girls made a pretty sight in their dress uniforms of rich Hunter green, as they wound in and out, following one another, singing as they went, the simple little old song,

“Come, come to the Church in the Wildwood—
No spot is so dear to my childhood.”

Their trail was high about the edge of the lake which sparkled, and gleamed through great pines—pines so high and straight that they might be pillars of a great cathedral. A million twinkling candles could be no more beautiful than the brilliant tiny sparkles of sunlight blazing through the heavy foliage. At their feet were lovely lichens, mosses,—a myriad of lacy ferns and wild flowers.

In and out they trailed—every now and then the first girls were lost entirely from view—but their song came back to the others.

“Come, come to the Church in the Wildwood.”
High up somewhere in the trees, the birds echoed their song.

The Church Grove itself had not been made. There had been no trees cut down—no underbrush cleared away—it was there—waiting for them for many a long year—and might be the same for many another long year. It was on a small plateau above the lake and was entirely encircled with magnificent white pines. Miss West had had rows of boards arranged in a semi-circle, so the girls could sit right down on the soft pine-needles, and use the boards for back-rests, softened by the pillows which they brought under their arms. A very rude table faced the girls, a table almost covered with pines and mosses. Miss West's seat was as rough as the table itself, and that too was entwined with vines. Behind her, perhaps a dozen feet or so, was one giant pine—so straight that it might have been used for the mast of a sailing vessel. To it, with just as few nails as possible, was fastened a big rude cross of silver birch—The Church in the Wildwood.

As the girls trooped into the grove and settled themselves on the heavy pine-carpeted ground, above them the high, sweet notes of a bird filled the air—as the notes of a boy soprano might in a cathedral. Then the low strumming of a locust took up his song, like the vibrating chorus of a huge pipe organ.

“The Lord is in his Holy Temple,

Let all the earth keep silence before him.”

“Amen,”—chanted a hermit thrush from afar in the heart of the forest.

After Miss West had read the fifteenth chapter of St. John to them, she talked to them,—or better, *with* them. It was a simple little talk—and she asked them questions which they answered.

“I am the vine—ye are the branches”—the girls' eyes sought the branches all about them. It was

so easy to feel that God was the vine, and they, the branches out in this beautiful woodland temple.

Flopsy and Babbie were spell-bound by Miss West's talk and by her parable which she made vivid by the examples of the forest around them.

Miss Bobby, standing beneath the crude white cross of birch, fastened to the giant pine, sang Joyce Kilmer's *Trees*. After she had finished those last lines, there was a profound silence.

“Poems are made by fools like me
But only God can make a tree.”

Somewhere—a white throated sparrow—then a chickadee up in their choir loft—sang, as the girls filed out of their “pews.” One by one, they took the narrow trail, back to camp.

Flopsy and Babbie walked together.

“What is this?” Flopsy bent over to pick a small flower. Not because she felt she would ever know it again, but she knew Babbie enjoyed telling her.

After a happy hour, the quiet of the camp was broken by the notes of a bugle. On weekdays they were called to meals by a whistle but on Sunday, old Jim, the chef, insisted upon playing his one and only tune. He discorded, puffed and flatted through it, but he felt that nothing could be more beautiful and fitting for a call to dinner on Sunday than his dearly cherished hymn.

“If you're asking me—I think *Nearer My God to Thee*—is a perfectly weird song for a cook to call you to dinner by—a dinner he's cooked himself! Is it a promise or a threat?” Flopsy giggled as she spoke.

Tommy chuckled with delight. “I never thought

of it in that light; he's been playing it on Sundays every meal since I came here, and all I've noticed is that his technique is getting steadily worse."

The girls always looked forward to their Sunday dinner, for like most Sunday dinners, they were more lavish than those of the weekdays. There were always the huge platters of chicken, the dishes of fresh green peas and beans—the chicken gravy on the potatoes, and two helpings of ice cream! As there was no rest hour on Sunday, the girls could wander off or rest as they pleased. Some, who had passed all their canoe tests, took the canoes for short trips, while others took the row boats.

"I'll tell you what let's do—after I've written a few letters. Let's take a walk through the Nature Trail—and out to Merrie Northland, and sit and talk—just you and me, Flopsy. We've hardly ever been alone—to just talk. Wouldn't you like it?"

"Oh, I'd love it. Let's!" Flopsy's eyes shone brightly.

She perched herself on her bed and began to write. She found herself so enthralled in her letter to her mother that she forgot to write Alice and make her "jealous;" besides the day was too beautiful and she was too happy to be "mean."

"Girls, how would you like to have Bible tableaux tonight after vespers? I've thought of an idea. How about having tableaux showing famous women of the Bible?" Miss Lindy had just walked into the shack, her face beaming with her idea.

"Oh, Miss Lindy, I think it would be marvelous!"

"I will tell you how we will arrange it," Miss Lindy went on. "Tinkerbelle will do it all—we will surprise the camp—I will tell the story and then

I'll read the verse from the Bible that you will choose for your tableaux. Tonight we will take the women from the Old Testament—Ruth and Naomi—Sarah and Hagar—Rebekah or Rachel—” Miss Lindy stopped abruptly as though with a sudden thought. “Babbie *must* be Rachel—” She smiled at Babbie as she spoke.

Babbie's face flushed a little; she wasn't very sure who Rachel was! She looked up into Miss Lindy's face with a faint smile in her black eyes—half shy, half questioning.

Miss Lindy nodded her head approvingly at her own idea, as she continued to gaze at Babbie's face. No one's hair could be more shining black than hers, nor could Rachel's eyes have been darker, nor features more delicate and straight. Yes, Babbie must be Rachel.

“Who could I be in the Bible? In the Old Testament? Salome?” Flopsy asked, with a worried expression on her face. “Mary Magdalene in the New Testament, maybe. *Red hair?* Who could or would have red hair in the Old Testament? Oh, I know,” her eyes shone, “I know. I'll be the Queen of Sheba.” She was positively purring with satisfaction. “I'd love to be the Queen of Sheba. All the other girls could follow in my train. One of them could be a camel.”

“Well, I won't be a camel. I am the biggest and I reckon you thought of me. I am going to be Ruth. I love the story of Ruth and Naomi,” Marcella Todd announced with an air that brooked of no contradiction.

“Maybe we will have to use some of you twice,” Miss Lindy said soothingly. “Marcella Todd can

be Ruth. Betty Graham, will you be Naomi?" Miss Lindy could not picture Marcella Todd's being Ruth and saying, "Thy people will be my people, thy God my God." For there was nothing yielding about Marcella Todd—she had not given in one inch since she had been in camp. Her ways were still her own ways—she would accept no one else's.

"Tommy can be Rebekah—" Miss Lindy was writing down her program.

"Now we have Babbie as Rachel; Flopsy as the Queen of Sheba; Marcella Todd will be Ruth; Betty Graham, Naomi. Perhaps we could have a tableau of Sarah and Hagar. Two girls could be used twice. Who will be Hagar?"

"I will!" Marcella Todd announced promptly.

Miss Lindy stared at her in amazement. Marcella Todd evidently liked to picture herself as gentle and tragically ill-used. It was as difficult to imagine Marcella Todd as Hagar as it was as Ruth.

"Now, who will be Sarah? Sarah, who turned Hagar out into the desert with a bottle of water on her shoulder and her baby?"

Babbie would never volunteer to put herself into the public eye. Flopsy had decided to be nothing less than the Queen of Sheba in all her glory, so she, too, did not care to volunteer to be Sarah. The choice lay between Tommy or Betty Graham.

"Miss West wouldn't like it if we turned these tableaux into a grand joke. If you don't think it would be a big laugh *my* being Sarah, I ask you!" Tommy said dryly. "Picture little me—the smallest girl in the shack—ordering out Marcella Todd into the desert. I am about half her size—" There was a burst of laughter,—for there was something

droll about little Tommy being Sarah to big Marcella Todd's Hagar.

"Betty Graham, will you be Sarah?" Miss Lindy asked with a smile.

"All right," Betty Graham answered without much enthusiasm. She was in two tableaux with Marcella Todd, and in each Marcella Todd had the more appealing dramatic part.

"Now, Babbie and Flopsy, if you are going for a walk—run along. But before you go, tell Miss Scotty where you are going for she is the officer of the day. I'd take a Bible along—and look up your parts and think over what you can get or arrange for clothes and properties."

Babbie and Flopsy gaily left the shack together, and were soon heading for the Nature Trail.

Flopsy was surprised to discover just how many wild flowers Babbie had learned—Babbie loved everything in the out of doors. Nothing pleased her better than to walk close beside Miss Peggy, the nature counsellor, for Miss Peggy knew the notes of the birds, knew each tree, knew the ferns, butterflies and all the wild flowers. Nothing thrilled Babbie more than to have Miss Peggy stop, and remove her field glasses from their case and say, "Babbie, would you like to see the blue grosbeak singing up there on the tip-top of that tree?"

On this Sunday afternoon as the two girls walked along the Nature Trail, Babbie was absorbed in the things about her, but Flopsy had no thought or interest for anything but the night's entertainment.

"I'll borrow all the beads and bracelets in camp. Several of the girls have brought up Indian costumes for a masquerade. I'll get all their beads and

I could even use curtain rings, and I'll make a crown—and—" Flopsy chattered gaily.

"Look, Flopsy, here is an 'interrupted fern.' Oh, I am so happy, because I wanted one. I am going to make a fern book." Babbie was far more thrilled in her discovery than in the magnificence of the Queen of Sheba.

"And I'll make long earrings! I'll use the curtain which is on the couch in the Nature Museum for a train and of course I'll have a specter (she meant a 'scepter') in my hand—or should I have a palm leaf—*which!*" Flopsy was suddenly deeply concerned.

"A monarch butterfly!" Babbie cried in delight, pointing just ahead of them.

"No. I won't hold a Monarch butterfly in my hand even if I am a Monarch."

Babbie looked puzzled. What was Flopsy talking about?

"I am talking about what I am going to wear tonight, Babbie," Flopsy explained, with what she felt to be a good deal of patience. "I've got to look like the Queen of Sheba, haven't I? It wouldn't be respectful to the Bible if I didn't try very hard to look just the way she is described, would it?" she asked a little piously. "Now, I'll help you plan your costume as Rachel. But first tell me, do you think the Queen of Sheba was dressed anything like Cleopatra? I've seen pictures of Cleopatra but I think it would be a little too snappy if I wore nothing much but a tiger rug."

"Where would you get a tiger rug?" Babbie asked as she leaned over to examine a flower. "They haven't one in camp."

Flopsy giggled. "That's right. There isn't one in camp. Anyway, I think it was a leopard skin."

"And they haven't a leopard skin either," Babbie said, "and this is a hop clover, Flopsy."

"Listen, Babbie, those flowers are to be there tomorrow, and *tonight's*, tonight!"

"All right," Babbie agreed good-naturedly. "Let's talk about tonight. But what can I do about Rachel? I can't remember just who she was."

"When we get to Merrie Northland, I'll find out about her, for you. Jacob loved her very much and served seven years for her. I remember *that*. I'll always love the old Bible stories. Mother knows the Bible from end to end."

"Until we get to Merrie Northland, can I notice flowers and ferns, then? I promise to talk about the Queen of Sheba and Rachel all the rest of the afternoon if you like."

Merrie Northland was at the end of the trail, a lovely stretch of meadow land, down by the lake's edge, fringed with a white sandy beach. The girls had called it "Merrie Northland" because it was north of the camp, and because it was there they had held many merry picnics. There were two huge rock fireplaces, with poles arranged for hanging kettles and pots when suppers were to be cooked out of doors.

"It will seem queer—going back!" Flopsy drew designs in the sand with a twig. "I can't imagine summer's *ending!*"

"But it will," Babbie said with a faint sigh. "I never was so happy."

"You will come here again, I bet, next summer. Some day, you will get your second degree—and

your third. Your—well, Captain David Stewart will be your brother then—and he will send you. I'll never come again," Flopsy's voice had a faint quiver to it. "My family couldn't afford it."

"Let's talk about *tonight*, Flopsy," Babbie changed the subject abruptly. "You're going to be the Queen of Sheba. I'll tell you what! Brush your hair out until it's fluffy. It will be beautiful—almost like a halo."

"I like your hair better. It always reminds me of so many people in books— Sometimes, you make me think of the lovely Rebecca in *Ivanhoe*. But I think Rachel is just the part for you."

The girls left enough time so that they might wander leisurely back to camp. Now that the matter of the costumes for the tableaux had been more or less settled—Flopsy was as interested, for the moment, in wild flowers and ferns as Babbie herself.

Sunday night suppers were quite different from those of week nights. There were no places set at the tables. But on them was a pile of paper plates, glasses, and knives, several pitchers of milk, dishes of jam, cheese, pickles, marmalade and peanut butter, plates of bread, crackers and cake. Each girl took her regular place and helped herself in cafeteria style. Jim, the chef, and his staff in the kitchen, had a rest Sunday night.

"Vespers," Miss West announced, "will be at seven-thirty in the bungalow. And Tinkerbelle has prepared some Bible pictures for us."

From six until seven-thirty, the inmates of Tinkerbelle were quietly and mysteriously busy. While many of the girls were rowing or paddling up and down in front of the camp limits, the five Tinkerbelle girls

and their counsellor prepared and rehearsed their parts.

The vesper services were simple and lovely. The girls arranged themselves on the floor of the wide bungalow porch. The porch faced the west, where the sun was slowly going down in all its glory. Way down below them was the lake like a gleaming highly polished silver platter.

Miss Bobby went into the bungalow and played the piano for their hymns, and through the broad open windows drifted the simple chords.

"The Tinkerbells" were on the small stage in the bungalow, all dressed and quite "quivery" with excitement. The vesper hymn, Miss West said, would be sung after the tableaux, the very last thing. When the girls had sung for half an hour, they trooped into the bungalow, and waited for the curtain to be drawn and the tableaux to be shown. Miss Lindy had prepared a story for each picture, and then she read from the Bible the very verse the picture represented. The first one was the story of Sarah and Hagar. After Miss Lindy had finished telling the story, she read Sarah's command to Abraham from the Bible:

"Wherefore she said unto Abraham, 'Cast out this bondswoman and her son: for the son of this bondswoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac. . . . And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread, and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away.'"

Marcella Todd was surprisingly good as Hagar. Her expression was so grave, so tragic, that as she held her baby in one arm and the water bottle on her

shoulder, one could imagine that she realized what she was facing and what her baby was facing as well. Marcella Todd had been very painstaking in every detail, and the girls saw a side of her that they had never seen before. Marcella Todd never did anything lightly.

There was a faint smile on many faces when Tommy appeared as Rebekah, for try as Tommy would, she could not keep her face straight. When Miss Lindy read the description of Rebekah, that "she was very fair to look upon," Tommy's water pitcher on her shoulder wobbled very suspiciously! Tommy, to control her face, looked skyward—very intently—so intently in fact that Miss Lindy had the curtain drawn very hastily.

"And when the Queen of Sheba heard the fame of Solomon she came to Jerusalem with a very great train, with camels, that bear spices and very much gold and precious stones—"

And there she was! The Queen of Sheba! The Queen of Sheba in all her glory. There wasn't a trinket, bracelet, or curtain ring in camp that was not upon her—on her neck, her arms, and on the sandals on her bare feet. A magnificent crown, painted with gold, and studded with emeralds and rubies, was upon her head. Her train was a literal interpretation, for it was not crowds of servitors and courtiers, but a long train which hung from her shoulders made out of the curtain from the Nature Museum! In one hand she held a huge fan, which on weekdays was a green Fuller brush from Miss West's office; in the other hand, a long scepter, entwined with ground pine. This Queen of Sheba would certainly have, by her majesty and magnifi-



The Queen of Sheba in all her glory.

cence, swept everything before her. Her red-brown hair was like so much burnished copper as it gleamed ruddy, as the flaming rays of the setting sun caught and held it. Flopsy Moore at that minute was not taking the part of the Queen of Sheba; she *was* the Queen of Sheba, sweeping on in all her glory and splendor to King Solomon!

Miss Lindy was quite thrilled and very proud as she pulled the curtain that ended the brief but magnificent reign of Flopsy Moore, Queen of Sheba!

Once again Marcella Todd surprised them all when, as Ruth, she knelt devotedly at the feet of Naomi. Betty Graham was very sweet as Naomi, but there was something startling, a depth of feeling, a sincerity, even a nobleness in Marcella Todd's face, as she looked up into the face of her "mother-in-law" and made that beautiful promise of faithfulness and loyalty:

"For whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God, my God."

Babbie dreaded the moment when she was to appear alone before the whole camp of girls and counsellors! She stood, trembling just a little, and shy as she waited. Flopsy had arranged her costume. Over her dark hair was a scarlet and yellow scarf, and about her head and over the scarf, was a string of gold beads—and by pinning several other scarfs together, Flopsy had made her robe. On her feet were gold sandals.

Babbie stood at last before them—a shy, shrinking, but wholly lovely Rachel.

"And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and

they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.”

The vision of this gentle, timid Rachel with her delicate form and face, her raven hair, and soft black eyes, was so lovely that it did seem as though to serve seven years for her love would seem like a few days.

The drawing of the curtain was followed by a hush—a Sabbath twilight peace. Softly the girls sang the vesper hymn and then trailed off quietly to their shacks—and to sweet sleep.

Chapter Nine

Letters and a Canoe Test

THE next day, Flopsy was trying to write a letter to her father and mother during rest hour. Although every girl in camp was compelled to keep quiet during this period, and there were no distracting noises to make letter writing difficult, there were too often distracting sights. For instance at this moment Tommy Adams was reading a book in manner and position so original and unusual that it could not be overlooked. She had laid the book on the floor and was lying across her cot on her stomach. With her curls tumbling down over her face like a sheep dog, she was reading her book, turning its pages as though this was the most natural way in the world to read.

Flopsy lay on her cot watching her, ready at any second to giggle, but she dared not. She knew right well Miss Lindy or Marcella Todd would jump "right down her neck" if she did. She deliberately turned her back on this idiotic sight and re-read her father's last letter. She smothered a laugh with her hand as she did so. She had written home that second day that "Babbie had sung and played cowboy songs and every (she had left out the word 'one') had gone simply wild and crazy over her." Her father had promptly answered:

MY DARLING DAUGHTER:

I suppose it's too much to ask in the midst of your various activities to take time to make life simpler for your father. Since you must write in code, he craves the key to it. It would make it easier to decipher your letters. However, I have discovered all by myself that a long word beginning with an "M" and with a row of bumps, and ending in "ous" is *marvellous!* And, that another long word starting with a "G" and more of these bumps, and ending like the first with "ous" is *gorgeous*.

I must say, Miss West ought not to tolerate *wild* and crazy *everys* in camp, they should be chained up while Babbie is playing and singing.

She picked up her pad and began scribbling off a letter, trying her best to keep her mind on what she was doing and off Tommy, whose curls were now only a foot above her book. It would seem that any moment now the stillness of the camp would be broken by a terrific bump and thump.

DARLINGEST MOTHER AND FATHER:

Last night, I was the Queen of Sheba and *everyone* (she underlined this last), thought I was wonderful—

A long drawn sigh from Tommy, made her turn her head. She broke off her writing for the moment. Tommy wanted to call attention to the fact that this way of reading a book was not as easy as it might be. Flopsy put her hand over her mouth again to keep from laughing outright. Marcella Todd's warning look stopped her. She went back to her letter—it had to be written. Without again referring to her first statement she rushed on to another thought.

I am going to take a canoe test tomorrow. It's all set. So, I can go on the over-night canoe trip. Babbie looks—muuuuuuous and guuuuous on her horse (you know what those words are, daddy).

The shrill whistle that ended rest hour, tore through the air over the camp. The unnatural quiet was instantly shattered into a thousand bits. Flopsy ended her letter in a helter-skelter, hit-or-miss rush.

Mr. Moore answered by return mail.

It's bad enough having wild and crazy everys about the camp but I cannot bear to think that my only daughter has gone crazy, too. I am trying to comfort your mother and assure her perhaps you stayed out in the sun a bit too long. What happened just before you thought you were the Queen of Sheba? Your mother and I are waiting with intense interest. In the meantime, my dear child, will you please wear a hat when you are in the sun—

Flopsy giggled when she read this, and then drew a heavy sigh. She wished she did not have to write letters in camp, she wished people could know things without writing. For instance, she had been meaning ever since she got to camp to write Alice and Fleurette and tell them about "being good sports" and "good campers"—they ought to hear about it—it would be good for them. She wanted them to know that you must cheer people on and never discourage them. You must take teasing "on the chin"—you mustn't complain about things. She felt that her two friends would be helped vastly by this new point of view. But she had never got around to sending off this valuable information.

Flopsy had taken the first part of her canoe test,

with Miss Hilton "timing" her from the dock. She had not been too sure about it, but to her delight, she found it was just "pie" to swim about for fifteen minutes without touching anything.

The next day she got into her bathing suit and put her camp clothes over it. Her shack mates sat around and watched her, helping her and advising her. She felt like a queen setting off for her coronation with the girls as her ladies-in-waiting. Marcella Todd was nice and seemed determined that Flopsy should win. She offered Flopsy her middy because it was bigger and would be easier to get out of in the water. Betty Graham gave her an old pair of sneakers—so that *if* Flopsy should drop them—it wouldn't be much loss. But she was warned not to drop them—she **MUST** bring them in.

Flopsy swaggered down to the dock with her shack mates in her wake. She looked about and felt very important as she noted that about half the camp was there waiting to watch and cheer her. Miss Bobby, the swimming instructor, was the one to take her out.

"Up in the bow for you, Flopsy!" Miss Bobby ordered.

And Flopsy, with pounding heart, did as she was told. She grinned and waved to the audience on the shore, like a circus performer about to perform a dazzling feat. Miss Bobby, without any more ado, struck out and the canoe headed for the opposite shore for some hundred yards. Then abruptly she turned the canoe about and they paddled up and down and up and down in front of the camp. Miss Bobby kept talking, trying to distract Flopsy's attention.

"Now, remember this, Flopsy," she was speaking

as though giving simple directions and as though there was no question of a canoe test, "remember, that when you are a bow paddler on a canoe trip, you are just as important as the stern paddler. Especially, if we go up the Little Shaded River, as we are planning. It is very narrow and winding and full of snags. You will be in a position to see what is coming before the stern paddler. You will be the pilot. Never, never say, 'Look! Look!' and then point. But do something and do it quickly—just as I am going to do at this minute." And she had dumped Flopsy into the water.

Miss Bobby struck out for the shore. The canoe was upside down and the paddles were floating off, many yards apart. Flopsy was confused, rattled. She started for the canoe which even in a minute had got beyond her reach.

The girls had never seen Marcella Todd so excited. She cupped her hands and made a megaphone of them and shouted frantically, "Get your paddles! PADDLES! PADDLES!"

Hardly knowing what she was doing, Flopsy struck for the paddles which were floating farther and farther away. For the next few minutes the girls shouted directions. Flopsy, cheered by their loyalty, was keenly alive and alert to the situation. Their interest was intoxicating. She must put on a good show—and she did! She brought the paddles back to the canoe. And then she hung to the side of it and ripped off Marcella Todd's middy, and waved it over her head like a flag and dropped it into the canoe. Next came her bloomers. She waved them around in the air and stretched them out so that they looked like a pair of pants. These too,

went into the canoe, as the girls shouted with laughter. She wound her legs about the stern of the canoe and with her feet in the air, tore off her socks and sneakers. To the horror of her audience they noticed that she was about to nonchalantly drop her shoes and socks to the bottom of the lake—a lifetime's bad habit was about to be her undoing. Her mother had always been in despair at the way she dropped her shoes and stockings on the floor wherever she took them off.

“YOUR SNEAKS! HOLD THEM, HOLD THEM!” Marcella Todd and Babbie shrieked wildly. Oh, she mustn't fail now! She mustn't! And she didn't. Although the sneakers had slipped from her hands, she made a dive for them and caught them! It was over! In triumph, she pushed the canoe ahead of her to the dock. A roar of approval greeted her as she stood up on the shore again. They burst into song.

Flopsy, Flopsy, here's to you!
You're a good sport through and through.
And know what you can do—
YOU BET—WE DO!

The song fell sweet, very sweet upon her ears. She mustn't look puffed up, however; she mustn't swagger about. Pleased as she was with herself, she was also a little tired and in her heart she knew it had not been easy.

A short time later, Flopsy went to Tinkerbelle looking for Babbie. In the general confusion after the canoe test she had lost track of her. As Flopsy stood in the doorway, she saw Marcella Todd and Miss Lindy. Marcella Todd was talking very seri-

ously and earnestly. Neither of them had heard her.

"Oh, Miss Lindy, I do try to think Tommy and Flopsy are funny but I can't, I can't. I simply can't laugh at them as the other girls do. They do such *silly* things! I wish I thought they were funny. I want to be a good sport and a good camper—but I can't laugh at *silly* things," she repeated emphatically. "Now, some of the girls thought Flopsy was funny when she was doing the canoe test, but I did not. I thought she was a good sport. I wanted her to pass it. I couldn't laugh—I simply couldn't!" Her tone was tragic.

"My dear child," Miss Lindy said softly, "my dear Marcella Todd, you are not used to girls are you? You are an only child aren't you?"

"Yes, I have only my mother and father for friends. I have a private tutor, you know. My daddy, who is a doctor, takes me on his rounds. I always sit in the automobile while he is in the house, reading a book. We always talk about serious things. I think people can't learn too soon how really serious life is."

Miss Lindy felt that this last comment was quoted. They were her parents' words.

"I can like Flopsy and Tommy—but I simply can't laugh at them!" Marcella Todd wailed. "I can't, Miss Lindy!"

Flopsy turned and fled. She ran rather blindly down towards the water's edge. She threw herself into a hammock which was hung between two birches. She felt so silly and stupid, so foolish. But she was touched by Marcella Todd's saying that she liked her. She lay very still, her face somber. This was the first, and last, shadowed moment in camp.

"Flopsy! Flopsy!" It was Babbie's voice eager and excited.

Flopsy sat up and answered her. At the sight of Flopsy's sad expression Babbie exclaimed, "Why, what is it? Something has happened! Tell me, please!"

Flopsy told her—sweetly, gently, and without complaint. She had felt hurt, but she felt it wasn't this camp spirit they were always talking about to say so. Babbie's eyes flashed. She was angry—and it was startling to see Babbie angry—but it was comforting. Her indignation and loyalty were very sweet.

"You know, Babbie, I guess I am a goose. Why should I care if Marcella Todd doesn't think I am funny? Maybe I am not. Maybe, I am *silly*. Anyway, Marcella Todd *was* a good sport this morning, she helped me in my canoe test, she reminded me about the paddles and my socks. She says she likes me, too," Flopsy added with an air of great generosity.

"Well—" Babbie drawled in a dubious fashion, "I am not sure I'll like her. You and Tommy have given us so much fun. And she's hurt your feelings lots and lots of times."

"Don't let's tell Tommy." Flopsy was still holding her noble pose. "It might hurt her feelings, too."

"It would not," Babbie said sensibly. "She wouldn't think a thing about it. She'd only say Marcella Todd was cuckoo. You know Tommy—she's blunt!"

"Did you want to tell me something, or show me something?" Flopsy asked sweetly, now soothed and

herself again. "You came running as though you had something on your mind."

"Oh I did!" Babbie's eyes were bright. "Molly wants to tell you something. She asked me to find you. Hi there! Here we are!" She cupped her hands to her mouth and called her sister.

Flopsy sat bolt upright in the hammock, tingling with interest and expectancy. Something in Babbie's manner suggested that this was going to be important.

"Well, here you are!" Miss Hilton smiled down at Flopsy as she came to them. "Stay right where you are and I'll sit on this log. It is quiet and secluded here. And what I have to tell is for just us three."

Flopsy's eyes were widening now with surprise. What could it be? Something nice, at least, because Molly Hilton was radiating happiness.

"Two things, Flopsy!" she began as she seated herself. "The first is for you alone. The other thing I have to tell is for the three of us to share. For a second I forgot the first. Here it is. Miss West just told me that she is planning an over-night canoe trip in a few days and she wants you to go."

"Oh, Miss Hilton!" Flopsy sprang to her feet. "Oh, how wonderful! I'll love it! I could hug some one."

"Please do!" and she caught her former pupil in her arms. "You funny child! I must be 'Miss Hilton' to you always. I suppose when all the world calls me Mrs. Stewart, you will still call me—"

"Miss Hilton!" Flopsy nodded. "Always and forever."

"Aren't you going to ask me what else I have to

tell you? Something the three of us have to share? The canoe trip, you see, leaves Babbie and me out—”

“Oh—why?” Flopsy’s face fell.

“Well, you know the camp rules. Babbie isn’t a good enough swimmer. And, I—well—I want to be here to get a letter—” and to Flopsy’s amazement she blushed furiously.

“She gets a letter *every* day from David,” Babbie explained. “Every day. And she’d miss it if she were not here in the morning.”

“Oh not as bad as that!” Miss Hilton protested, her face now flaming. “Oh, I could wait a few hours—but well, you see so many important things are in my letters these days. So many things to be decided.”

Flopsy eyed her former teacher solemnly and with great curiosity. This was being in love, she supposed. It didn’t seem possible. Would she ever wait for a letter? Could she ever give up an over-night canoe trip for a sweetheart? It was amazing. But, at the same time, a little thrilling.

“Flopsy!” Miss Hilton spoke quickly, before another comment could be made. “Flopsy, I have a very special favor to ask of you.” She took Flopsy’s face between her hands and looked down into the puzzled countenance with a smile.

“Oh—what?” Flopsy’s eyes widened.

“Will you please be one of the bridesmaids at my wedding?”

“A—a—*bridesmaid!*” Flopsy gasped. She could scarcely believe her ears. She was dumbfounded. But at the same time she began to swell with pride.

“Yes, one of my bridesmaids. I want you and Alice Holt. Babbie is to be my maid of honor. Will you?”

"*Will* I? Oh I'd love it, I'd adore it! It would be marvelous, wonderful—it would be gorgeous!" For a passing second she felt a pang of jealousy that she must share this startling honor with Alice. Then it melted away. "Oh Miss Hilton!" she threw her arms about her former teacher's neck. "I am thrilled right down to my toes."

"Now Flopsy, let us sit down again and talk." Miss Hilton, Babbie and Flopsy sat down by the water's edge. "We were speaking of letters a few minutes ago," she dug down into a pocket. "This is a very special one. I received it several weeks ago."

"Who do you reckon it's from?" Babbie teased. She was thrilled as Flopsy at this minute although she had been in on this secret for weeks.

"Hush up, you saucy child!" Miss Hilton reproved with a smile. "Yes, it *is* from David. And it is the letter that gave me the very happy idea to have Alice and Flopsy as bridesmaids. You see, he had taken a long, long trip and went to call upon our Great-great-Aunt Clarissa Ames. It is a story book tale he wrote me of that visit. Do you want me to read the part you are in?" She turned to Flopsy.

"That *I* am in?" Flopsy gasped.

"Yes, you and Alice. Let me find it." Miss Hilton turned over the pages of the letter. "Here, is about where it starts—"

—Your lovely old aunt is no bigger than a pint of peanuts, and weighs no more than a feather. You should have seen her faithful butler carry her down to the dining room. He's an old darkey called "Uncle Washington" and although he must be nearly seventy he picked up Aunt Clarissa as though she were a tiny

baby. When I looked at that beautiful little old lady of eighty-six—I had a happy vision of our golden wedding. Beauty must run in the family and I could see—

Molly Hilton broke off suddenly. The color raced to the roots of her hair.

Like Alice in Wonderland, Flopsy thought to herself—“It’s getting curiouser and curiouser—”

“I don’t think I’ll read any more of this letter, because I don’t know just where David is going to write something foolish. I’d better tell you. It was a very charming meal he had with my old aunt. The table was beautiful with its candelabra and rare old silver. And Aunt Clarissa looked like a little old princess. When he told her that, she smiled in a curious way, and said he was very discerning and very nearly right. Wasn’t that strange? He told her all about us—Babbie, my mother, the ranch—and then my year and a half at School Number Nine. And she listened very intently to his story of how he met you and Alice and what it all meant to me. Then she gave an order—an order that was not to be denied. This little red-head and Alice were to be my bridesmaids—it would be charming and altogether fitting. Why, she even has an idea of what you shall wear. A very lovely and romantic idea. She didn’t tell David what it was—she will write me about it—”

There was a breathless silence. Flopsy drew a long deep breath. It was too much for her—she had no words. A whistle tore through the camp, followed by a scamper of dozens of feet and the shouts of the girls. Flopsy blinked and shook herself, for

a few minutes she had completely forgotten where she was—she had been in a rosy day dream.

All through lunch she was strangely silent. The spell of that moment by the water's edge hung over her for hours. It was not completely broken until she heard about the plans for the canoe trip that evening. Miss West stood up at her place at the table and announced them. Four counsellors were to go, Miss Lindy, Miss Joe, Miss Bobby and Miss Peggy. Then she read the names of the eight girls. Flopsy's heart was in her mouth. One by one they were mentioned and Flopsy's name came last. For a few awful seconds she thought Miss Hilton had made a mistake and that she was not to go after all. Most of the girls were seniors and expert paddlers. Tommy was the only girl from her shack. Thank goodness, Tommy was going! Yes, and thank goodness about Mandy Marshall too—Mandy was the red-haired girl in "Pine Cradle," that Marcella Todd had mistaken her for that first day. In the beginning, Flopsy had not liked Mandy, not at all. Some of the girls had insisted that they looked alike and Flopsy had stared at her in a very unfriendly way. She decided that *her* hair was nowhere near as fiery as Mandy's, nor had she a pug nose, and Mandy certainly had a *million* more freckles than she had! But Mandy was celebrated as the biggest giggler in camp and for being unfailingly good-natured. Flopsy liked her from the first moment that Mandy expressed herself on this so-called resemblance. She said that she wished she were only half as pretty as Flopsy and that she knew she was as homely as a mud fence. Flopsy warmed to her at once.

During rest hour the next day, Flopsy began the

most scrambled, mixed-up letter she had ever written home and some of the preceding ones had been pretty complicated! She had to tell Miss Hilton's NEWS, and she had to tell about the canoe trip. She read over her last sentence: "Miss Hilton says she is going to be married in a church where David's mother and father were married two hundred and fifty years ago. And when we start on our trip Miss West is going to take moving pictures of us."

"Oh nuts!" she groaned and tossed the letter away. The church was two hundred and fifty years old—they were not married when it was built! Miss Hilton had said she was going to write her mother—and maybe she had better let her do it! She was happy for the first time that silence was imposed upon them—for she wanted to dream over these plans. She curled up in a heap and pulled a blanket over her head. She turned her back upon her shack mates. For once she didn't care what antics Tommy might be up to.

Early the next morning right after breakfast, Miss Bobby's voice tore through the camp as she roared into a megaphone, "DOWN TO THE DOCK IMMEDIATELY—ALL CANOERS!"

The get-away was every bit as exciting as though they were embarking for the South Pole. Miss West was there with her movie camera, and as Flopsy heard its click she felt for all the world like Admiral Byrd. Four canoes in a single line loaded with pots, pans, provisions, ponchos, and with their human cargo of four counsellors and eight girls headed down the lake. Flopsy was overjoyed that she was given the bow position in Miss Lindy's canoe. Billy Wilson, a girl of seventeen, was their passenger—

Billy had been on so many trips that it was no novelty to her to paddle, and she willingly let Flopsy take her place.

The sky was radiantly blue and the lake had enough "surf" to make the paddling exciting. Until they reached Antwerp, a distance of five miles, they paddled in unison, and sang one song after another. There old Mr. Brown met them and helped them to "port" their canoes over to the Little Shaded River—a distance of only a few hundred yards. By the side of this beautiful little stream they ate their first meal. This they had brought with them, for they did not want to take time to cook—as they had eighteen miles of paddling up stream ahead of them before they reached their destination. They hurried through this meal eager to be on their way. An hour later they stopped at a sandy beach and had a long swimming period. Then they were off again.

Chapter Ten

An Over-Night Canoe Trip

LOOK what's here! Look!" Flopsy sputtered after they had twisted back and forth on themselves a dozen times on the stream. "Look!"

Miss Lindy was about to remind her of Miss Bobby's warning: "Don't shout '*Look!*' *Do something!*" when Miss Lindy suddenly saw what Flopsy saw! Tommy was out of her canoe, perched high and dry on a fallen tree which stretched almost across the stream, her canoe was wedged between its branches. Behind her canoe was the second with Miss Peggy, and this one was trying to get around Tommy's, but in the narrow space there was little room and the rushing waters were bent on turning the canoe down stream instead of up. Every one was working furiously like a lot of beavers on a dam, but not as quietly—for there was a general hubbub.

"Oh, what a traffic jam! We ought to blow our horn." Flopsy giggled, but she used all her strength to keep her canoe from turning around and going back to Antwerp. "Worse than those crazy horses," she gasped to herself. "They won't do what you want."

"Look out, Tommy! You will land us in the

water!" Tommy was kicking now at the bow of her canoe as well as pushing it off with her paddle.

"Where are *you* going?" Billy Wilson shouted, as Miss Peggy's canoe headed down stream and aimed right at Flopsy's.

"Foolish question 1,000,000!" shouted Mary Ellen. "Keep your canoe out of my way!"

Just then the fourth canoe appeared, and all four of them were now cluttered up in one narrow hair-pin curve, with the whirling water insistent upon turning them down stream—or into a snag.

"Say, Tommy, have a heart," for Tommy was fairly savage as she tried to get out of the snarl she was in.

"Listen, get out of our way. We have to have room to back out of this mess. Now back up, please." Tommy held her hand up like a traffic officer. "Back up and no passing on a curve." Tommy stepped into her canoe again, and gave one more violent shove. The canoe rocked this way and that and every one expected to land sprawling in the water.

"I can't keep this canoe away from this old snag any longer," Flopsy wailed. She was gritting her teeth, and using all her might and main to keep her canoe headed up stream.

"Mandy!" roared Miss Bobby, "if you don't stop giggling, I'll crown you with my paddle."

Mandy, now fairly hysterical, was making only feeble efforts to paddle. "My stomach aches!" she gasped weakly.

An epidemic of giggles and snickers broke out and the canoes got into a worse jam than ever.

"Well, let's just go down stream. We might just

as well," Miss Joe said calmly. "We better give it all up. It's too bad, because we are nearly at the sandy beach where I expected we'd have supper."

This promptly sobered everybody. Flopsy managed to get her canoe through the narrow passage, past Tommy's canoe. With her departure, there was room left for Tommy's canoe and she quickly followed in Flopsy's wake.

Flopsy could hear an uproar behind her; evidently one of the last canoes was getting all snarled up into *something*.

"Don't stop, Flopsy, don't turn around. You've done very well, so far." Miss Lindy turned her head to see what the trouble was. "Don't turn around, but something tells me that Mandy has landed her canoe into that same tree that Tommy discovered. They will have a rare time if she has. She's still giggling her head off!"

"We will get there first," Flopsy boasted gleefully. "We will make the first landing!" And Flopsy made good her boast, for within the next half hour, her canoe glided up to a very beautiful silver white sandy beach.

No weary world-wide wanderers could have been more happy at the sight of their port—their haven—than those girls. They had paddled steadily for hours, and the last hour had been a hard, hard pull.

Flopsy stepped out of her canoe with scarcely less feeling of triumph than the Pilgrims must have felt as they landed on Plymouth Rock!

"Land at last!" she shouted. She was the first to step upon this "Land" and that added to her elation.

After the canoes had been pulled upon the shore,

and unloaded, the one question in every one's mind—on every one's tongue was—"When-do-we-eat?"

"Some one's got to go to that farmhouse over there for milk and eggs—some one else must gather wood for a fire—" Miss Joe was ordering and di-



viding the girls up in twos and threes for various tasks.

Flopsy and Tommy insisted upon going to the farm. Miss Joe looked at them doubtfully.

"You are a bad combination to send for eggs. Let it steady your mirth, Tommy, to realize that ten starving people will be ready to annihilate you if

you break those eggs. Perhaps Flopsy better carry them—although I haven't any too much faith in her."

Miss Joe gave them the money and told them to "be gone." Each girl had a pail—one for milk and the other for eggs. With many misgivings, Miss Joe stood looking after their rapidly retreating figures.

"Billy Wilson—please stop what you are doing and go after those two and help them—" Billy flew— It interested her far more than peeling potatoes.

The beach was low and lay beneath a steep embankment covered with underbrush. One had to climb up through a snarl of branches before she came to the broad meadow that stretched far off to the farm house. It was the descent from that meadow that worried Miss Joe.

Billy and Tommy carried back the milk—a quart and a half each. Flopsy was carrying two dozen eggs.

"I'll go down this place first," Flopsy announced, as they were about to climb down the meadow to the beach. "It will be better." She didn't explain *why* she thought it would be better—because she didn't know.

There was practically no path—they were making their way down through a tangle of underbrush.

"I think we are climbing down what was once a brook—it is all rocky and slimy and just a little wet," Flopsy shouted back to the other two. She held her pail of eggs high over her head; she was far more intent on keeping her eyes on it than on where her feet were stepping. With one hand she was pushing back branches which got in her way, hit her face, and caught her hair.

Billy and Tommy were just behind and quite

often she would let fly a branch into Tommy's face, which made her squeal with laughter, even as she protested.

Flopsy put her foot down on a smooth slimy moss-covered rock—her ankle turned—and down she crashed through a mass of branches. She let out a feeble squeal of horror and felt a momentary pang of agony. Tommy, right at her heels, fell over her as she lay sprawled upon the rocks—there she sat down with a wallop on Flopsy's free foot—the one that was not turned under. Both girls were giggling hysterically. Flopsy's egg pail had caught on a branch and was wobbling in a perilous position just above her head. Tommy had splashed milk in all directions—the leaves were glistening with drops of "milky dew."

Billy caught up to them and she, too, succumbed to weak, hopeless giggles.

"Flopsy, grab that egg pail, for the love of Mike!"

Flopsy stretched up and pulled it off the branch, just in time to save herself from returning to the beach looking like an animated dish of scrambled eggs.

"I can't stand up!" Flopsy groaned. "My ankle's broken."

"Well if it is, we will simply have to shoot you and leave you here. There is no earthly way to carry you along with this milk and these eggs. Provisions must be gotten to the expedition," Billy suggested quite serenely.

"Supposing I had spilled this milk all over you and supposing those eggs had crashed all over you—you'd have been an egg-nog," Tommy squeaked—she was far too weak to talk coherently.

"Shut up!" Billy retorted inelegantly. "We have

got to go on—and we never will as long as you two lie there giggling. Try standing up, Flopsy.”

Flopsy pulled herself to her feet. She had laughed and giggled until she could not possibly let forth another little squeak.

“Oh, I’ll manage it *somehow*,” Flopsy said nobly—half in jest and wholly in earnest. Her foot *did* hurt, but not enough to prevent her using it.

By the time they reached the beach again, a roaring fire had been made. It was letting out a long, straight streak of smoke—up—and up—toward the sky. What a heavenly smell! Is there any fragrance sweeter than that of a wood fire out in the open? The tiny dry twigs in it crackled and snapped. Flopsy stood spell-bound, sniffing and delighting in the noise of the burning wood in her ears.

“Here you are!” There was a shout of welcome. “Eggs, milk and all! You’ve given us a bad fifteen minutes. We never expected to see the milk and eggs both. We heard Tommy giggling in the distance.”

Flopsy was eager to help get the meal—it was her first opportunity really to take part in the cooking of a big meal in the open. She joined the girls who were peeling potatoes; their job, however, was nearly finished.

Miss Bobby stood watching them a few minutes, and then she said dryly, “There’s one girl who has never peeled a potato before in her life. Flops, have you ever peeled a potato before?”

Flopsy was startled, and even a little hurt. What was there to peeling a potato? You had a knife and a potato, and there was no skill required—you just got the skin off!

“If you ask me, I’d say you were whittling that

potato," Miss Bobby commented—in a reflective fashion. "And it's just as well that most of them were peeled before you arrived."

"Please let me cream the potatoes," Flopsy begged. "I've watched mother do it a million times, and I know I can." Flopsy was perfectly happy. She was given the salt, pepper, flour, butter and milk. They had brought a huge pail to cook the potatoes. Besides creamed potatoes, they were to have a big frying pan of bacon—two fried eggs apiece, a cup of coffee—and if they wished, a glass of milk. For dessert there were pears and doughnuts. Oh, what a repast! Surely a banquet for a queen—and a dozen queens at that!

"Oh, I am weak! When do we eat?" Tommy groaned.

Flopsy's face was a fiery red. A combination of a day on the water, a hot fire, and exciting work, had made her look like a boiled lobster. She had finished her potatoes and with a happy but weary gesture, she tossed away the warm wet curls from her flaming face. Her hair was standing up on end about her crimson countenance.

"Instead of being the bridesmaid at the wedding, you look more like the boiled lobster for the salad!" some one said.

"Oh, dear!" Flopsy sighed. "Do I look awful?" She didn't care, she was too happy and content. Paper plates, paper napkins, the knives and forks were distributed, and Miss Bobby and Miss Joe served the meal, piling up each plate just as high as it was safe. The girls flopped down just where it was easiest—and ate and ate. They hardly said a word at first; they were too ravenously hungry to

care about anything but food. At last, the "Ahs" and "Ohs" came. Oh, what food! Oh, what potatoes! Flopsy was a wonder! She was radiant—not only literally—but spiritually. She had never had more satisfaction from any accomplishment in her life—probably, because it was one no one would have expected of her! Who among her relatives or friends would think of her as a good cook? They would have laughed uproariously at the idea. It was the novelty of it that had inspired her—cooking in the open was an adventure new and exciting!

After the girls had eaten everything but the paper plates, they lay stretched out on the sandy beach like a lot of little puppies that had stuffed themselves until they couldn't move.

"Girls, we must make our beds before it grows dark—that's a hard and fast rule. We will sleep up in the meadow, so our packs must be carried there now. After we have made them, we can sit here by the fire and sing. Mandy's brought her 'uke' along. We will have a regular camp fire evening. Anyone who wants can hike over with Miss Peggy and Miss Lindy to Madrid—"

Flopsy was disgusted with the idea of anyone's hiking anywhere— Goodness, hadn't they had enough exercise for one day? She wanted every one to sit cosily about the fire and sing. She was relieved to see that only three girls volunteered to go. Well, let them! There were seven people still to sit by the fire and sing.

The girls carried their packs up the embankment, through the underbrush, falling over themselves as they giggled their way up to the meadow.

"Flopsy, I've got an idea. Let's Tommy, you and

me sleep on one poncho. We can talk about stars until we go to sleep. It's going to be a gorgeous night," Mandy suggested. Mandy hated making up her bed—she'd have preferred to share another's.

"Okay," Tommy agreed good-naturedly. "You can sleep on my poncho—as long as I don't sleep in the middle."

"We will let Flopsy sleep in the middle—so she can talk to both of us—" Mandy hastened to say.

Flopsy didn't seem to have much to say about it. The bed upon which Flopsy, Mandy and Tommy were to sleep had to be made width-ways of the poncho—instead of length-ways.

"How will we ever stretch our feet out?" Flopsy asked dubiously.

"We can't—we will have to curl up," Mandy giggled. "And curl up *plenty!*"

The girls were now calling for Mandy and her "uke." The sun had set and a beautiful twilight had followed in its wake. A fragrant twilight, so soft and lovely that it almost hurt!

Mandy dropped down on the sand by the fire—and strummed at her ukelele. The notes of *Love's Old Sweet Song* sounded. And softly the girls sang one song after another.

Flopsy lay back on the sand singing and looking up fascinated and enthralled by the afterglow in the gorgeous summer sky. What a perfect ending to a perfect day! Flopsy felt sentimental. In the deepening light the songs, old tender sentimental ballads, drifted over the river, *In the Gloaming*, *The End of a Perfect Day*, *I Love You Truly*, *The Long, Long Trail*,—and on and on—the girls sang first one and then another. At last darkness fell

and the stars came out one by one. Their songs changed, they were foolish, gay, rollicking camp songs, college songs. By the time the Madrid hikers had returned, the music was riotous. The fire was burning brightly with a ruddy glow, as deep and as red as a pigeon-blood ruby! They danced, did tricks, stunts, shouted and laughed, until at last they rolled over on the sand too weary and happy to move. It had been a long, long day. It seemed ages since Miss Bobby had announced the canoe trip at breakfast that very morning.

“You know, I never in my life have found anything but the Great Dipper. I never have found the Little Dipper, although I’ve said ‘Oh, yes,’ a million times when I about decided I would get crowned on the head if I didn’t say I saw it.” Flopsy was lying on her back staring up into the starry sky.

“Girls! It’s nine o’clock and *after*. Let’s get to bed and find your constellations from there,” Miss Joe suggested. “You ought to be dead tired.”

Flopsy was eager to try out a bed upon the ground; it was her first experience with sleeping out of doors. The meadow was now very wet with a dew so heavy that it soaked their sneakers through in a minute.

“For Pete’s sake!” Tommy flopped down on her “bed.” “It’s like going to bed in a pond.”

“I am not going to get into my p’j’s,” Flopsy announced. “And what is more, I am going to wear my bathing cap. I am preparing to spend the night in this pond. Whose sweet idea was it that I sleep in the middle?”

“Well, it has its compensations—it’s the driest spot,” Tommy observed. “So don’t kick!”

“Kick!” Flopsy squealed. “Don’t mention the word. I won’t be able to move, I’ll be jammed so tight. But I’ll have two people kicking me.”

The girls finally wriggled and twisted themselves into the space under the blankets and on their poncho. Flopsy lay still—for a few minutes, almost too surprised and shocked for words.

“Why, I never knew anything could be so *hard*,” she gasped. “It’s awful! Whoever thought it was nice to sleep flat on the ground?”

“It’s beautiful, old top,” Tommy said soothingly. “Now, don’t get ‘tender-footish’ on us. Look up at the stars and forget the ground—that’s the idea.”

For a few minutes the girls were quiet—but only for a few minutes.

“Say,” Flopsy whispered; the silence out in the meadows under the stars appalled her. “What was that animal that barked like a dog, but who wasn’t a dog?”

Mandy rolled over and almost fell out of the blankets in a wild fit of giggling.

“Let her giggle. If she rolls out into the wet meadow it will bring her to, and you’ll be getting a chance to move your legs,” Tommy said coolly. “I know what you mean. I guess Miss Lindy meant a fox. We used to hear them once in a while barking off in the woods.”

Supposing? Supposing that fox or any other fox—were to bark now—she couldn’t even move. She was not even in a shack with a roof over her head. *Supposing?* *Supposing* a field mouse played around her face and neck? She couldn’t use her arms to brush him away!

“Don’t you just adore lying here in the open under the stars?” Mandy sighed sentimentally.

“Ye—ah,” Flopsy agreed with little enthusiasm. “But I’d like it better if I weren’t a slice of ham between two pieces of bread. Besides, Tommy kicked me a million times and she’s gone to sleep with her elbows boring a deep well into my back. Sure, it’s just great, I love it!” Just then she felt something nipping into the back of her neck—a lot of somethings, nipping for all they were worth. Her head was on a pillow made of her rolled-up sweater and her extra middy.

“Glory Hallelujah!” she squealed, as she sat bolt upright, tearing and ripping the blankets off the other two girls. “What is it? What is it?” She was frightened almost out of her wits. “A whole bunch of things are eating my neck right through to my backbone.” She was kneeling and was frantically feeling around for a flashlight. Mandy and Tommy, now wide awake, were almost as startled and frantic as she was. What was it? What was sharing their bed under the stars with them?

“You’re crazy!” Tommy said. “You only imagined it. What could bite you through to the bone?”

“Plenty of things—snakes, hornets, rats, mice, foxes. Oh, glory, where is my flash?” She was turning the bed upside down and inside out.

Girls’ heads were bobbing up from everywhere. A hubbub broke over the broad silent meadow.

Tommy found her own flash first and turned it on Flopsy’s pillow. She let out a squeal, “There, there, that’s what was biting you. Look!”

Flopsy was almost afraid to look. “If it’s some-

thing awful," she thought, "I'll just yell bloody murder." But then she looked. There it was lying upon her pillow.

"What is it?" Miss Joe called. "What is the matter?"

"Flopsy's tooth-brush bit her. It bit her in the back of the neck right through to the bone!" Tommy yelled lustily. "But I've got it. It can't do any more harm."

A shout of joy rent the air. For the next hour the laughter did not die down, except for a few seconds and then it would begin all over again. Sleep was simply out of the question—the girls were wide staring awake. Miss Joe made several protests. Miss Bobbie roundly denounced their idiocy, and the only answer was smothered snickers and giggles.

Flopsy, Tommy, and Mandy switched their positions—just for something to do. Tommy was in the middle now, and she made some remark about being "between two fires" as she touched the two red heads on either side of her. Mandy giggled and Flopsy thought this was as good a time as any to keep quiet and try sleeping.

The girls all insisted next day that they had never slept a wink, but there was an hour or so when the meadow was quiet, except for the strumming of the crickets. Dawn at last, gray, misty and fragrant. Flopsy opened her eyes to something strange and sweet—dawn out in the open, under the skies. The sunset the day before, twilight, dusk, starlight and now the dawn. Streaks of rosy light in the sky. How sweet was the meadow! Flopsy lay wondering, fascinated and enthralled. The birds' twittering, greeting

the dawn, was music in her ears. Although she was stiff from a night on the hard ground, she was happy. She would never forget the memory of this sunrise—nor for that matter would she ever be tempted into trying to sleep on the ground again! Once was quite enough for a lifetime as far as she was concerned.

Breakfast was cooked and served at the unearthly early hour—half-past-five o'clock. The sun was now blazing forth in all its glory. Before breakfast, every one had a swim and by the time all were dressed they were ravenously hungry. Flopsy insisted upon helping with the cooking. Their breakfast consisted of fruit—bacon—cereal—coffee and toast.

Mandy took her black and badly bent piece of toast and went off in a fit of giggles. Tommy stared at her in cool disgust.

"What's started you going?" she asked.

"Supposing you were home, and some one gave you a jet black broken piece of toast for breakfast and a cup of coffee filled with sand—would you eat it? Wouldn't it be awful? Well, look at me—eating it as though it were a rare treat." Mandy was laughing so hard that tears rolled down her face. She wiped them off with the sleeve of her middy.

"You're hopeless!" Tommy sighed, but Mandy's giggles were infectious and soon all the girls were laughing over practically nothing at all.

After breakfast, the fire was put out, the beach made as clean and spotless as they found it, and their packs were made up again, ready for the trip campward.

"Let's go!" they shouted. "On the way."

Once again, they were in their canoes. The stern

paddlers were now passengers and the counsellors were now stern paddlers.

Flopsy didn't want to be a passenger even for a minute, although they promised she should be sometime during the day.

The trip down the Little Shaded River was very different from the one up! The canoes raced along, the stern paddler had only to guide them. There was no effort at all to paddle.

"We are whirling along as though we were going down a toboggan slide," Flopsy marvelled. It hardly seemed possible that they could go so fast on that stream, after the long hard pull of the day before—with the current against them all the way. It was fascinating watching the scenery "flying by." The snags and snarls of yesterday were no problems today! The girls took a long swimming period because they didn't want to arrive in camp until supper-time. It would be so dramatic to arrive then for the girls at home at supper-time would be straining their eyes down the lake and borrowing field-glasses to catch a glimpse of the four returning canoes. It had been so in other canoe trips—it would be so in this one.

Those last few miles on the lake were a hard stiff pull. The lake was certainly going for all it was worth in the wrong direction—it was beaten up into waves and white caps. Overhead, storm-clouds were gathering. No one talked. Passengers were given paddles and every one worked and pulled like mad to get back in time for supper and beat the storm. On the way, they saw a mother loon floating on the water carrying three baby loons on her back. She, too, was anxious to get away from the storm. Flopsy,

although her arms and back ached, loved the excitement, the feeling of possible danger.

“What a wild finish,” Flopsy sighed contentedly to herself. “I’ll bet they are worrying about us, and hoping we will make it.”

No one said a word aloud until the dock of Camp of White Pines appeared in sight. It was just pull—pull.

Miss West *was* waiting for them and obviously anxious. The girls landed and docked their canoes in the highest of spirits—there wasn’t a groan or a wail—they were proud and satisfied.

“The camp is at supper, girls, so—” Miss West began with a smile.

“So—there we go double-quick time—we are starved. We can change our middies later. They are only sprinkled.”

The girls raced pell-mell through camp to the dining hall, shouting and calling as they went, for they wanted their return heralded; they wanted every last person in camp to know that they had beaten an oncoming storm, and had returned gaily, brightly, triumphantly!

They raced into the dining room and took their places amid the cheers and greetings of the stay-at-homes. Flopsy was fairly bursting with pride!

Chapter Eleven

"And They Lived Happy Ever After"

ONE brilliantly clear, cold, crisp morning, Flopsy awoke with a dull and heavy heart. Summer was on the wane. There was the tang of Autumn in the air. A feeling of depression almost overwhelmed her. She snuggled deeper in her blankets. Her shack-mates were still sleeping, as the bugle notes of reveille had not yet sounded. It was her last morning, her last day, in Tinkerbelle, her last day at Camp of White Pine. She was to hear reveille but she was not to hear taps. When taps floated sweetly over the pine trees that night, she would be in a sleeper on a train going home. This last day had come upon her as suddenly as though she had had no warning. Just like *that!*

These girls she was parting with she had known only two weeks but it seemed that to be separated from them was to be torn and uprooted from something that was a part of her life. It was all a new sensation and as bewildering as it was miserable. The pang of parting from friends made on a vacation is out of all proportion to their real place in one's existence.

"I'll probably never, never, *never* see these girls again." She rolled over on her face and buried her face in the pillow. "*Never, what a word!*"

"You've got to pack today." Babbie's voice was quivering and small, and it seemed to float through the air.

Then the notes of reveille sounded over the camp. They came at a merciful moment—action helped. The girls were tumbling out of bed, grumbling as they got into their bathing suits.

"You ought to be thankful, Flops, you don't have to get into a tub tomorrow morning full of ice cubes," Tommy sang out.

"It's too bad you're going to miss the water sports day after tomorrow. It's a pity, isn't it?" Betty Graham said.

"Do think of cheerful things," Flopsy groaned. "Do try and brighten me up!"

"And the closing banquet this year is to be the best ever," Marcella Todd commented. "At least, so they say."

"Don't talk about it!" Flopsy's gloom was deepening.

"Cheer up, old top," Tommy banged her on the back, "your last dip!"

The rest of the morning was unreal. The landscape seemed broad, wide, clear and unutterably lonesome. Summer was dying. Flopsy could not swallow that lump in her throat.

"I hate last days—last good times." Flopsy choked a bit. "My *last* hike to the farm on the hill, my *last* walk to Merrie Northland, my *last* swim, my *last* paddle—my last—"

"Oh, don't please—please—" Marcella Todd beseeched—her eyes swimming with tears. "Oh, please don't talk like that. I'll miss you, Flopsy. I will, I will. Truly I will. You did make me laugh. I

never thought you would. But you did. And now you are making me cry—"

Marcella Todd threw herself upon Flopsy and sobbed.

"For love of mackerel!" Miss Lindy's voice broke in upon them. "What a cheery sight."

"Marcella Todd's crying because Flopsy made her laugh," Tommy explained with a large wink.

"Have you packed yet, Flopsy?" Miss Lindy spoke crisply. She herself felt a little annoying lump in her own throat. Poor Marcella Todd!

The next half hour was riotous. The gloom had to be beaten down, thoroughly and effectively. And the girls made a good job of it.

"As long as I live, I'll never understand how my clothes got to be a million times as many in two weeks. I can't get them in my suitcase," Flopsy stormed. "Who wants—this middy—and this one. I won't want them much again. Who wants this darn old bath robe—" Flopsy was now tossing her clothes about. "Take your pick. I can't pack them," she wailed in despair.

"Hey, there," Miss Lindy called. "That was a new bath robe when you came. Besides, that suitcase is plenty big enough."

"Let me help you," Marcella Todd begged eagerly. "I want to help you. I am very neat, you know. It's not fun being neat, but it's convenient sometimes."

Before supper, Babbie and Flopsy went up to Tinkerbelle. Miss Hilton was waiting for them. Flopsy was to get into her traveling clothes.

"Now, you two," Miss Hilton's eyes were warm and bright. "I've been watching you. Don't you

remember the best is yet to be? That not far ahead is a bright and rosy day? Oh, Flopsy, you look so sweet and lovely—your sunburn has all faded these last few days—and I've a secret for you, a last minute secret. In only a few weeks more—early in September—you are coming back to Maine. Oh, don't look so round-eyed and like a little owl. I am to be married," and the pretty pink glowed deeper in her cheeks, "in the most beautiful little chapel, down by the ocean. Oh, you'll love it! It's all arranged. When you get home, you will find that your mother knows this part of the story. When Babbie and I return in only a week now, we are coming straight to your home and you will hear all the rest of it."

"Oh, Flopsy, you will make a lovely bridesmaid! Oh, you will!" Babbie's voice quivered. It had been quivering all day. She did not want Flopsy to go away. She could not bear to see Elsie Turnbull's dull brown hair lying on that pillow, where Flopsy's warm bright locks had lain. Oh, how she would miss her!

"I guess it was a good idea I wore a hat these last few days," Flopsy said lamely. She couldn't talk. Bright days behind her—bright days ahead—but the moment was very cold and dark.

Throughout supper, the girls sang songs to Flopsy, made her stand up and bow. Even Miss West made a sweet little farewell speech. Babbie was elated by the attention Flopsy was receiving.

Miss West sent a dozen girls and a few counsellors over to the station in the camp car with Flopsy. Flopsy was not taking the sleeper from Portland but from a nearby town.

As Flopsy tramped up the hill from the camp to the road, she again felt like the Queen of Sheba—for she indeed had a train in her wake! Every one was now in high spirits, joking, teasing as they merrily trooped up that hill.

"Oh, Flopsy, what will Tinkerbelle be like tomorrow?" Marcella Todd's voice broke. "I can't bear to think of it."

"Let's," Miss Hilton suggested, "think of the poor deserted little shack. Let's sing 'Auld Lang Syne,' 'Farewell to thee,' 'In the Sweet Bye and Bye, We Shall Meet on that Beautiful Shore.' Then we shall all float into the depot on an ocean of tears. Let's make the parting as sad as possible. I can think of a few more heart-throbbing songs."

And with a shout of laughter, they broke into the gayest, silliest, craziest songs they knew. Babbie, with brightly burning cheeks, sang one cowboy song after another. The hour's trip to the depot was *over*—all *over*!

"Write me! Write me! Write me!" Over and over again, this request was made—and over and over again the promise given. Marcella Todd was in an agony of tears. Suddenly before Flopsy's eyes, the girls' faces became blurred. No one seemed real, herself least of all. Her last moment at camp was now as hazy and mixed up as her first had been. Had she said the right things, the polite things? She never could remember later on.

It was all over. She was on the train, the shouts and cheers were still ringing in her ears, but she was quite alone sitting on a Pullman seat, facing homeward.

Facing homeward, and suddenly thinking of home

—of Mother—of Daddy, Dickie, Frankie, Alice, Fleurette, and all her friends.

And almost before she knew it, she was in her mother's arms. Daddy was standing jealously by, he longed to hug that red-headed little minx of his.

"Oh, mother, aren't you *glad* to see me?" Flopsy looked up into her mother's face. "Why, mother, there are tears in your eyes."

For an hour or more Flopsy talked incessantly. Then, abruptly, she ceased. She felt lost, strange even in her own home. The house seemed so unfamiliar, so much smaller than it ever had, smaller than the wide out of doors she had been living in. Mrs. Moore watched her and understood the swift change. She could understand how Flopsy felt, as she saw her try to swallow and keep back some of her tears.

"Darling, Alice wants to see you. She's called and called. And so has Fleurette. You'd better see them."

With a grateful look, Flopsy flew to the telephone. At that moment, the girls at camp were no farther away from her than Fleurette and Alice. In spite of her long telephone calls the feeling of loneliness persisted throughout the day. However, before another twenty-four hours had gone by, Tinkerbelle, Betty Graham, Tommy Adams, and Marcella Todd had receded from her so far, as to be worlds away. She had, of course, written Babbie and Miss Hilton, but she never mailed the postal cards she had bought to send the others. That solemn pledge to write was broken. The girls, too, never wrote her. The strangest thing of all was that Flopsy never gave even a passing thought to the fact that they hadn't.

Ten days later, Flopsy and Alice and their mothers were sitting in the Moores' living room. There was to be an all important conference. Miss Hilton and Babbie were due at any moment now. The wedding plans were to be discussed.

When they arrived, Molly Hilton, looking as lovely as a picture, was carrying a large box under her arm. The color came and went a dozen times in her cheeks, as she greeted her friends. Babbie was on her toes with excitement. Every one's eyes were on that box. What did it hold?

"Tell them! Tell them, please Molly," Babbie begged. "I can't wait."

"Nor can we!" Mrs. Moore laughed.

"Well!" Miss Hilton began, her eyes luminous. "It's a story. Flopsy knows part of it. It's about my Great-great-Aunt Clarissa Ames. She has planned my wedding as though it were her own. In a sense, she feels it is—a belated wedding—a wedding that should have taken place seventy years ago. Seventy years ago! Think of that! Just after the Civil War! She was sixteen then. She was to marry a French prince whom she met when she was taking the Grand Tour. Seventy years ago this autumn, he set sail from France with his little sister—a girl of fifteen and their aunt. The little princess was to be a bridesmaid. The wedding never took place. As they drove along bad country roads in a coach to the Ames estate, the horses were frightened and ran away. The bridegroom and the bridesmaid were killed. The aunt arrived, broken-hearted and crippled, with nothing to remind one of a wedding but the little princess's portmanteau filled with lovely clothes. Aunt Clarissa has sent me the dress which was to have been worn

by the bridesmaid. We are to have it copied for my bridesmaids.”

In an awed hush, Molly Hilton opened her precious bundle. Gently, she lifted the lovely dress from the box.

“I have not brought the hoops which went under it,” she explained. “We will not use them. The dresses are to be of taffeta and ruffled as you see—so they will look billowy without hoops. Here are the pantalettes of exquisite lace.”

“Pants!” Flopsy gasped—her eyes round and filled with dismay. “Are we going to wear *pants!*”

There was a shout of laughter. “Oh, dear, that’s just how long the story stayed romantic and sentimental—until our Flopsy had spoken—” Molly Hilton’s eyes were dancing. “And, Flopsy, that’s just what David said! We are going to have the dresses made right to the ground—and *no* pantalettes. I wrote and told Aunt Clarissa that, and she said as long as the rest of the costume was copied exactly, she did not in the least mind. Oh, you should see the bonnet, it is so lovely and quaint, and a perfect frame to the sweet young faces of my bridesmaids!”

After a moment’s hubbub, Molly Hilton spoke again.

“It’s to be a secret—no one is to know.” She looked from Flopsy to Alice, who nodded vigorously. They were completely enchanted with these plans. “The dresses are to be the colors suggesting autumn, Babbie’s dress is to be a rich old gold. Flopsy’s and Alice’s are to be a deeper shade, almost coppery. The bonnets are to be of brown velvet,” she paused as the “Ahs” and “Ohs” were breathed. “No word of this is to come out until the wedding.

It will make a romantic little story for the newspaper. Aunt Clarissa loves the newspapers. Collecting unusual stories is a hobby with her—she has books and books of clippings. And, if it were not for a newspaper notice, Flopsy, she would never have known us all.” Miss Hilton smiled. “Aunt Clarissa says she is eccentric and I think the dear little old lady is all she says she is!”

On Thursday, the day before they left for Maine, they had one rehearsal for the wedding. At noon on the day of the wedding they were to have another in the little chapel itself. The wedding was to be at four o'clock Saturday afternoon. Friday had to be spent in traveling.

“Flopsy, *are* you going to giggle Saturday afternoon?” Alice asked after the first rehearsal. Flopsy had giggled all through it. “And, are you going to keep in step with me?”

“I don't think so,” Flopsy admitted cheerfully. “I mean I don't think I am going to keep in step with you and I do think I am going to giggle. I never kept in step with anyone in school when we were marching, don't you remember? I was always being pulled out of line. And, I can't see why I giggle but I do.”

“Well, it's just going to be awful,” Alice scolded. “Miss Hilton will be sorry she ever asked you. Weddings are not funny, they are very serious.”

“I know,” Flopsy agreed. “They are very serious. I always want to giggle when things are serious—and you can't laugh. Isn't it awful? What shall I do? That usher I have to walk with going out is a scream. He makes me laugh. He was making funny faces. He asked David, ‘If it rains Saturday, are

you going to have it or not?' Didn't you hear him?"

Alice herself giggled at the idea. "'Are you going to have it if it rains?' Imagine postponing a wedding!"

"And David acted so silly. And then when I take that long step to keep in time with the wedding march, I feel as though I were going over on my head."

"Well, don't you dare do it, Flopsy Moore! I'll never never speak to you again as long as I live if you do!"

"Of course, I hope I don't—but—" Flopsy promised nothing. "But if that usher makes cross-eyes at me Saturday afternoon, and if he kisses my hand when we are going down the aisle, I am just going to burst right out laughing. It's his fault—"

"Well, *goodnight!*" Alice squealed. "What a happy prospect. I thought you said weddings were romantic!"

"They are," Flopsy nodded. "That's why they make me giggle. Goodness, Alice, I can't help it. Don't get crabby. Do you suppose I *want* to giggle? Use your head and don't start a fight. Babbie never said a word to me because I giggled."

"Oh, *Babbie!*" Alice retorted. "She's very sweet and nice."

Alice looked sideways at Flopsy's face and suddenly her expression changed. She laughed in the best of good humor.

"I was only teasing you, Flopsy, don't get sore. It's going to be a perfectly wonderful wedding."

One very beautiful Friday afternoon in the middle of September, Flopsy, her mother, father and Mrs. Jackson (the kindly woman with whom Molly Hil-

ton had boarded), were heading for Maine in the Moores' car. The Holts brought along Mr. and Mrs. Morris in their car. Mr. Morris was the principal of School Number Nine. It was not until long after midnight that they arrived at the quaint pre-Revolutionary Inn where they were all to spend what was left of the night. They found the rest of the wedding party and guests waiting for them.

The young bridesmaids were hurried off to bed and told to stay there until they were called the next morning. They could sleep almost up to the time for the noon rehearsal. The most important thing was they must look fresh, radiant and lovely for the ceremony.

The wedding day was not raining, there could be no desire to "call it off"—even if anyone could conceive of anything so idiotic. It was as beautiful a September day as one could imagine. The autumn had, so it would seem, rushed hurriedly into Maine with all its abundant glory—just to make the wedding perfect.

Out in the vestibule of the chapel, three girls were standing very, very close to each other, as though for protection and comfort. Their eyes were wide and their lips parted breathlessly. Flopsy's knees were shaking and she had an awful fear that any moment she might giggle—or worse, yet—cry.

The wedding guests had all arrived and were waiting in their pews. There were not more than fifty people in that beautiful little chapel—only those dearest and nearest to Molly and David.

Mrs. Hilton, Molly's mother, was sitting happy and tremulous, beside Mr. Bates, David's uncle, who as president of the Board of Education had once

made life difficult for Molly Hilton. However, at this minute he looked benign and seraphic. He was just a sweet and kindly old man who was proud and happy in his nephew's choice of a bride! Mrs. Jackson sat on the other side of Mrs. Hilton and looked every bit as happy and tremulous. There in the pew behind them was Mr. Morris, the principal of School Number Nine and his wife. Scattered here and there were some very prominent and important-looking friends of David's. And right along with them were two cow-hands from the ranch in Rawhide. They had been hitch-hiking across the country for over a week.

Mr. and Mrs. Moore sat in the same pew with Judge and Mrs. Holt. Mr. and Mrs. North sat in front of them. Mr. North was the janitor of School Number Nine. Mrs. North whispered to her husband, "I hope they sing, singing is nice at weddings. It makes them real sweet. I hope they sing '*Oh Promise Me*' and '*Because.*' And '*Lead Kindly Light,*' is nice, too, I heard that once."

Mr. Moore nudged his wife; they both stared ahead to keep from laughing. Mr. Moore was saying over and over to himself, "'Amid encircling gloom—the way is dark and I am far from home.' Happy thought for a wedding," he reflected to himself.

The brilliant afternoon sunshine was blazing through the stained glass windows—flooding the exquisite little chapel. The roar of the sea was deeper than the tones of the organ—and its chant seemed to be—*forever* and *forever* through boundless space and time.

Then clear and sweet rose the notes of a soprano

voice up in the choir loft. Warm and tender they floated over the little assembly.

*Believe me, if all these endearing young charms,
Which I gaze on so fondly today,
Were to change by tomorrow, and fleet in my arms
Like fairy gifts fading away.*

The chapel was very still as that promise was sung.

*No, the heart that has truly loved never forgets,
But as truly loves on to the close,
As the sunflower turns to her god when he sets
The same look which she turned when he rose.*

There was a breathless hush as the notes died, but the everlasting sea took up the song and went on and on.

Suddenly the organ burst into a joyous chord. At the altar was the officiating clergyman, kindly old Dr. Edmonds. Years and years before, David Stewart's mother and father had stood at this very altar railing and he had joined their hands.

“HERE COMES THE BRIDE!”

There was a movement, as with one accord every one was on his feet.

The ushers, two by two, very solemn, came first. But it was not the solemn ushers who interested anyone—they might as well have been stuffed shirts. Babbie, Alice and Flopsy, three slender slips of girls came floating down the aisle—like three fluttering autumn leaves caught by a gentle breeze. A breeze so gentle and soft that it brought them up to the altar railing and no farther. The delicate rustling of their taffeta frocks was silent now.

“Dearly beloved, we are gathered here in the sight of God and in the face of this company to join together this Man and this Woman in holy Matrimony.”

Dr. Edmond’s voice, rich and low, filled the chapel. Flopsy Moore no longer felt like giggling. That was long, long ages ago that she felt that way—aeons ago when she had been out in the vestibule! She was now so awestruck, so overwhelmed with the solemnity of the moment that she *did* feel, oh, so very much, like an autumn leaf—an autumn leaf that was about to crumple up and lie forever still.

In a trance she saw Mrs. Hilton step from the front pew in answer to Dr. Edmond’s “who giveth this Woman.” She saw Mrs. Hilton step back again into her former place. She heard Molly Hilton’s familiar and yet unfamiliar voice give some answers. She heard David’s low promises. To think, she had planned to notice every detail and to remember them all the days of her life. And she wasn’t even *thinking*—she was scarcely even feeling.

Once again the organ peeled out—now with a tone of joyful triumph. Flopsy was tingling with life once more, right down to her very toes; she turned and grinned broadly all about her. She felt distinctly proud of herself, as though she were largely responsible for this deliriously happy moment.

Molly Hilton Stewart stood beside her husband in the vestibule of the chapel, before she went back to the old inn to receive her guests at a small reception. She was waiting for her bridesmaids.

“Oh you lovely, lovely girls!” She caught them

in her arms and her misty veil seemed to float about and encircle them all. "I couldn't see you before the ceremony for my eyes—were—"

"Seeing only me, Mrs. Stewart!" David broke in with a grin. He was standing holding his bride's bouquet and was looking altogether foolish and happy.

"Mrs. Stewart," Alice echoed. "Oh Flopsy, she's Mrs. Stewart!"

"Mrs. Stewart," Babbie breathed in a small voice. "She's Molly to me—"

"She'll be Miss Hilton to me always and always!" Flopsy shook her head. She broke off and threw her arms about Molly Stewart's neck and buried her face in the soft satin folds of her dress.

"You darling, you funny, funny darling—I understand, indeed I do—" Molly held her close for a second—

"Come—come we must be going." David took his bride's arm. "We must be started on this living happy forever after."

"And, they lived happy forever after," Flopsy repeated as the three bridesmaids rode back to the inn in the automobile, directly behind the one which held a radiant bride and a proud bridegroom. "Yes, forever and ever!"

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00024759933

