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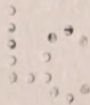
**THE POLLY PAGE
MOTOR CLUB**

THE POLLY PAGE MOTOR CLUB

BY

IZOLA L. FORRESTER

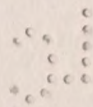
AUTHOR OF "THE POLLY PAGE YACHT CLUB,"
"THE POLLY PAGE RANCH CLUB," ETC.



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THE POLLY PAGE MOTOR CLUB

CHAPTER I

WINNING OVER WELCOME

POLLY hurried upstairs, breathless and excited, the Admiral's telegram in her hand.

"We're to stay a whole week at White Chimneys, Aunty Welcome," she exclaimed, "and Marbury's to meet us at the station with his car."

Welcome never even turned her head at the news. Down on her knees before the wide chest of drawers she was, packing, every curve of her ample figure a protest. Even the slow sideways wagging of her head was portentous.

"Pretty doin's," she soliloquized. "Puffin' 'round in strange places Chris'mus, and de Admiral flat on his back."

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Polly was bending over a time table at her little desk between the south windows.

“We can leave here the morning of the 24th, and be home for New Year’s. It’s so dear and thoughtful of Mrs. Yates to include me with Hallie, don’t you think so, Aunty?”

Dead silence.

Polly tiptoed over, and stroked the old turbaned head coaxingly.

“Go ’long, chile, go ’long,” muttered Welcome haughtily. “Don’t you try ter git ’round me. Ah ain’t givin’ mah consent nohow. Jauntin’ at Chris’mus is agin ma conscience and predelictions.”

“But, dearie, with Grandfather away, think how lonely it would be here. And didn’t he say it was right for us to go?”

“He’d say it was all right if you wanted to put dis whole house on a sea turtle’s back and trundle it to Florida. Go ’way, now, Ah say. Ah don’t feel resigned, Mis’ Polly. Pokin’ way down to tidewater country for Chris’mus. Ain’t no more like Chris’mus ’an mah ole granny’s funeral.”

Polly sat down on the floor beside her, and

hugged her knees. It was a serious crisis when Welcome rebelled.

"Now, listen, Aunty. All of the girls from Calvert Hall are going home for the holidays, excepting Hallie Yates and Peggie Murray, and Peggie wants to stay with Jean, of course. They can't go 'way out west to Wyoming just for two weeks, you know. So if I didn't go with Hallie, I'd be all alone here."

"Tryin' to tell me you'd be lonely? Don't hug me so tight, chile, jes' like a catamount. You ain't lonely any time. If you was to be wrecked in distress on Greenland's icy mountain, you'd get up a grasshopper parade next day." Welcome's shoulders shook with silent mirth, and Polly loosened her clasp.

"Of course I wouldn't be lonely with you," she said, happily, "but this is ever so much nicer. Hallie gave me a time table. She's going down Saturday. The Senator and Mrs. Yates motored down from Washington last week, and Marbury joined them from Annapolis with two of his classmates."

"An' you takin' int'rest in sech doin's wif de Admiral endurin' plumbago."

"Lumbago, dearie," suggested Polly, absently,

back at the time table. "Oh, it's 'way down the bay, almost to Norfolk. Here's Wenoka, and White Chimneys is seven miles up in the country from there."

"Don't you try ter sidetrack me, Mis' Polly." Welcome gave the hamper beside her a vigorous whack. "Ah won't have mah train ob thought discoupled. De Admiral he goes and ketches plumbago, and he runs like a scared rabbit for de Springs. Jes' as if Ah couldn't 'a' cured him, an' no dippin' in boiling, bubbling, spouting brimstone water. He's gittin' fearful' childish."

She was years older than the Admiral, but that made no difference. Often she would tell him. "'T ain't years makes folks old. It's lack ob common senses. You ain't nuffin' but a sprightly boy, Marse Admiral Bob."

Polly sang softly under her breath one of her favorite carols. She was standing on a stool at the tall wardrobe now, hunting out her prettiest dresses. Welcome's droning voice hardly reached her. All the glad expectancy of youth and the wonderment of the trip were so fresh in her mind, she could not think of other things. She felt for all the world like

pinching herself, and saying with the little old woman who fell asleep by the king's highway,

“Lauk-a-mercy! This is none of I!”

It was nearly two weeks now since the Admiral had felt his first twinge of pain, and, with old Balaam for a body guard, had departed for the Springs to try the treatment there.

Polly had received several letters from him, and he had decided to journey leisurely south as far as Camden over the holidays. She had spent considerable thought over those letters. Should she join him or stay alone at Glenwood with just Welcome and the other help? As the Admiral himself put it, “There won't be any snapdragon fun around this invalid camp, so you had best go down to White Chimneys, matey.”

For years Polly had heard of White Chimneys, the old Virginia plantation of Senator Yates. Her own mother had been a guest there in her girlhood. There was one little drawer in her desk, the same desk Polly used now, and inside it lay a pair of white silk mitts with trailing rosebuds embroidered on them, and a white and gold dance card, Mary Percy's first dance card.

Polly liked to look it over, and see how every single waltz was marked "Hearts."

"Who was 'Hearts,' Grandfather?" she had asked once, and the old Admiral had chuckled over the card with its tiny white and gold pencil dangling from a silken cord.

"That's my boy Phil, Polly, your father. He knew the right way to win her."

And now she herself was going down to this dear old haunt of memories, just as Polly Percy had, once upon a time, for her first real dance. Hallie had told her all about what it would be like. She was the Senator's niece, in her freshman year up at the Hall. The Vacation Club had taken possession of her from the first week in September. It needed two new members, and Hallie was made one of them with the customary rites known only to Crullers and Polly.

"What you puttin' in dat lacey dress for, chile?"

Polly started out of her day-dreaming of White Chimneys and Christmas bells. Welcome was pointing at the dainty dress in her arms. It was new, and Polly loved it, for she had designed it all by herself. Cream white it

was, silky and clinging as a poppy petal, with tiny pink satin rosebuds half hidden under the lace at throat and elbows. She had been saving it for her Christmas party at home, but now it could be her "bestest frock," as Welcome said, down at the Senator's.

"Is you goin' to answer me, now or never?" repeated Aunty severely. "What you puttin' in dat dress for? Jes' ter hop-skip down in de country?"

"Going to do you credit, precious," laughed Polly, packing the dress away in its soft folds of tissue paper, and laying it herself in the big traveling hamper. When the Admiral was home, trunks were used, but when Welcome managed any going forth, the good old willow hampers did service. Polly sat down on a stool now, and leaned her chin in her hands. Even while Welcome scolded over the suddenness of it all, she knew in her heart she was fairly bubbling over with pride that her "honey girl" should be an invited guest at White Chimneys.

"Aren't you glad for me, Aunty Welcome?" she asked with just the right touch of pathos to bring the old nurse around. "Don't you want me to look nice? Mandy and Peter will get

along without us. I asked Mandy if she didn't want to ask Peter Jr. and Mrs. Peter Jr., and all the little Petes up for Christmas dinner, and she's ever so pleased. They won't even miss us, and think how you'll impress all the help down at the Senator's. I heard Mrs. Yates say once when we were at Lost Island that she didn't have a single maid who could remember before the war."

"Pouf!" chuckled Aunty, her shoulders shaking with pleasure. "Ah can go clar back ter Pocahontas if Ah jes' kinder concentrated mah faculties. Put in de silk frock, chile, and mind you get de long gloves and stockings and slippers for it. Ah s'pose we've got ter go down and impress 'em, but it's de fust time since you was born dat you've been away from your own roof tree Chris'mus. Mandy's cooked turkey for you since you was able to waggle a wishbone in your fingers. Ah'll go, but Ah suttinly don't see how you's goin' ter take any comfort, honey."

Polly's face was thoughtful. She watched the bare tendrils of the creeper tap at the window pane like pleading, timid fingers. Outside the world was windswept and almost listening for the first snow. Polly had always half believed

the trees and shrubs and little dried grasses were kept posted by the messenger winds about the coming storms. Certainly the creeper tapped its message of warning to the window pane, and the window pane gave little creaks so that the room it protected might know the news.

Now, while Welcome crooned softly to herself over the packing, Polly thought over all the long procession of Yuletides at Glenwood. Such happy times, each year seemed better than the last. The first three she had been too tiny to recall any impression of, but Welcome had told her of them over and over so often that she felt as if she knew every detail.

The first had been fifteen years ago. There had been much discussion over the advisability of having a tree upstairs, as the Admiral's quarters were always called "below." Every year Mandy held her own celebration down in the kitchen kingdom, and always at a certain signal, a procession of giggling happy, expectant figures had come up the long center hall, Mandy and Peter leading, to where the Admiral himself waited them under the high arched doors of the library. There was Polly's grandmother beside him, Welcome said, the beautiful "Mis' Caro-

line," to hand forth "Chris'mas gif' " to the eager hands.

Behind them were the young ladies of Glenwood, in white mulle dresses over huge hoops, and roses in their hair. Millicent, Faith, Evelyn, and Hallie, and shoulders high above them, Polly's own dear father, "Marse Phil." But never had there been a tree upstairs. The celebration then was very stately and decorous.

But one by one the girls had married and gone from the home nest, "Mis' Caroline," slipped over the shadowy borderland in her sleep one summer night, and only the Admiral was left with Phil and his bride, Polly's mother.

It was very seldom the old Admiral could be coaxed into telling her of the days that followed, but Welcome would chat by the hour of her "Young Missie," Polly on the footstool at her feet begging for more, asking if she looked one little bit like the wonderful Mary Percy of Albe-marle County.

Welcome would survey her placidly, her mouth well puckered in perplexity.

"Maybe kinder 'round de eyes, only hers drooped a little at de corners like she's always laughing, and dey was jes' as brown as one ob

dese hyar moths in early spring dat beat on de window to get in. But you got de same kind ob ha'r she had, honey, all brown and curly and fly-away, and you got de dimple in your side cheek, but mah land, she had distinction! Hold her head way up high like a lily to de sun, she would. 'Cou'se after Marse Phil died, she drooped, jes' like de frost ketch her."

"I know," Polly would interrupt hastily. "Don't tell that part, dearie."

Too well could she remember those last years after her father's death. A hush had seemed to fall over the old place. The Admiral had traveled a good deal, and stayed up at Washington. Her mother had moved like a shadow around the gardens or through the great lonely rooms.

Polly had always been with Aunty Welcome then. Only now and then would she see her mother, sometimes at night to feel a kiss as she was falling asleep, sometimes when she was going for a drive behind pompous old Balaam, sometimes in the garden when she found her mother sitting by her favorite rose tree, looking westward to where the hills seemed to rest against the sky.

Yet, even after the shadow fell, Glenwood had always had its Christmas tree. Welcome had attended to that feature of the celebration. And the size of the tree had increased every year. The past two had been giant hemlocks, with Polly and the Admiral receiving at the same old arched doorway, and Welcome marshaling Mandy and the rest in the back hall to look at her "honey lam'" doing the honors. It did seem strange, she thought, that this year was to find the old house dark and silent.

"But it's time you was a 'bloomin',' anyhow," Welcome declared relentlessly. "An' I s'pose we have to show des tidewater Virginians what de Capital quality is like."

"But we're not Capital folks, Auntie," laughed Polly. "We're almost tidewater Virginians too down here at Queen's Ferry."

"Dere's tidewater an' tidewater. We're close enough to de Capital to get all showered wif de tone and general appearances, and settin' upnesses, and manners ob Capitalian glory—"

"Oh, you precious old dear," Polly's arms were wrapped around her neck. From below came the sound of the door-bell, and Welcome gave a gasp of relief as she was released. "It's

Hallie. We're going over with the Christmas presents to the girls, Auntie."

She ran downstairs, singing a carol, and Welcome stood at the window until she saw the two girls pass together down the garden walk between the high hedges. When she came back to her packing, tears glistened on her dark cheeks, but all she said was,

"Dat chile's suttinly bloomin'."

CHAPTER II

A SPECIAL SESSION

“LET me help carry those parcels,” Hallie said, reaching after the stack on Polly’s left arm. “Whatever have you put in them? We girls have been tying up things and marking them all the afternoon.”

“Sue’s gone home, hasn’t she?”

“Yesterday. Ted went this morning with Crullers. It’s lonesome already without them. Oh, Polly, can you go? I’ve been wishing and wishing you could.” Hallie turned her back to the wind, and danced along facing Polly. “Marbury says he’ll take us all around in his machine to where Pocahontas lived, and up to Mount Tom where some big battle was. If you dig deep enough you come to bones, he says, but I don’t believe it. When I was little I used to though, and we’d dig and dig.”

“What sort of car has he?” Polly missed the bones story, so busy she was thinking over Mar-

bury and his machine. The Admiral had always denounced automobiles, and no gasoline car had ever threatened the permanency of old Balaam and his various carriages at the Glenwood stables. But in her heart Polly liked them. Perhaps it was the speed that attracted her. She had ridden with Isabel and her mother often from Queen's Ferry up the shore road towards Arlington, and it had fairly thrilled her to listen to the soft purr of the engine, and feel the sweep of wind in her face.

In some way it had brought back to her the racing days at Lost Island, the excitement over the little catboats, and the same keen smack of fresh air that made you half close your eyes, and lift your chin higher. Half the interest she felt in the trip down to White Chimneys was on account of Marbury's car, and the chance for spins in it.

"I don't know," answered Hallie, happily. "It's a runabout, I think. Uncle has a big one that seats seven people, but it's up at Washington most of the time, because he says our roads are bad for touring."

"Why doesn't somebody have them fixed?"

Hallie laughed. Polly's first notion when

anything went wrong was to have it "fixed." Even when Annie May, the cook up at the Hall, said her twins didn't look alike, Polly had asked anxiously, "Can't you fix them so they will, Annie May?"

"You'll have to talk to Uncle and Marbury, 'cause I don't know much about it. I suppose you'd want to get right out and make new roads, wouldn't you, Polly?"

"If they needed new ones. Don't squeeze that round parcel, Hallie. It's cake with frosting, and chopped nuts, figs, and dates for the filling."

"Won't Crullers be sorry she went home? For us, Polly?"

Polly's eyes twinkled just the way the Admiral's did. "Not for you, Hallie. It's for the girls after we've gone."

"Oh, Polly, are you going with me, surely? Did your grandfather say so?"

Polly produced the telegram out of her coat pocket for answer, and nearly dropped her load of parcels opening it. They stood reading it together, the precious "order to march" as Polly called it. But the sky was grey with the early winter twilight, and time was short. They hur-

ried along faster than ever until the Hall came in sight with its imposing Doric columns, then slipped around the side garden paths to Annie May's domain.

"Now, for de mussy sakes," ejaculated Annie May, rolling her eyes in glad surprise. She unwrapped her parcel, and shook forth two broad white muslin aprons with shoulder ruffles and streaming ties. "Ain't I goin' ter feel jes' like one ob dese hyar airships, wif dese angel wings a-flyin'!"

"There's candy for Julian and Juliana," said Polly. "One's tied with blue and one with pink ribbon, so they won't get mixed. Going to miss us awfully, Annie May?"

"Don't ask me, Mis' Polly. You make me all sobby and rattled. Ain't any more sperit left in me dan in dat dishrag." Annie May was cheerful and smiling as possible, but she always pretended she was "pinin' fearsome," as she said, when any of the girls went away. The girls laughed, and ran up the back stairs to the long center hall that cut the house in two portions. All was silent, though, and they followed the circular stairs up two flights more to Miss Murray's room. Here Polly tapped on the door, her

own individual tap, three imperative knocks and one longer one for luck.

"Come in!" called Jean Murray's clear tone. "I thought it was you, Polly. See how industrious we are over here."

"Jean's directress of work," Peggie said from the couch between the two windows where Isabel Lee was helping her dress dolls. Down on the floor was Crullers struggling over pink net stockings and contents, eleven of them. Ted Moore was inscribing the compliments of the season and Santa Claus's tenderest regards in a pile of picture books, and Sue was tying up mittens, mittens of all sizes and colors it seemed to Polly, in white tissue paper bound with holly ribbon, with a sprig of southern mistletoe tucked into each.

"Miss Murray," Crullers exclaimed, holding up one mitten with a thumb that fairly bulged. "Look at that one. I made it, and I didn't get the pattern just right."

"It looks like a bed slipper with a place for what Julian calls his thumb toe," Jean answered. "Don't care, Crullers. Maybe it will shrink."

"When are you going to ship the box?" asked Polly, dropping her own parcels in a heap on the table.

"Tomorrow. And it's such a dandy box," Peggie spoke up. "Mother wrote us that it's the first year a real Christmas celebration has been held up at the Forks since Jean and I cut our own tree and dressed it for the children. Jimmie is to be Santa Claus. Remember Jimmie, don't you, Polly?"

"Remember Jimmie!" Polly exclaimed. "I remember everything that happened last summer on the ranch, Jimmie and everyone. What are you sending for him?"

"A housewife," Sue announced, triumphantly, holding it up for inspection. "Thimble, darning needles, thread, everything for the complete bachelor. It's blue velvet lined with corn colored silk, Polly, and I made it."

"We're sending him books besides to help him bear the shock of Sue's housewife," Jean added. "Take off your cloak, Polly, and help us finish packing."

"I mustn't. It's 'way past five now, and I promised Aunty Welcome I'd come right back. See this bundle of things. They are not to be opened until Christmas, positively. Crullers, no fair sniffing."

Crullers giggled happily, and backed away from the table. "I can smell violet sachet."

"But you'll be here with us for Christmas, won't you, Polly?" asked Jean.

Polly shook her head.

"I'm going away Saturday for two weeks at White Chimneys, Senator Yates's home. Now, please, please don't be sorry for me because I'm so divided now I don't know what to do. I want to go there and stay here too."

"Where is White Chimneys?" Sue puckered her brow musingly. "Farther down the river, isn't it?"

"Nearly to the open sea. Aunty calls it the 'tidewater' country."

"That always sounded funny to me. If anything could be more 'tidey' than we are up here on the shoulder of old Chesapeake, I'd like to see it."

"Oh, I'd love to go all over Virginia," put in Isabel, dreamily. "One fall long ago we came up by boat from Charleston. The boat was called the *Yemassee*, I remember, and it had a big gold figurehead with great wings that you could hide under. I used to stand under them right bang up in the prow, on the coils of rope,

and watch the porpoises leap around the cut-water."

Peggie had stopped sewing a pink sunbonnet for a brown haired doll, and was listening with all her heart.

"Grandfather had one great uncle who was with the original expedition shipwrecked on the Bermudas under Sir George Somers," Polly said. "He said his father could remember hearing about it when he was a boy, how they thought the islands were enchanted like in 'The Tempest,' and how they tried to get back to Virginia. I think they were an awfully plucky lot, don't you, Miss Murray, poking off over unknown seas like that?"

"Tell more, Polly," Peggie spoke up shyly. "I love to hear you girls talk about such things as if they happened around here yesterday. Back home in Wyoming, why, fifty years is ancient history with us. After that it's just Indians."

"Well, I guess from all accounts, it came pretty near being all Indians here too. If it hadn't been for Pocahontas trotting corn regularly to the starving colony, Virginia would have given up the ghost. We girls ought to do something for Pocahontas some time, have a Poca-

hontas camping club, or anything that's wild and woodlandish, don't you know! Peggy could model her head in clay to put up on a totem pole."

"No totems in Virginia," laughed Miss Murray, "but I think we might have a clay model just the same." Back in Wyoming Peggie had found a strata of clay, and had tried to model figures from it. Jean had always encouraged her. As Polly often remarked, Peggie was so far the only girl in the vacation club who had shown symptoms of genius, and she should have all the encouragement they could give her. So during this first year at Calvert Hall, the shy girl from the Crossbar Ranch had found plenty of happiness up in Jean's room, with her box of modeling clay and the funny little wooden "spoons," as the others dubbed her tools.

"Take Sue with her straight brown hair and beetle brows for a model," suggested Isabel.

Sue promptly threw a cushion with swift, sure aim, but Jean interposed hastily, and said that Pocahontas was the loveliest maiden of all the tribes, and even Queen Elizabeth had to admire her when she was presented at court.

"But Polly," Ted suddenly exclaimed, "you

won't be here for the board meeting, and we can't decide on anything at all without you, can we, girls?"

Polly did not answer for a minute. She had forgotten all about the meeting. It was to be held the Wednesday of Christmas week, the girls had decided, the one important meeting of the year, when the members of the Vacation Club were to decide where their trip should be for the coming summer. And with the president of the Club away, there could be no decision, that was obvious.

"I forgot all about it," said Polly, simply. "Why not have it now?"

The suggestion brought a delighted peal of laughter from the girls. As Annie May said, "Miss Polly was de most expeditious and immediate grabber ob opportunity's coat tails she eber did see." It was so characteristic of Polly to seize the fleeting moment whenever it was possible, and she always declared it saved time.

"If you have anything to do, do it just as soon as you can, or you have to keep on remembering not to forget it," she would say. So now when the girls laughed at the idea of holding an immediate meeting, Polly said nothing, but pro-

ceeded to clear the table, and rap for order.

“Let’s waive formalities, and get down to real suggestions, and then see whether we can do the thing we want most. What do you think is best, Isabel?”

“Why, I haven’t really thought of it seriously. We have had such good times each year, I’d be willing to go right back to either Lost Island or the ranch.”

“That’s not progressive at all,” protested Sue swiftly. “We ought to go to a different place every year. I loved the horseback trip to the mountains last year. Can’t we keep moving somehow?”

“Charter a nice, four-room airship, Polly. Something that soars apace with Sister Susan’s fancy,” murmured Ted.

“No, I don’t mean an airship,” protested Sue, quite seriously. “I like something that you can manage, that will do as it’s told, don’t you know? But, really, girls, I’m in earnest. I don’t see why it would take much more money for us to keep on the march than it would to camp.”

“Gypsy wagon; donkeys; yellow silk curtains; little fat black kettle on three poles; one dog; two tents.” Polly enumerated the essentials for

caravaning slowly. "What do you think, Miss Murray?"

"You'd need a bodyguard, and it would be rather slow going, I'm afraid. What part of the country do you plan on seeing this coming summer? Have you thought of that at all?"

"We haven't thought or talked of anything specially, not yet," answered Polly, doubtfully. "Ruth did say one day that she would like a houseboat on old Chesapeake Bay, but that wouldn't be like gypsying."

"I know what to do," Sue exclaimed, happily, "rent a caboose from the railroad, and just jog along at the end of freight trains all over the map."

"We don't want to be dependent on trains of any sort," Polly protested. "We must do something where we have our own schedules and can do just as we please."

"The way Aunt Margaret and Uncle Larry did when they motored to the White Mountains last year," Hallie added. "They never planned ahead at all. When they came to a town or country inn, they put up there for the night, and took up the road, as Uncle called it, in the morning."

Polly's chin was on her two palms, and her eyes regarded Hallie with a far-away intentness. Already she could see the long white road unroll ahead of the Vacation Club.

"Did it cost them very much, Hallie?"

"Why, no. Uncle drives his car himself always. He likes to. You know he's president of the highway commission, or something like that down home in our county, so it isn't just fun to him. Marbury went out last summer with one of the pathfinders."

"Pathfinders?" repeated the girls. "What are they?"

"Cars sent out to trace new roads, and find out what conditions are. He went 'way out through Kansas and Nebraska, then southwest."

"Miss Murray," Polly asked. "Why couldn't we girls do that?"

Jean laid aside her last Christmas package for the ranch box, and shook her head laughingly, as she came over to the council table, and laid her arm around the president's shoulders.

"Don't you know that it costs awfully to keep up a machine, Polly? Several hundred a month, I am sure, when you are touring."

"But if we only toured for a month that

wouldn't be so much. We wouldn't have any railroad fare at all."

"You have to pay toll rates and ferry rates, and license rates, and all kind of things," said Hallie. "Marbury figured it up, I know, and it was pretty expensive."

"Are they paid for being pathfinders?" asked Polly.

"Of course they must be. It's work."

"It could be work and play mixed," said Polly, gravely. "I'm going to ask Senator Yates and Marbury all about it, girls, and let's lay the vacation question on the table until I get home again."

"Second the motion," cried Ted. Parliamentary rules never bothered any session of the club so long as general results were obtained. And when the meeting adjourned, Polly's face was aglow with excitement and anticipation. Jean followed her out into the long hall, after she had told the rest good-bye. She leaned over the balustrade smiling down at the gay, purposeful face.

"I'm sure it can happen if we wish and wish for it, and work for it too," said Polly. "And we needn't go 'way out west either. Suppose we just cruised all around Virginia and helped

the Senator find out new roads. I don't believe it's so hard to run a car. You just oil it up, and keep on the right side of the road."

"Oh, Polly, Polly," Jean shook her head despairingly, but with merry eyes. "I do believe you'd hitch a wagon to a star and tell it to make a record on the Milky Way."

"Never mind, Miss Murray," Polly replied firmly; "if the girls all stand by me, I know it can happen."

CHAPTER III

AT WHITE CHIMNEYS

MONDAY noon the bay shore local left two passengers at the little station of Wenoka.

It was beautifully clear and mild for December. In the distance were glimpses of old Chesapeake's vivid blue expanse. Distant uplands scalloped the horizon line. The roads were dry and frozen just enough to make them firm for riding.

"Humph! Ah must say," grunted Auntie Welcome as the train moved away. "Ain't a soul hyar to say howdy. Nice doin's."

Polly's alert eyes had caught sight of a moving spot on the landscape, though, and her sharp ears detected the throb of a motor. Presently it turned the curve of the road at the station, a smart looking olive and black runabout, and Hallie waved joyously to them from the driver's seat in front.

"There they are," cried Polly, waving back.

"Ah suttinly thought a gentlemun like de

Senator would have a coach to send," murmured Welcome, eyeing the car with suspicion as it drew up alongside the platform. "Ah'm goin' to sit right hyar on de baggage, Mis' Polly, and see it gits up all right."

Polly's brown eyes gleamed with mischief.

"Aunty, I do believe you're afraid to ride with us."

"'Fraid!" puffed Welcome with aggressive dignity. "Go 'long, chile, go 'long, Ah say. Ain't a mite 'fraid, me dat's faced crocodiles in mah day. Ah'm jes' cautious."

Marbury sprang from the car, and came towards them, head bared, hand outstretched, face smiling. He was taller and manlier than when they had met him on board the *Hippocampus*, nearly two years previous.

"I'm sorry I was late, Miss Polly, but it's all Hallie's fault. She nearly made me run into a telegraph pole up the road."

"I'm learning how to run a car, Polly," exclaimed Hallie, proudly. "Truly I am. I can go on a straight road now at low speed, but I don't know what the handles are for, I mean the brakes. There are some you have to grip and some you step on, and it gets me all mixed up."

Here Welcome came forward, and dropped one of her most majestic curtseys, explaining that she would stay behind with the two trunks, and not ride up in that "puffin' automobilicus."

"I wish you'd try a ride with us, Aunty," said Marbury. "I'll promise not to go over first speed, and we'll run easily."

"You're likely to run over any ole thing, chile," Welcome told him, firmly. "Ah ain't takin' no chances whatsoever dese days. De Admiral's down at Hot Springs wif plumbago at his age, and it's enough ter make sensible folkses take care ob dere mortal coils."

Polly stepped into the tonneau after Hallie, and settled back for the five-mile run up to White Chimneys.

"Mother's sending a team down after the trunks, so you won't have to wait long, Aunty," Marbury called as they waved good-bye to the placid old figure sitting on the willow hamper. He sent the car forward smoothly, and Polly drew in a deep breath of delight, as she tied a long brown veil down over her hat.

"Do you know that I've hardly ever ridden even in one of these machines, Hallie? Grandfather's a dear old treasure, but he can't bear

motor cars. He says the span of greys and Baalam will last as long as he does, and he's perfectly satisfied with them. Are cars very hard to run, Marbury?"

Marbury did not glance back, but kept his eyes fixed keenly on the road ahead of them.

"You've no time to eat peanuts while you're at this wheel," he laughed. "Father wouldn't allow me out alone with a car for two years, and I'd been driving with him off and on all that time too. I think you have to keep at it until it is fairly second nature to do the right thing at the right time. When you see danger ahead, your hand should reach out for the clutch brake just by instinct."

"Reach, then," Hallie called excitedly, as they turned a curve at the top of the hill. "Mule cart ahead!"

Plodding comfortably along was an old grey mule hauling a load of evergreens and spruce in an old two-wheeled cart. Half buried up to his eartips in the green branches was an old darky, a grey beaver hat pulled low over his spectacled eyes. Marbury threw in the brake and pulled up behind the fragrant boughs trailing on the ground.

"Uncle Pharaoh!" he called cheerily. "May I pass, please?"

There was no response. The old mule kept steadily along. The white beaver never even waggled.

"Let's all call him," Hallie suggested. So they sang out in chorus, "Oh, Uncle Pharaoh! Uncle Pharaoh!"

"Whoa, dere," Uncle Pharaoh admonished the mule, and stopped short. When he saw who it was in the car, he began to unwind the gayly striped woolen comforter from his throat, and chuckled.

"Howdy, Marse Marbury, howdy boy," he laughed. "You feel like givin' me an' Skeeters a race to-day?"

"Not today, Uncle," said Marbury. "I'm afraid you'd beat me." As they passed, the girls waved to the old man. "That's father's favorite citizen in Wenoka. He's nearly ninety and still works around by the day. He doesn't really believe the war's over yet, father says, and still votes a straight ticket for President Lincoln."

"He's carrying the trees around to the little colored children from Aunt Margaret," Hallie

chimed in. "They all call her Mrs. Santa Claus, Polly, in the cabins along the bayshore road. Oh, I just love to come down here for Christmas. It seems to last two weeks, and we have such good times."

"Are there many guests?" asked Polly, with almost her first touch of shyness. Among girls of her own age, she felt at home, but this was her very first trip away from Glenwood as a guest.

"Randy Dinwiddie's coming and his sister Cary. You'll like them, Miss Polly. Rand's at Annapolis with me, midshipman. And Cousin Pen. That's all excepting Dean Philips from Richmond. He's a classmate of father's, and always comes down to hold the midnight Christmas service at our little chapel every year."

"Oh, but at the party Christmas night a lot more come from around the country, you know, Polly," Hallie added. "This afternoon we're going up after laurel and everything we can find to decorate with."

The car went around another curve, over a stone bridge, and up an avenue of trees. There were tall stone posts at the entrance gates, overrun with creepers that still kept a deep tinge of crimson in their dry leaves. Half a mile ahead

Polly could see white chimneys rising above the trees, tall, narrow ones above gables and cornices.

Marbury threw on high speed, and the car took the smooth graveled road like a skimming bird. The girls had no time for further talk, but lifted their faces to the wind, and enjoyed the spin. It did not seem a minute until they drew up before the wide veranda, with its tall white columns, and low broad steps. Polly gave a little gasp of delight.

“Oh, isn't it welcoming!” she exclaimed. “Just as if it held out its arms to us.”

At this season of the year the full beauty of the grounds and distant view was lacking but even with the forlornness of windswept gardens and leafless trees, there was a charm and spaciousness about the old mansion that stole over one like a spell.

Polly turned her head around to Marbury with one of her quick impulses. “Don't you love it?”

“We're glad that you do,” answered Marbury, with a touch of his father's old-time courtesy as he assisted the two girls out of the car, and they went up the wide steps to where Mrs. Yates awaited them.

CHAPTER IV

MISTLETOE AND MOTORING

THERE were so many things to see and get acquainted with that first wonderful week at White Chimneys that Polly began to feel like a squirrel in a cage whirling around and around.

Mrs. Yates gave her a welcome that was full of gentle motherly graciousness, doubly cheering to a girl who had known no mother's love for years.

Polly never forgot the picture her hostess made in the bright December sunshine, as she stepped from the wide entrance doors that first morning and held out her arms to her.

Her hair had once been the sunniest among all the belles of the old Baltimore inner circle. Even now, the silver threads could not entirely hide the soft golden sheen. Her eyes were grave and tender, ever ready to light up with interest. Polly had always wondered how Mrs. Yates managed to be so interesting and sympathetic,

and say so little. It must be her smile, she decided, and the influence she radiated on those around her.

“Welcome to White Chimneys, child,” she had said, taking Polly in her arms and kissing the rosy cheeks. “Why, you’re nearly as tall as I am, Polly. Did the drive seem long? Hallie, you can take Polly up to her room, and both of you prepare for lunch. Clarinda?” Polly saw somebody bobbing up and down making funny little curtseys in the shadows of the old oak hallway, and saying “Yas’m, yas’m,” over and over again. “You look after all of Miss Polly’s wants.”

“Aunty Welcome came with me,” said Polly. “You know she never would have allowed me to come alone.”

But Clarinda led the way up the broad winding staircase, and back to the guest-room that was to be Polly’s during her visit.

Here a log fire burned lazily and comfortably in the deep rock fireplace. There was a pungent scent of pine and hemlock through the room, and on the table between the windows stood a low grey earthen jar filled with mountain laurel.

After lunch, the two girls had settled down

in front of the fire on the rug. Marbury and Mrs. Yates had gone for a spin in the car over to Mount Tom. Polly had asked at once, with her relish for adventure, where Mount Tom was, and what it was.

“It’s a great hill of rock about twelve miles from here. Aunt Margaret goes there every Christmas for her mistletoe. There are Indian graves there, and some old ruins that date back to the time of the early settlements. Come in.”

The tap at the door had been a very light one, and now a head was poked in inquisitively. It was a delightful head. Polly saw a round, plump, middle-aged face, with a pair of dimples, and surely the merriest, youngest blue eyes that forty-odd ever claimed. Their owner wore a pale blue silk boudoir cap with a soft frill of delicate lace around it. Polly thought how much the head resembled Dolly Madison.

“Oh, Cousin Pen, do come in and meet Polly,” exclaimed Hallie, springing up from the hearth rug.

“I felt it in my bones that I was missing something nice,” smiled the newcomer as she took Polly’s hand in hers. She was shorter than Polly too, and the latter liked her at once. “I’m

making shadowgraphs for the tree celebration in the Hollow," she added. "Don't you girls want to help?"

Did they? Back they went to the big sunny room at the end of the corridor, where Miss Harmon held undisputed sway. It was littered with every conceivable sort of holiday clutter. Once Hallie had told Polly back at Calvert Hall, when she was rushed with studies and had said she couldn't do more than two things at a time, that Cousin Penelope Harmon could do sixty-nine different things at one time.

It surely looked as though she could that first day, Polly thought. There were bags and bundles of all sizes and colors waiting to be done up, or undone. The couch was laden with ground pine and evergreen. Holly and mistletoe filled two great baskets in another corner.

"See what the boys gathered for me this morning," said Penelope cheerily. "They didn't know where to put it, so I said just to bring it in here where it would be handy."

"I can make wreaths," volunteered Polly.

"Then set right to work, child. There's the ball of green twine behind you on the table, and the scissors are under the sheet of music on the

stand. Hallie can clip the mistletoe and make it up into clusters for the dining-room. There's plenty more coming from Mount Tom. We're fixing up boxes to send away to the hospitals, too."

"I'm going to tuck a bunch right in your hair Christmas Eve, Cousin Pen," said Hallie, mischievously.

"It will go in easier under your bow of ribbon," Penelope answered good temperedly. Polly's eyes, bright with anticipation, watched her as she went to and fro, with noiseless slippered feet, attending first to one thing then to another. "You see," she added, "Mrs. Yates has all she can attend to, so I always run down from New York to help her with the decorations and tree. Where's the big grey elephant, girls, with the red blanket? It's the prize for the pickaninny who draws the lucky number in the wish cake."

"What's the wish cake, Miss Harmon?" asked Polly.

"It's for the little kiddies from the Wenoka shore settlement. We have a special tree for them, and old Uncle Pharaoh brings along his banjo, and things are very gay downstairs in the big hall that night. You see, Polly, here in this

little tag end of Virginia, we're not progressive. We are pretty peacefully situated on this strip of tidewater land, between the old bay and the river, and the great currents of life hardly even ruffle us."

"I think we grow too contented if we stay down here too long," Hallie put in with a restful sigh. "It's too good to be true."

"Grandfather says it's better for a good sailor to know all the gales that blow over the seven seas."

"I think he's right, Polly." Miss Harmon paused a moment, and looked down at the pine knot fire blazing on the hearth. "I was born right here at White Chimneys. My mother was the Senator's sister. So Wenoka seemed a very large slice of the earth to me those days, and a very busy place too. Now, I live part of the year in New York, and part I travel abroad."

"Cousin Pen's motored all over Europe, and even in Japan and India, Polly."

"Motored?" repeated Polly, wonderingly. "Not alone?"

"No. My brother and I did Japan together and the East, but in France and England I usually travel alone or with a woman friend."

From the outdoor world there came the low, musical tremolo of a siren horn, and the girls went to the windows.

"It's Mrs. Yates and Marbury," said Hallie. "Just see all the mistletoe and laurel they have."

Polly was looking down at the trim runabout. It looked so compact, and clean lined, and busy, as Marbury said.

"Is it very hard to learn how to run one," she asked, after they had waved to the others, and come back to the fire. "They always seem to me to be acting so impatient and skittish."

"Well, I'm not so sure," answered Penelope, stoutly. "I do like to run my own car, but still, in case of anything going wrong, it's good to have a man around. I had a small two-cylinder car in France, and the roads there are delightful to ride over. It really takes away half the responsibility, having a good road ahead of you. We're just beginning to waken up to our poor roads here, but the best thing about America is that once the alarm clock does go off, we are wide awake. Take the old turnpike here in Virginia, I mean the State road over west. It used to be dreadful and now it's the pride of Virginia. Ever been over it, Polly?"

"Oh, Miss Harmon, I don't know anything at all about motoring," Polly exclaimed. "And I do want to so much. How many people can ride in one?"

"What a funny question," said Hallie. "Seven, isn't it, Cousin Pen?"

"That's all unless you sit on each other's laps. We had a car you would have liked, Polly, when we did Japan. Creston, my brother, had it fixed up with everything for light housekeeping. We could even sleep in it; at least I did."

"Five girls, one chaperon, and a driver," counted off Polly reflectively. "Does it cost much to run a car for a month or so?"

"Several hundred dollars."

"You may as well talk of chartering the morning star, Polly," said Hallie. "I know what you're figuring on, our vacation, aren't you?"

"It's much cheaper motoring here in Virginia than up north." Penelope took off her cap. "Run away now, girls, I'm going to dress."

"Would you go with us as chaperon, Miss Pen?" asked Polly.

"If all the other girls are as nice as you, I

might," laughed Penelope. "It would be more exciting than Japan or India, I fancy."

"Aunt Margaret's calling us to help put up the laurel," said Hallie. "Come along, Polly, or you'll be drawing up the route, and making lists of canned goods. That's the very first thing those girls do when they talk vacation time over, Cousin Pen. They make lists of good things to eat."

"A good soldier remembers his commissariat department first. But if you're going on a motor trip, you'll have to carry food in capsules, Polly."

"I don't care how it's carried so long as we go," said Polly, happily.

CHAPTER V

THE PIRATE TREASURE

DURING the days that followed, Mrs. Yates and the Senator were engaged with their own grown-up guests, so Polly and Hallie were left a great deal to their own "ways and means," as Hallie said. But every hour she could spare, Miss Harmon took them out for long spins with Marbury in his runabout.

The weather was mild, and no snow covered the ground. Polly never tired of skimming over the frozen roads in the runabout. The country all around White Chimneys abounded in historical interest, and she wished that the girls were with her to enjoy it all, and the tales that Penelope loved to tell.

Most of all the girls enjoyed Mount Tom, and its Indian ruins. Not far away was a spot supposed to have been the last wild-wood home of Pocahontas. Only a pile of rock marked the place.

“Oh, I do love our little brown princess, don’t you, Miss Harmon?” Polly cried. “I think we Virginians have the dearest heroine of the old Indian days.”

“Remember when she came to the starving colony with her native followers, bearing corn to save their lives?” asked Hallie.

“Do you girls know that John Randolph, our statesman, was immensely proud of being sixth in line from that little brown princess?”

“Aunty Welcome declares her seventy-fourth grandmother was a queen in Samaliland in South Africa, wherever that is,” laughed Polly, as she perched on one of the ancient grey rocks. “And when she says it, old Uncle Peter always shakes his head, and says it’s so far back there’s no refutation permissible.”

“Spin about, Marbury,” directed Penelope, and Marbury slipped into second speed, after they were all packed in once more for the return trip. “Here, let me try my hand. I haven’t touched a steering wheel since I left England a month ago.”

“This car’s easy to control,” said Marbury, and the two began talking about the car just as if it were a human being, as Polly said. She

listened in silence to comparative values on sparking plugs and running gear, connecting rods and cylinders, and all the other talk of the road, but with a mental picture forming in her mind of what sort of trip the Vacation Club would have next summer.

“You know, Miss Polly,” said Marbury once, as he turned to the two girls, “Cousin Pen knows as much about the overhaul of a machine as anybody ever did.”

Penelope showed her white, even teeth in a quick smile of appreciation, her eyes narrowed as they watched the stretch of road ahead, her chin pointing forward to the breeze as though she were at the pilot wheel of a boat.

“It seems so odd for a woman even to care for machinery. I’d love to know all about the inside of a car too.”

“When we stop, let Marbury take her bonnet off, and show you, Polly,” Hallie suggested.

“Whose bonnet?”

They all laughed over that query, and Polly took it good-temperedly when Marbury explained what he meant by the “bonnet.” It was the cover over the cylinders. Then Polly put the question that had been in her mind for

several days, ever since her visit that first time in Miss Harmon's room.

"Couldn't we girls undertake a motor tour?"

"Here, Marbury, take the wheel," said Miss Harmon, happily. "I can never carry on a serious conversation when I'm running a car. I tried to once, and nearly snapped a telegraph pole in two. Now, then, Polly, child. Back to that motor club of yours that is still pathfinding over the cloud highways. It costs a great deal to run a car, pay for the upkeep, and a chauffeur."

"Yes, and it's just like the old darky's recipe for chicken soup," put in Hallie. "First find your chicken. Where's your car, Polly?"

Polly's eyes danced with responsive fun. She was quick to see the humor of her proposition, but so many hopes had come true for the club in the past that even a motor trip did not seem wholly impossible.

"What could we rent a car for, say for one month?"

"Just the car itself, or car and chauffeur?"

"I mean just the car itself."

"I'm not sure down here in Virginia. We could find out from the Senator."

“Would two hundred dollars cover the cost of car and driver?”

“Polly goes right to the main point,” said Penelope, gravely. “If you didn’t have to repair your car much, it might. But I’m not sure, with your driver’s salary, and gasoline, and general upkeep. If you had any break-downs and had to replace a couple of punctured tires, that would send the expense up. I should want three hundred to make sure.”

“I don’t see why we couldn’t rent a car,” said Polly, hopefully, “one with chauffeur and everything all found, and plenty of baggage room.”

“There never is any baggage room to speak of unless you get a ’bus top, or have a camp body put on.”

“What’s a camp body?”

“Oh, Polly, you cross examiner,” cried Penelope. “I’d have to show you a picture of one so you would understand. They use them for long overland trips out west, I believe. The regular passenger body is removed, and in its place they put this camp body. The seats at the side can be used for bunks, and there are all sorts of cubby holes for storing things away.”

“That’s the sort I want,” said Polly, quickly.

"But, child, it costs too much for you girls to undertake."

Polly leaned back again, pondering.

"It's the queerest thing, Hallie," she said presently. "Just as soon as I want to do anything it always seems half done to me. Somewhere there must be the car we could use, and surely if we girls spend every spare minute through the winter and spring planning for the trip and finding out about cars and their insides and their 'tricks and their manners,' as Miss Diantha says, we could do it. I know all the others would love to. And we needn't take a long trip. How far can you go in a day, Miss Harmon?"

"That depends on your roads and your speed, Polly. Jogging along as you girls would want to, you can make about a hundred miles a day."

"That's too many," said Polly, "unless we try to cover Virginia and Maryland, or some other bordering state. We want to take our time, and make discoveries."

"You'll make discoveries if you try going off the beaten track fast enough," Hallie interposed.

"Why not advertise, Polly. 'Wanted: well

behaved, perfectly tame car for vacation purposes.'” This from Marbury.

“Don't let them tease or discourage you one bit,” said Penelope, warmly. “There's no reason why you girls shouldn't do it if you can raise the money. You want a good reliable driver, though. He would be a large item of expense, but you must have him.”

“Oh, there are so many things I must have,” laughed Polly. “Let's do what Aunty Welcome says. ‘Dey ain't nuffin' suttin but de fleetin' moment, and you have to hold fast to its coat tails or even it gets away from you.’”

This particular moment was fleeting swiftly. They had ridden many miles from White Chimneys, and now turned back from the low shore roads, and were making for the higher land.

“It's just glorious,” said Polly. “Like steering a boat, isn't it, Marbury? What are all those handles beside you?”

“Levers,” answered Penelope. “Don't ask the man at the steering wheel questions. Ask me. Do you expect to know the proper names of everything concerning a car in your motor club?”

“I think we should. Supposing some day the

car turns turtle and our chauffeur is underneath. Wouldn't it be a good thing then if we girls knew what to do?"

"I won't be your chauffeur," Marbury called over one shoulder. "I'd be afraid you might get me into some scrape purposely so you could get a chance to run the car."

Polly laughed with the rest, but as soon as they reached White Chimneys she went up to her own room and wrote a long letter to Sue, who was club secretary. It went direct to the point, and Sue would read it to the others, Polly knew, so after it had gone down in the post bag, she felt as though the work were really started.

"Polly, you've been evading your share of the trimming," called Miss Harmon from a step ladder in the great hall. "Come here immediately and help me fasten a holly wreath under every candle bracket."

Polly went to work with a will until every wreath was in place, and the great boughs of spruce and hemlock were crossed above the arches. Hallie and Marbury hung festoons of southern smilax to cover the wall spaces, and old Uncle Pharaoh brought up the tree, a tall taper-

ing spruce that made the whole house redolent with piney perfume.

“If we push on these old panels we may come across the pirate treasure,” said Marbury.

“What’s that?” asked Polly, quickly. She came down from the ladder. Mrs. Yates and her guests were resting for the evening. Only Marbury and his chum Randy were with the girls and Miss Harmon.

“Let’s have tea and honey scones by the fire in here,” Hallie suggested. “I’ll go and tell Clarinda to bring it, and then Cousin Pen will tell us the story, won’t you?”

Polly never forgot that twilight hour. Already the expectant hush of Christmas Eve seemed to be falling over the outdoor world. Down below stairs someone was playing on a fiddle. The music came faintly to them as they sat around the great open fireplace. Randy and Marbury had stretched out comfortably on the rugs before the blaze. And over the teacups, Penelope told the old story that had come down through the years as White Chimneys’ ghost tale.

“It was back in the days of the buccaneers, when Sir Edward Morgan sailed the Spanish

Main. Old Percival Yates built this house, you know. And one night his servants came running with tidings of a strange ship that had sailed up the river. It had cast anchor down at the old stone landing that you can still find a trace of, and two boats were sent ashore.

“Old Percival was bedridden at that time with gout, and his daughter Barbara bade the servants prepare for guests, for in those days neighbors were far distant from each other, and it might be some of her father’s friends from Jamestown. The fires were built high, and food was prepared, and I don’t doubt that Barbara herself stood out yonder on the steps to take her father’s place in welcoming the unexpected guests.

“But when they came in sight, she saw they were strangers and dreadful looking ones at that, although the leader was splendidly garbed, and swept her a low bow. He had been driven up the river by a terrible gale, he said. His ship needed some repairs before they put out to sea again. Could he and his men replenish their store of supplies? Might they seek friendly shelter beneath the White Chimneys that had guided them for miles?

“Barbara told them her father was very ill, and any shock might bring on his death, so she must beg them to be very quiet, but in his name she was most glad to offer them hospitality. And she left them feasting here in the great hall. You see that little gallery at the north end? The two doors that open from it lead into the Senator’s room and to Mrs. Yates’s sitting-room; the latter used to be Barbara’s. Hearing sounds of quarrelling late that night, she rose softly from bed, and, wrapping herself in a long dressing gown, stole silently out on the gallery and looked down on the scene below.

“All the dishes had been gathered up in the table cloth and thrown in a corner, and on the bare table were sacks of gold and silver. Then she heard them planning to kill her father and take over the house as a refuge, for in those days this was far removed from any of the settlements. But there were two of the men who refused. Their host was ill, and his daughter had been kind to them. Divide fairly, they said, and get back to the ship with all the supplies they could take. And before Barbara realized what was happening, they were fighting, the candles were overturned, and the hall was in darkness. She ran

to her father's bedroom, and put her arms about him, expecting any instant the pirates would appear, but after a while their shouts died away, and leaning out the open window she heard them making for their boats.

“Her father told the terrified servants to go down and look here in the hall. All the treasure had vanished excepting a few scattered gold pieces under the table, and on the floor lay the leader, wounded.

“Old Percival said to put him to bed, and tend him as a guest, for he was a human being in distress. And for weeks after little Barbara saw that he was tended by an old colored woman until his wounds were healed. When he was able to leave, they gave him a horse to ride, and safe conduct to the coast, and as he said farewell to his host, he gave him some sacks of gold.

“‘If I return safely some day, keep them for me,’ he said, ‘but if at the end of ten years you hear nothing, let this little maid keep them for her dowry.’

“‘They shall be kept,’ promised old Percival. ‘Bend thy head, and I will tell thee where to hide them.’

“The stranger obeyed, and smiled as he caught

the whisper of the old man. He left the room with the sacks of gold, and the next hour he was gone from White Chimneys. Somewhere in a secret hiding place known only to her father, Barbara knew the pirate gold lay hidden. And only a few years afterwards, she bent over old Percival's pillow as he lay dying, trying to catch what he was saying.

“‘Three steps up, and three panels high,’ he murmured.

“And though she begged him to tell more, he could not. That night he died, and with him,” Penelope leaned forward mysteriously and lowered her voice, “with him died the secret of pirate gold. The stranger never returned, and Barbara sought for years the spot in this old house where her father had told him to hide his treasure. But they used to say that the pirate chief's spirit came back to this hall just before Christmas, and tried to find the old secret panel.” Miss Penelope's voice died away, and the girls were silent.

“I wish I could find it,” said Marbury, sitting up, and eyeing the old shadowy wainscoting above his head. “‘Three steps up, and three panels high.’”

“Is that the end, Cousin Pen?” Hallie whispered, her blue eyes round with interest. “Did they ever find it?”

“Not yet,” laughed Miss Harmon. “So there is something for you girls to dream about tonight. Time to dress for dinner now.”

“‘Three steps up and three panels high,’” mused Polly, gazing up at the staircase that ascended to the gallery at the end of the long room. “If I lived here I should go about pressing every single panel until I found the right one.”

“I suppose every Yates who has lived here since old Percival resolved to do the same thing, Polly,” said Penelope, briskly. “And it is only an old tale after all. Hurry and dress, both of you.”

CHAPTER VI

POLLY LOCATES HER CAR

“DOAN’T yo’ git yo’ head turned, honey, now,” warned Aunty Welcome, as she leaned over the balustrade to watch Polly and Hallie go arm in arm down to the Christmas party. Then she went to take her place on the gallery at the end of the long hall, with Clarinda and two of the other housemaids.

“Is it really your first party, Polly?” whispered Hallie, “I mean with grown-ups?”

Polly nodded her head. She could not speak just yet. At the turn of the staircase she paused to look over the railing. All the candles were lighted in the wall sconces. They gave such a soft mellow radiance. Mrs. Yates was talking to the Dean and a tall fair-haired girl in white with holly in her hair.

“That’s Cary Dinwiddie, Randy’s sister,” Hallie said under her breath. “She came down from Richmond tonight. Isn’t she lovely? Some

day Marbury's going to marry her, he says."

Polly watched Cary Dinwiddie all that long happy evening. As she wrote home to the Admiral the following day, she didn't know there were any more girls like her left.

"Mrs. Yates says that Cary is like one of the old-time Virginia belles, she is so graceful and sweet. There were other girls there, grandfather, but they were like a lot of sweet peas and honeysuckle blossoms with one lovely pink rose in the center. That's Cary. I told her about you and Glenwood, and asked her to visit us if she could some time. I hope I will be like her when I am nineteen. Not in looks, of course, because I'm just your brown gypsy girl, but I mean in charm and manner.

"And, grandfather dear," underlined, "I have something so important to tell you I can hardly wait to get home. I haven't even told Aunty Welcome. Is Dr. Smith visiting at Glenwood? I do hope so, for I know he would encourage me in going ahead with the plan. But I think you will too, when you know everything.

"We will be home Saturday on the 2:15 train. Don't you trouble to come to meet us if you are not well yet. Just send Balaam."



AT THE TURN OF THE STAIRCASE SHE PAUSED

Every day following Christmas was filled with novelty and enjoyment, but after breakfast each morning Polly would slip away to the garage and watch Marbury and Randy while they tinkered over the runabout.

Once Cary accompanied her, in short skirt and sweater, and Polly told her of the wonderful plan for the coming summer.

"It is fine, Polly," she said. "I only wish I were eligible. And if it does materialize, I want you girls to be sure when you get to Richmond, to come out and visit me at Meadowbrook. It is only a short run from the city, and you could easily plan on staying over night. I would love to have you, and so would my mother."

"Better come, Miss Polly," Randy put in from under the car. "You don't know what a jolly place we have up there, and Mother would pet you all so you wouldn't want to go any farther."

Polly felt she was fully justified in accepting the invitation on the spot for the vacation jaunters.

"Indeed I wish there were Meadowbrooks scattered all along the way for us," she said. "I have Aunt Evelyn in Richmond, but in the summer time she always goes to the mountains."

"North?" asked Hallie.

"No, down around Asheville, in North Carolina. I wonder if it will be dreadfully hot trying to tour in July and August."

"Awful," Randy replied, cheerfully. "Unless you rise at dawn, and ride until about ten, then choose a shady spot, and sleep until four, then drive until eight. That's the way we boys would do, wouldn't we, Marbury, and find places to swim when we rested."

"I shall remember that advice," Polly remarked, nodding her head wisely. "Hallie, we'll carry our swimming suits with us."

"Say, why don't you put in a silk tent, too?" Randy queried. He rolled over, and stuck his head out like a friendly turtle. "One of the fellows from home took a motor cycle trip with me up through the hills last year, and we carried a silk tent with us. It's light, you know, and strong, and straps under your seat, and then you're independent if you don't make a town or house for the night. Saves money too, and after last year out west you girls ought to be good campers."

"Would a silk tent cost very much?"

"I'm not sure. Ours belonged to the other boy,

Teddie Baxter. Write to any firm that handles outing supplies, and you'll get their list."

"Isn't it queer," said Polly, when Cary and Hallie and she strolled back to the house, "that once you make up your mind, you seem just to sail along, and everything happens for the best. I've learned ever so much from Randy, and good practical things too. Why, with a silk tent and a fireless cooker, we could cut expenses in half."

When she reached the house Miss Harmon was waiting for her, and laughed when she saw Polly's all-enveloping brown apron with oil smudges on it.

"You must carry jumpers with you as I did abroad. I had jumper and overalls to slip on when I had to do any repairing at all. I wish you girls could have seen some of the roadside receptions that I held in that outfit going through Holland."

Cary and Hallie went away to find Mrs. Yates, and the "conspirators," as the Senator had dubbed them teasingly, went to his study. There was a definite purpose written on Polly's expressive face.

"Get out your pencil now," said the Senator, after greeting them. "The very first machinery

to set in motion on a trip such as you propose making is a well-sharpened pencil."

"I have one ready, sir," Polly replied, promptly. "It's been working regularly every day since I came to White Chimneys, and I do really think it has brought the trip nearer. You get down to facts this way, and two summers of earning our vacations has made every single girl among us respect facts."

The Senator laughed at this, and at Polly's serious face. He opened up an automobile map of Virginia on the desk before him.

"Where do you want to travel?"

"Anywhere we can on the money we are able to raise. We haven't talked it over very much, you see, but I should think we ought to start with our home state. There is so much about it we don't know and haven't even seen."

"Humph," said the Senator, eloquently. "It's a poor state for the best of motorists to try and get over unless they keep to the National Pike. If I were you, Polly, and the chief of this affair, I should put my car on a steamer bound north and take a state that has been well mapped and is safe."

"I wondered, Uncle Gordon, whether or not

the girls could be of any help on the roads committee," Miss Harmon suggested at this point. "I haven't even spoken of it to Polly yet; I waited for you to give your opinion. I know they couldn't work with the A. A. A.—"

"What's that?" asked Polly, eagerly.

"American Automobile Association, child. You'll learn to appreciate it and its protection later. They have their own cars and workers, of course. But couldn't the girls do some sort of work for the State Association? They could trace out roads that were not well known, and take photographs of different places that needed attention, or of dangerous fording spots and awkward turns. Just as good motor scouts, I think, they might earn something to help defray the expenses of the trip, don't you?"

The Senator's face was amused and sceptical.

"We should all enjoy it," Polly protested. "And we'd work faithfully."

"How many girls do you expect would go?"

"Five, Isabel Lee, Sue, Ted, and myself, are the old members of the club. And this year we would have Hallie. With the chauffeur and a chaperon, that makes seven. And we've almost persuaded Miss Harmon to be the chaperon."

“What about your driver? If you did good road work, I might secure the services of one for you at a lower rate. And where would you get your machine?”

“Couldn’t we rent your old one, Senator?” asked Polly quickly. “We could have it put into good shape ourselves, and Marbury says its a splendid car only it isn’t this year’s model. I’ve just found out this morning that the top comes off, and we can put any kind we like on the body.”

“The chassis,” corrected Penelope.

“Is it? Oh, we’ll have all the names down pat before it is time to turn the wheel,” laughed Polly, happily. “Anyway, I found out that we can take off that top and put on another, a seven seater, with a top part over that—”

“Too many tops to your car, Polly,” teased the Senator.

“I mean the top of the tonneau, is that right? We must carry some suit cases along, and I don’t see where they go unless we fasten them on top some way. What is under the seats?”

“Tool kits,” said Penelope. “And at the back you have your extra tires and reserve petrol tanks.”

“Petrol? That’s what we call gasoline on this side, isn’t it?” Polly replied reflectively.

“Dear me, I only wish I’d brought my own car over with me,” fretted Penelope. “I could have packed away you girls in it, and have spun you over the roads without a bit of worry.”

“Pen, that little underhung runabout of yours doesn’t clear more than ten inches. You’d get caught on every thank-you-ma’am and turf ridge along our roads.” The Senator reached into his desk drawer and drew out some catalogues and booklets. “You go over these carefully, Polly, with either Marbury or Cousin Penelope. Take them home with you tomorrow if you like, and let the girls look them over too. Then pick out the build of car you think would be best suited to your use. Send it back to me, and I’ll see what can be done. If you wish to use my old car, go ahead. It is a good reliable make, and with a little overhauling will do very well for the rough work here. Don’t forget a medicine kit, and good serviceable clothing besides your pretty motor veils and teabaskets.”

“I know he thinks we won’t stick to the plan,” said Polly, as they went back to the big sunny morning-room where the rest were. “But it

doesn't seem any harder to undertake than the yacht club we had two years ago up in Maine. Only of course the chauffeur is going to be a large item on our expense bill. But I know you will go with us, Miss Harmon. Why, it will be the most exciting four weeks you ever had!"

"I don't doubt that one bit," agreed Penelope merrily. "I think I shall go along. I have had so little chance for any long touring trips since I came over this last time, that even the mishaps would be adventures. If Marbury were older I should take him with us, for he has developed into a very fair mechanician, but I hardly think he would pay much attention to his steering gear with five of you girls talking to him. We shall need a sedate, middle-aged chauffeur warranted not to permit the car to climb fences when Polly bids him see the beautiful sunset."

"I think," said Polly absently, "that we could string out this tour so it would last quite a while. We don't care about the fashionable thoroughfares a bit. Why couldn't we just spin around comfortably, and if it rains, put up until it stops, and if we come to a place that looks inviting, just pitch camp and enjoy it for a while? Make it a sunshine tour. Marbury says you get very

hungry when motoring. Very well. We'll be vegetarians, and carry plenty of nuts and raisins and figs with us."

"Better get capsuled food, Polly," Hallie suggested, as she joined them at the end of the corridor. "If Crullers goes we'll feed her concentrated food entirely, and that will save so much."

"Just the same, I'm in earnest," protested Polly. "When they hear a horn toot, Marbury says, up go the prices along the road."

"I see where this expedition travels under 'Revised Road Rules,' by M. Yates."

"Letters for everybody," called Cary, glancing out of the door at the head of the hall. "Uncle Pharaoh just brought up the mail."

Polly caught her breath as one from the Admiral, and one from Sue, fell in her lap. The first was from Glenwood, so she was sure her grandfather had reached home from Camden.

Excusing herself, she ran up to her own room to pore over the two momentous epistles. On them hung all the hopes of the summer. She felt fairly certain the girls would all agree to her plan, but the Admiral's scruples could veto everything. At the first few lines of his letter, a smile broke over Polly's face.

“I had been dreading the journey home by rail, but Dr. Smith met me at Camden, and spent several days with me there. He has been on a long motor trip through Florida and South Carolina, and insisted on bringing me home with him in his machine. We made the journey with very comfortable speed, stopping at various places along the way to rest. It is indeed a delightful mode of travel.”

“Oh, the precious old dear,” exclaimed Polly.

“Is yo’ speakin’ ob yo’ grandfather in dat unrespectful way, Mis’ Polly?” inquired Welcome from the big rocker where she sat mending a long rent in Polly’s coat.

“But Aunty, listen, he’s been in an automobile all the way up from South Carolina, and he likes it, and you know how set he was against them.”

“Didn’t Ah say he was gettin’ childish, and now he’s all irrational too, and light minded. When folks get unsettled in dere opinions, you can’t depend on ’em two minutes at a time. Jes’ de hour I get home I’m a’ gwine ter slap a plaster right on de back ob his neck, and bring him out ob it.”

“Oh, dearie, let him alone,” coaxed Polly, who knew from long experience what one of Wel-

come's all-healing plasters was like. "Maybe we can coax him to help us with our trip now."

"Doan't talk about dat motormobubble trip to me," protested the old nurse haughtily. "Here Ah've lived to be most ninety or maybe it's seventy, Ah forget, and now Ah feel jes' like seekin' some home for de discouraged and broken-hearted de way you and de Admiral cut up after all mah upbringing'."

Hallie tapped at the door, and looked in.

"Uncle has been looking over the old car with his chauffeur and Marbury, and they say it will cost about eighty or a hundred to overhaul it properly. So he says we may take it and put it in shape, and if we do road work with it, he'll call it square. And another thing, Polly, when we stop over night at hotels or houses, we girls can double up, and that saves room rent. Cousin Pen says she knows we can get through on three hundred dollars. And she suggests that we take along a fireless cooker. She likes the little continental ones the best with two kettles, and she says we can manage beautifully. She was just telling us about some old general back in the seventeenth century who hated to fight on an empty stomach, and they had a long forced

march, so he fixed up a sort of basket with hay and blankets, and put in it a potted chicken to brew, and it went along with the general's kit."

"Chicken friccassee's goin' to give anybody courage and peace to dere souls," said Welcome fervently.

"It will give us both, and a reserve in the treasury too," Polly said laughingly. "You'd better come along, Aunty."

"We'll promise not to let you ride on the rumbles."

"What are the rumbles, Hallie?" asked Polly, for Welcome disdained even to make response to the suggestion.

"Hear our lady of the road," Hallie teased. "Just you wait until you go over Virginia roads sitting on a rumble seat, then you'll know."

"Hallie," exclaimed Polly, "I'd sit on the bonnet if it would make the trip certain." Her tone was so solemn and earnest that Hallie fled laughing down the hall to tell the others, but Polly sat still, with the two letters in her hand. Sue's was full of expectation, and she knew the girls were all waiting her return with outstretched hands.

CHAPTER VII

GATHERING THE CLAN

NOT a word of the summer plans did Polly breathe during the drive home from the station at Queen's Landing.

The Admiral met her with old Balaam driving the carriage. He was full of his old genial teasing ways, and his eyes twinkled with amusement at her descriptions of her first real visit away from home, but she noticed how quickly he wearied after dinner.

It seemed good to follow him to the old consultation corner in his study. There was a deep-seated leather chair drawn up at one side of the open fireplace. Behind it was a great Chinese jar filled with mountain laurel. As long back as Polly could remember, the dragons that coiled about the rose and green and deep blue surface had reached their fire-spouting heads to the mountain laurel in winter time. It was a

“notion” of the Admiral’s, as Welcome would have said, and one he always indulged.

Above the mantel hung a three-quarter length painting of Polly’s grandmother, “Mis’ Car’line,” in primrose brocaded satin, with damask roses on her lap and in her dark, rippling hair. Evening after evening, the Admiral would lean back in the large armchair and look up at the face in the picture, and only Polly ever ventured to disturb his dreams there.

Tonight she seated herself on one arm of the chair, and began to swing her right foot, a sign always that she had something important to impart.

“Grandfather Admiral, dear.”

“Out with it, Mate,” with a sigh of resignation. “I knew there was something in the wind from your letters. Do you want Glenwood moved to White Chimneys?”

Polly shook her head from side to side, and smiled down at the glowing pine and chestnut logs. She had tied her long brown curls at the back of her neck instead of in Dutch fashion, plaited and crossed, with two bows back of her ears, the way she had worn it at White Chimneys. The Admiral liked it best this way so he could put

back his hand and stroke the curls. And tonight she wanted to do everything possible to please him for it was her home-coming.

“Did you have a good time riding up from Camden in the Doctor’s car?” So irrelevant the query seemed that the Admiral walked into it cheerily.

“Delightful, splendid. I haven’t enjoyed a journey so much in years, Polly. The roads were hard and the weather clear, and—upon my word, Polly, you’re laughing at me.”

“Why, dear, you won’t mind when I tell you something.” She laid both hands on his shoulders, and put her cheek down on his upstanding grey tuft of curls. “We girls want to do something this coming summer, and I felt certain you would understand and help us, and approve—”

“Steady, Mate,” warned the Admiral. “Don’t you steer me into any uncharted channels. What is it?”

Polly laughed, and squeezed his neck lovingly. Then she whispered slowly and distinctly into one ear, the one nearest to her, “We want to take a motor trip for our vacation.”

“Not alone?”

“Oh, no, indeed. Miss Harmon will go with

us, she promised. Don't you remember her, Grandfather, Penelope Harmon?"

"But is she quite grown up?" asked the Admiral thoughtfully. "She was a girl with curls like these and a rose behind one ear the last time I can recall meeting her down at White Chimneys."

"She is just forty-two," Polly returned impressively. "Forty-two. Isn't that old enough to be steady and responsible? Aunty Welcome always said any one under forty was just a giddy gadfly, do you remember? But Miss Harmon is past that. Anyway, she understands a car just as you do a ship, and I can't think of a single reason why we shouldn't go. Can you?"

She put her head on one side like a meditative parrot, and the Admiral chuckled.

"We'd be very careful, dear," she insisted, "and it certainly won't cost any more or as much as the trip to Wyoming last year did. Mrs. Yates said she would allow Hallie to go. Couldn't I, Grandfather, please?"

"I'll consider it," promised the Admiral evasively, but the hands about his neck only tightened their clasp.

"That won't help a bit. How can we go ahead

and plan and save unless we are certain we can make the trip? And I have to see all the girls tomorrow and let them know. You understand how important it is, don't you, dear, dear ship-mate?"

It was the last word that unsettled the Admiral's prejudices. When Polly called him ship-mate, there really was nothing to do but act up to the compliment.

"Well, if Penelope Harmon goes along, and the Senator says the expedition has his sanction, and you promise to telegraph home every day that you're still in sailing trim, I'll see what can be done."

"You don't have to see about anything, Grandfather," Polly protested. "We want to do it all by ourselves, the same as last year. All you need do is consent. Maybe you can come and meet us along the way and ride too. You and Doctor Smith."

The Admiral gallantly accepted the invitation on behalf of the Doctor and himself, and smiled over Polly's motherly attitude towards them both, quite as if it were the most natural thing in the world for a Rear-Admiral and famous Smithsonian scientist to go trailing off over unknown

paths after a lot of gypsying motor jaunters.

Early the following morning, Polly went down to the Hall to tell the girls that the victory was already half won.

Sue hurried to meet her on the way, holding her hat with one hand, and laughing.

"I saw you from the dining-room window, Polly, and ran. School doesn't open until Tuesday, so we'll have two days to talk things over, and lay out a campaign. I read your letters to the girls, and they think the whole plan is just wonderful if we can carry it out. Won't it cost a lot? And won't the roads through Virginia and Maryland be terribly dusty in summer time? Father says we ought to strike down into the North Carolina mountains where it's cooler."

"I don't know which way is best yet," Polly returned happily, her hands deep in her coat pockets, chin up to the keen wind from the bay. "We'll have to leave the route for a little while, and plan on the money end and the fixing up of the car."

"What does the Admiral say?"

"He is not much in favor of it so far, but he will be, I know he will. It's only because he sees us girls scooting all over the map with nobody to

look after us, don't you know? But I told him we'd have Miss Harmon with us, and the Senator will be sure and see that we get a good chauffeur. It will all be done easily when the time comes."

"Polly Page, you're the worst optimist I ever knew. Miss Calvert said last term an optimist labored under great responsibilities, because he might influence people the wrong way just as much as a pessimist. You have to be sure things are really all right before you go around declaring they are."

"It's more fun the other way," Polly retorted comfortably. "I'd rather keep saying the sun's bound to shine than everlasting expect to feel raindrops on my nose. And the sun always looks brightest through a crack, too, did you ever notice that?"

"But can this all be done easily?"

"Susan, don't you dare pile up boulders on my track. I'm sure we girls can do it, and Miss Harmon says we can too. You'll like her, she's so—oh, I don't know, like a fresh breeze in your face when you're all tired and fussy, don't you know? She says everything has to be started, and it always starts with an idea in somebody's brain, see? We've got nearly six months to work

for this vacation trip, and I can just shut my eyes and see us skimming along the road in a seven-passenger car."

"Red with gold trimmings, I suppose," Sue put in mischievously. "I'd love a deep maroon car, wouldn't you, Polly?"

"Grey and silver, I think." Polly's big brown eyes stared ahead of her as if she beheld the car straight in front of them. "Grey and silver, and long and low, and kind of scooty looking."

"We could call ourselves the scooters, couldn't we? What shall we wear?"

Polly laughed.

"That sounds like Isabel, Sue. I hadn't even thought of it."

"But we'll have to think of it," Sue protested sensibly. "We'll need a lot of new things of course, goggles and veils and 'sich like,' as Annie May says."

"We could need them, but we won't unless we can afford them. I want to get all the girls together, and figure out just how much we'll need and how to earn the money."

"There's Ruth coming up from the village," interrupted Sue suddenly, waving her hand to a figure just turning a corner on the hill street.

"She knows how much we have in the treasury."

Ruth was seventeen now, and it was her last year at Calvert, but she was still in the club, and the girls deferred to the opinion of "Grandma," as they still called her from the old days up at Lost Island. She smiled as Polly eagerly unfolded her plan, her chin lifted a bit higher than usual, her grey eyes keen and interested behind her eyeglasses.

"It's really splendid, Polly," she exclaimed when she had heard all. "I do hope you can carry it through, but don't count me in this year. I went up to the ranch last year with you, and mother is a little bit better, so I told her this year I would take a summer course in kindergarten work and stay with her. Why don't you take Natalie Reid into the club? Have you thought of her at all?"

"She's a Freshman, but she is full of ideas, and a dear. But she's not a Virginian, is she?" Polly stopped short. Natalie was in her first year at Calvert, but had won her way into the comradeship of the old-time pupils easily. She was the daughter of a civil engineer, whose work had led him to all sorts of strange corners of the earth, and in her childhood Natalie had traveled along

with the "caravan" as she dubbed the family entourage.

Polly loved to sit and hear her tell of queer and comical happenings in Egypt and China, Brazil and Mexico. She had managed to pick up from native nurses funny little phrases in different languages, and the girls loved to coax her into repeating them. Or nights where one of the resident girls held a feast, Natalie would sit cross-legged on a divan like an Indian idol, and tell wonder tales while all lights were extinguished and only little red punk sticks burned and glowed in the darkness.

"I'll ask her if she thinks she could go with us," Sue said. "I know she expects to spend her vacation here because her father and mother are away over in Samoa or one of the islands out in the Pacific. He is building a railroad, I think, just draping the track along the mountain sides up in the clouds like a flounce on a petticoat. I'm sure Nat would love to go with us if she can get their consent."

"Tell her to come to our meetings anyway," Polly suggested. "I think she can go. How much have we in the treasury now, Ruth?"

"About twenty dollars in dues and sundries."

"I do admire Ruth as a treasurer," murmured Sue. "She always has some sundries left over, and when I was treasurer I never had anything."

"Hush yo' foolin', chile," Polly laughed, with Welcome's exact tone and accent. "It is a fair start. Senator Yates said we had better have the car overhauled first of all, and he would attend to that, giving directions, I mean, because we wouldn't even know the right names of the things we need changed. I know there is to be a seven-passenger body put on for one thing, and it is to have an omnibus top, like on the railroad taxis, you know, Ruth, so we can put suitcases and things up there."

"Have you counted hotel expenses, Polly, in the estimate for the trip?" Ruth asked. "You will have to put up somewhere each night, and they charge for storing the car, don't they?"

"But think how we'll economize in other ways," Polly protested. "There will be five of us besides Miss Harmon, and I know we can manage with two rooms with double beds in each—"

"All Polly can see is this doubling up," Sue teased. "We'll be doubling up in everything, I know we will. It's a wonder you haven't thought of using a double decker car, Polly, like

the ones in France, and piling some of us up there.”

“Like a little hurricane deck? I think it would be lovely, but you’d bump your heads on low boughs along the country roads. It would be ‘Low bridge’ all the way, I guess. Wouldn’t it be fun next year to get a houseboat, girls, and just jog around with it up and down the coast?”

“You don’t jog around in a houseboat,” Ruth corrected. “You just anchor somewhere and stay all summer.”

“Not in mine,” Polly returned gaily. “I shall hoist a sail on my jaunting houseboat, and go hither and yon as I list. I wonder why no one has thought of putting a sail on a land boat. We could put up a sail on our car if the wind happened to be in the right quarter, and just skim over the country.”

“Into the nearest fence, Polly, when your breeze veers. You’ve got too trusting a nature. If you tuck sails on our jaunting automobubble, I won’t go along.”

As she spoke, Sue threw the challenge over her shoulder, and ran towards the big stone entrance to Calvert Hall, Polly in quick chase after her. Rosy and panting for breath, they drew up at

the side door, and went upstairs to Jean Murray's room.

"It isn't ten yet, girls," Jean protested as she admitted the trio. "How are you, Polly. Did you have a good time at White Chimneys?"

"Splendid." Polly threw her arms around her favorite teacher's neck in one of her swift impulsive bear hugs, and loosened her coat for a stay. "I know it's fearfully early for a call, but school begins right away, and we've really got only to-day to talk everything over and decide. Where's Peggie?"

"She went to the chapel with Natalie and Daphne." It always seemed odd to the girls when anybody gave Crullers her right name, Daphne. "They were going to distribute the Christmas decorations among the sick, but they started directly after breakfast, and will be back soon."

"Couldn't I telephone over to Ted, please, Miss Murray?"

Jean nodded her head in smiling assent.

"Gather the clan, Polly, although I think you would be perfectly safe now in saying the vote was unanimous for the trip by motor. It is all the girls have talked of since you left, and Isabel

has all her designs started for the latest styles in bonnets, silk dusters, veils, gloves, everything you need in equipment."

"We might dress Lady Vanitas up just as a sample of what we could have done if we had wanted to," said Polly, hopefully. "I think the rest of us will go in serge or khaki skirts and middy blouses."

"Telephone her too, or is she still in Washington? I know she said she was going up over Sunday with her cousins. She'd vote for the trip any way, we know that. I'll put in a proxy vote for her. That's fair, isn't it, Miss President?" Sue stood at attention beside Polly; but Polly only laughed, and ran downstairs to the telephone in the lower hall to call up Ted.

As soon as she had arrived, the first meeting of the New Year was called to order, although, as the president remarked in her opening address, it was more like a special session of Congress.

"But it's no use putting the question off a day longer than we can help, girls. We must strike while the iron is hot."

"Or our horseshoes won't bend in the good luck curve," added Ted sotto voce.

"Well, it's just this way," Polly persisted.

“The Senator is willing, and Grandfather is willing, and we can have the car all right. The only thing that really bothers me is this. We don’t want to travel too far away from home, but I find out a car can go a hundred miles a day easily and naturally. In a month or six weeks, we could go all over the United States at that rate.”

“We must move gradually like a variable star,” said Sue. “Here come Natalie and Crullers. I hear their footfalls on the neighboring air.”

“You mean stair, Sue,” Ted corrected, rising to open the door for the newcomers.

“Oh, is it a meeting?” asked Natalie, a bit wistfully, when she caught sight of all the other girls. “Then I’m out of it.”

“No, you’re not,” cried Polly. “Come right in. We’ve just about elected you a member of the Club. Girls, will somebody act quickly, please, and make Natalie a member, so we can go ahead with our business?”

So with very few words the little stranger at the Hall attained to one of its most coveted honors, membership in the strictly limited Vacation Club. Just then she did not realize what it meant, the circle of smiling, welcoming faces around her, but before she had removed her hat

and jacket, Sue informed her of her unanimous election.

“And can I go with you next summer then?” she asked eagerly, pushing back her fluffy, fair hair from her face where the wind had blown it loose. “I thought I’d have to stay here sure.”

“You will become a ‘scooter,’ ” Polly promised her solemnly. “Now, then, to business. Any questions or suggestions, girls?”

“What is your plan for earning the money to cover the expenses,” Ruth leaned forward to ask, a little pad of paper on her knee, and pencil ready.

“Didn’t I write that the Senator thought we could do some good scout work for the roads association? I don’t think it would be hard. We can surely take a map with us, and mark out new short cuts that are passable, and blind roads that end in a fence rail, and bad fords or good ones, anything that is of interest to motorists. I thought we could take snapshots of such places, and hand in the whole report to the State Roads Commission that Senator Yates is Vice-President of. There would be some money in it for us any way. I don’t know how much, but I think we could earn half our expenses that way.”

"They wouldn't pay us a hundred and fifty dollars for some kodak pictures, Polly," said Sue, speculatively.

"No, I know that, but supposing we put in a month and a half of steady scouting along roads that were unfamiliar, wouldn't that be worth a good deal with all the pictures?"

"It would cut down your expense account considerably, Polly," Miss Murray interposed. "And if the pictures came out well, you could send sets of them to the motor magazines and local newspapers, I should imagine."

"Girls," exclaimed Crullers, sitting bolt upright, "I just thought of something perfectly brilliant. You needn't laugh, Sue, at all, for it is. Why not drop a line to all the places where they make things for cars and motorists? Just tell them we're going to take this scout trip, and offer to advertise their goods all along the line. That would give us a full outfit for nothing."

"Crullers, precious," said Ted, putting her arm around Crullers' plump shoulders, "you're wasting time at Queen's Ferry. You should have a nice little shiny leather knapsack filled with business cards to distribute as we ride along."

"Maybe we could sell something, though," in-

sisted Crullers unbeaten, "as the gypsies do. Not tin pans or ponies, but something pretty. Post cards of Ted would be nice."

She reached the door by degrees, and at the finish of her speech just barely dodged Ted's accurate aim with a cushion.

"Order," laughed the president, rapping vigorously with Jean's paperweight. "Let's stop playing, girls. Somebody make a motion, please."

So Ruth rose and carefully put the motion that the Vacation Club make a tour by motor car the following summer, time and route to be decided on later.

"Second the motion," Natalie said a bit shyly, as her first act as a member. The motion was carried, and Polly smiled at them all radiantly.

"We won't be a bit sorry, girls," she said. "I can see the whole summer ahead of us. Tonight I'll write to Senator Yates, and we had better meet every week from now on at our own homes in turn, and start the money ball rolling. June comes soon."

CHAPTER VIII

THE COLONIAL DINNER

THE Senator kept his word faithfully.

The day of the special meeting Polly wrote him fully, telling him of the girls' action, and forwarding a list of questions regarding equipment and the best routes to follow.

Sue hunted up a list of automobile supply firms, and the seven pored over the long descriptions of enticing articles one might buy. Isabel had never been so deeply interested as this year.

"Girls," she exclaimed, when she had listened to all they had planned since her visit at Washington, "just think what darling outfits we can have this year, instead of plain khaki suits, or sailor ones."

"Yes'm," Polly assented, "and I know, too, how much they would cost. We're going into this just like old campaigners should. Middy blouses, serge skirts, and coats or sweaters, or if

they're too warm, then the thinnest crash or linen skirts we can find."

"Linen crushes too easily," said Isabel, calmly. "Get pongee or ratine, something rough and still in style. We might just as soon be in style, Polly. With soft hemp hats and wide crushy silk scarfs around them, it wouldn't be so bad, tied under our 'bonny wee chins.'"

"Misquoted," called Ted. Ted always knew when anybody misquoted anything. "It's her bonny wee shoe, goosie."

"I think it might be wise to take along serge coats. It may be cool sometimes," Polly said.

"Yes, it may, and then again, ten to one we sizzle," replied Crullers struggling over a motor bonnet she was making out of the back of an old rose silk pillow cover. She had borrowed a round pudding pan from Annie May and had succeeded in making a wire frame over it, with a fashion magazine laid out in front of her, and the picture of a bewitching motor girl before her, crowned with this particular bonnet. "Just look at this thing. Look at it." She held it out on one hand. "And I think I'll look just like she does when it's done."

"You should have shirred it on the wire before

you fastened it to the crown, I think," Ruth told her.

"I don't care. It will make a little handkerchief case or a nice Christmas present next winter for some of you. Polly, don't you want it for a work bag? I'll raffle it at a penny a chance."

"Crullers," called Natalie from the door as she slipped out to her music lesson, "there's always a breeze when you're in motion. Tell Polly to put you right in front where you'll be fanned by zephyrs."

"I don't want to be fanned," Crullers protested, placidly. "I just want to be cool naturally. What time is it, girls? I must be back at the Hall by five surely, Miss Calvert said, French intransitives."

"It's twenty minutes of five," Sue replied, looking over her shoulder at the tall clock in the hall. They had gathered at Polly's that second week, as a ways and means committee. At the long oblong mahogany library table Ruth and Polly bent their heads over many sheets of paper. Sue glanced at them now, speculatively. "Polly, have you figured out yet how much we can spend on our personal outfits?"

"Susan," Polly shook her head decidedly. "The

upkeep of the car and how we're to eat and sleep is all we've got to yet. This trip isn't just merry jaunting. It is full of responsibility. We'll have two cameras, mine and Ted's, and the Senator said to send on the rolls just as soon as they were used up."

"Miss President," Ted's clear voice interposed, "I suggest that we mark clearly the personal rolls and the professional ones. It would be kind of funny for the State Roads Association to get a roll of Crullers left behind by accident, discovered sleeping on a mossy bank like Ariel, or Sue selling trinkets to the natives."

"Why don't you be official photographer, Ted," asked Ruth, leaning her chin on her palm. "Your Lost Island films came out better than any of the others, and you've got a perfect gift for composition and lighting effects."

"Listen to our dear old adjuster who knows just where we belong." Peggie put her arms around Ruth's neck, and squeezed her. "I wish I were going too."

"You won't think anything about us once you get back to the ranch, and on your pony," Polly said merrily. "But I do wish you were going all the same, and Ruth too. It will seem queer,

won't it, girls, not to have Grandma with us to tell us what we ought to do when everything gets all topsy-turvey. When do you go, Peg? Right after Commencement?"

Peggie glanced around at them all, with a gleam of mischief in her dark eyes.

"The week after, so we'll be home in time for a good wedding celebration."

Polly dropped her pencil instantly, deserting the road map she had been following out.

"Whose wedding. One of the boys?" she asked eagerly. Dearly did Polly love weddings and christenings, and so far only Annie May and Mandy's daughter at home had given her a chance to pin on any bridal veils.

Peggie shook her head tantalizingly.

"Guess again. You know them both, oh, so well. Jean told me, and I don't see why all of the club shouldn't know, because Jean—"

She stopped at the chorus of exclamations, but Polly urged her to go ahead and get it over with, and out it came, the great secret that had been kept so long so well.

"Right after we get home Jean is to be married to Dr. Smith."

"The blessed old smuggler." Polly hugged

her knees, rocking to and fro joyously. "Girls, remember Smugglers' Cove? I'm so glad he's shaved off his beard like a nice, clean-shaven cheery Cæsar. Where are they to be married, did you say, Peg?"

"Up home, of course, because mother wants it so. Miss Calvert's going west with us, and the doctor too. He's shipping his car west, and they are going to make the trip back east in it on a honeymoon tour."

"In the car?" exclaimed Sue. "Well, forevermore. How things are happening. Remember when we first saw the Doctor, girls, and we thought he was old, ever so old, and now he's in the forties instead of the sixties. I can see myself growing steadily older. People don't seem nearly so old at thirty or forty as they used to."

"Sue's just turned fifteen, and the pride is sticking out all over her," Ted remarked in a casual and dignified fashion. "I'll be sixteen in November. Poor little Susan!"

"Edwina Pillow—" began Sue loudly, but Ted laughingly begged off. It was hard enough to be named after the old General without flaunting it in public, she always said, so Sue had her revenge. General Pillow might have been an ex-

cellent old dear, Ted said, but after you had been nicknamed Feathers and Downy all through a troublous childhood, it was time to call a halt.

“I’m so glad for Miss Jean,” Polly said, warmly, “just ever so glad. She loves everything that is beautiful and artistic in the world, and now she can travel and be a regular globe trotter. And I really think she likes the Doctor.”

The rest laughed at Polly’s serious declaration, but Peggie seemed to understand what she meant.

“I know. Of course you’re expected to love any one if you are going to marry him. That’s understood, but if you can like him too, it means so much more, as Polly says. Jean has told me the Doctor is the most wonderful companion she has ever talked with. After they come east in the car, they sail for some port in Arabia, and travel from there to the valley of the Euphrates, hunting buried cities, and cunic writing—is that what you call the brick or clay tablets, Ruth?”

Ruth nodded her head, with a faraway wistful look in her eyes. It sounded like some magic land of enchantment, some place where dreams came true, this talk of Arabia and the Far East.

Polly tapped the table with her pencil. "I wish we could go there too, girls, some time."

"Polly, if you heard of a pleasure party being made up for Mars, you'd hunt up mileage rates and reduced tourists fares." Ruth rose, smiling down at the circle of happy girl faces around the Admiral's desk. "Don't tease me to stay a minute longer. It's hard enough to break away as it is, and the longer I stay and listen the more I want to go with you."

"Dear old Grandma," Ted said affectionately patting the nearest shoulder to her. "Who will take care of us this year?"

"Miss Harmon will," Polly declared. "Did I tell you, girls, she wrote yesterday to say the car was being thoroughly overhauled, and there is to be a seven-passenger body put on with the railing top?"

"And seven passengers' suitcases, and seven passengers' bathing suits and fishing rods," Sue chanted. "How many were going to St. Ives?"

But Polly laughingly declared she could not be discouraged. She enjoyed every talk the girls had together. Every meeting seemed to bring out a flood of new ideas and good suggestions. They kept up the enthusiasm too. At

home she had won the Admiral over completely for when Doctor Smith arrived he had joined his arguments and appeals to hers, and verified every point Polly had put forward regarding the safety of the trip and its possibilities for health and pleasure.

The girls themselves had taken up the money-making side of the undertaking energetically. The old system of paying in twenty-five cents in dues each week had been kept up faithfully since the first of September, so there was already quite a large nest egg on hand. And now, in the weeks that followed New Year's, they put their heads together daily, figuring out new plans for having a good "hatch" of the golden eggs. As Crullers said, "A canary singing on the perch is better as a fireside companion than a nightingale in the bush."

Directly after the new school term began, they had started in with a series of monthly socials. Doctor Smith declared it rank piracy and high sea tactics, the way unsuspecting guests were lured to toothsome suppers and then despoiled. Perhaps the most successful of all was the February Colonial Dinner given on Washington's Birthday, although it ended with Polly's losing

her dearest and best-loved friend next to the Admiral.

The dinner was given at Glenwood under Aunty Welcome's personal care and supervision, and put over thirty dollars into the treasury.

All of the girls were dressed in the style of the costume shown in an old painting of Evelyn Byrd that hung in the library at Calvert Hall. It must have been one of the beautiful costumes she had imported from London-town, Polly said, with its puffed overdress and pointed bodice, quilted satin petticoat, high heeled satin slippers with rosettes, and the exquisite white lawn and lace waist under the velvet embroidered bodice.

It took some figuring to evolve even a copy of such a costume, but Jean helped them, and even Miss Calvert looked up the historical detail for them from rare old books in her library.

They waited on table with Uncle Peter's assistance and with Stoney to carry in the dishes from the kitchen. Such serenity of countenance as they wore, such quaint and charming dignity and poise, Polly explained later, could only come as a result of frequent examination of the treasurer's receipts.

After dinner they all went into the great liv-



IN STEPPED A STATELY GIRLISH FIGURE



ing-room, and there was mystery in the air. The Admiral could not be coaxed into divulging anything. He stood before the tall fireplace, beaming on the assembly, when all at once there stepped into the room a stately girlish figure, eyes unwavering in their haughty gaze, lips unsmiling.

Polly stepped forward and took the stranger's hand in hers with a low curtsy. Clad in brown she was, her gown fringed and beaded. There were little brown moccasins on her feet, and one lone eagle feather was slipped behind one ear, close in the flat plaits of dark brown hair.

"How did you ever get her face so brown?" whispered Isabel. "She looks like a full-fledged Shoshone, doesn't she? Like old Moon Face."

"We welcome you, royal princess and sister, to our midst," said Polly, clearly, her powdered head held high. "Daughter of Powhatan, we greet thee."

The little brown princess smiled and bowed her head, all the pride of her race in her bearing. All around the long room, and through the wide hall and library, she made her triumphal progress, escorted by her ladies of honor, and after she was seated she held her court right royally.

"Oh, Sue, you were splendid," Polly exclaimed when it was over. "I thought surely you'd smile or talk like yourself."

"Just wait a minute till I get out of this doo-skin roundabout, and I'll talk fast enough," groaned Sue. "I'll bet a cookie that Pocahontas would have given all her old moccasins for a middy blouse. Be careful of it, though, Ted. It all goes back to Miss Murray. How much did we make all told, girls?"

"Twenty-eight after paying for incidentals." Ruth held up her money bag as she spoke. "It's a good starter, isn't it?"

"Fine. I like dinners and suppers because you can ask fifty cents each, and it counts up. We ought to think up one for March." Polly meditated a minute. "How would a Dickens night do? Give a real Dickens dinner. I'll write to Aunt Evelyn in Richmond because she knows all the characters from Little Nell to Pip, and I know she will help us. We can just have the dishes he tells about. Wasn't there a veal and ham pie that somebody liked?"

"A weal and hammer, Samivel," corrected Ruth, solemnly. "Say, Polly, we could dress up in character for that too."

“Why not tell every one to come dressed as their favorite Dickens type? It would be ever so much more interesting. I know I could coax grandfather to be Captain Cuttle.”

“Dandy,” cried Ted. “Why, there are ever so many things to do. In May we can have a clam bake down on the shore, and in April a spring-time fête on Isabel’s lawn.”

“A Puritan one with a Maypole dance,” Isabel added. “I’d love to be Priscilla.”

“Prissie Alden wasn’t allowed to go to any Maypole dances,” Ruth protested. “I’m surprised at you, Isabel.”

“Maybe she would have been if she’d lived down here in Virginia. I think we could do that, but you don’t have Maypoles in April. Have an April shower.” Sue paused. “Shower? Girls, an inspiration. Let’s make it an April shower, and put up booths like at an out-door fair, and sell all kinds of little dingbats, and ice cream.”

“Susan, you are a real genius,” Polly declared, her eyes sparkling. “Tomorrow I shall send away the first payment to the Senator for our car’s overhauling, and that will make the summer seem near, won’t it? I told Miss Pen we would

want all the hide-away places they could give us for odds and ends. We can carry one suitcase each, and it had better be of Japanese matting."

"The rain will soak through matting, if you're going to put them up on the top," said Natalie. "Don't they have little round leather motor trunks that fit inside your extra tires?"

"But we can't carry seven extra tires." Polly hesitated. "They'll have to go on top and be covered with tarpaulin, or some waterproof material. We must cut down our luggage to the very limit, girls. If we were going up to Alaska, and had to carry our packs on our back, I guess even Lady Vanitas there would leave out a few things. Figure on economy of space. That is not my phrase. Miss Pen says it. If we carry each of us a coat, hat, serge skirt, middy blouses, and pongee or linen waists—there, I've thought of something else."

"She's going to put us all into sleeping bags, and cut down hotel expenses," sighed Isabel.

"No, I'm not," Polly laughed back, "but listen. It would be hard managing to have our laundry done skimming around the country like that. Why can't we ship it home by parcel post,

and it can be returned the same way. That saves money, and space too."

"Done," Ted announced forcibly. "I hear the buzz of the Doctor's car coming back. He took Peggie and Miss Jean up to the Hall, and said he'd come back for us. I just thought of another thing. You know all the pictures we took up at Lost Island? The ranch ones were dandy too. Why can't we print up a lot, stick them artistically and daintily on mounts or postcards and sell them at our dinners and festal occasions to all admiring friends? I know I can sell several to each of the choir boys."

"Ted!" protested the girls.

"Well, I can, just the same," Ted repeated. "We've helped them out at their choir dinners, haven't we? And didn't we sing at the summer afternoon services the first two weeks in June last year while they were camping? When we were so busy too, getting ready to go to the ranch. Of course they'll buy our postcards, and so will others. Five cents each."

"Two for five," corrected Ruth. "Don't be greedy, Ted."

"Not for really truly photographs. Five each. Sue and I will do the printing and mount-

ing too, and that saves. Miss Murray taught us how to make vignettes and all the other fancy touches last fall."

"I'm going out snooping around with my kodak, taking pictures of houses," said Sue mysteriously. "And when they're ready, I'll descend on the occupants, and say. 'There you are. Five each, please.'"

"I'm going to do mending, girls." Crullers said suddenly. She had been leaning sleepily against the porch post, watching the two lights on the approaching car. "I put up a sign this morning in all three dormitories. 'J. D. Adams, mending neatly done. Slight remuneration.'"

"I wouldn't make it too slight, Crullers," Polly suggested. "It's hard mending stockings and gloves unless you use a base-ball stitch."

"I always do," Crullers returned, mildly. "On my own, of course, but I'll be careful on professional work."

"Here's the Doctor," called Polly, as the big car swung around the corner, and up to the old carriage stone. "Good-night, girls. I've had a splendid time."

She stood on the steps waving to the laughing, gay-voiced crowd as the girls piled into the car,

sitting on each other's laps, with Crullers protesting volubly that she was squeezed under until she couldn't breathe.

"Oh, but Crullers, you make such a lovely cushion," Ted cried. "Good-night, Polly."

Polly watched them until the hum of the car died away on the shore road that led down over the hill. The Admiral had strolled along to the rectory with Mr. Ellis, the rector at Grace Church, and Mrs. Ellis. They had always lent their support to any movement the girls started for the success of their vacation trips.

Far out over the little town and masses of trees, the moonlight made the bay look like a gleaming expanse of quicksilver. The lighthouse on Sands Point seemed like a marvelous ruby that changed into a diamond as the huge reflectors turned. When Polly had been a little girl the lighthouse had seemed like some never-failing comforter out there in the darkness. Many a night she had wakened and reached out her arms with a cry for the mother who had left her, and when there was no answer, she would creep out of bed softly so as not to waken Aunty in the next room, kneel by the open window, and look over at the Point light for solace.

Tonight it gave her the same curious sense of companionship. She was standing watching it when she heard Mandy's voice at the door.

"Mis' Polly, honey?"

"In just a minute, Mandy."

"Better come along now. It—it's Welcome." The tears were rolling fast down Mandy's face. "She's took all ob a sudden. Peter and me we done got her on a couch in de back room, and Pete's run for Doctor Cable. We didn't want to spoil yo' party nowhow—"

She did not have time to finish. Polly had passed her and was fairly flying down the hall to where Welcome had been laid.

CHAPTER IX

AUNT EVELYN'S COMING

IT always seemed like a dream to Polly, that passing out into the life eternal of the wonderful old mammy who had cared for her since her birth with unfailing tenderness. For so many, many years, Welcome had been the very prop and stay of the Glenwood household.

In the Admiral's boyhood he could remember Welcome as his mother's sprightly young maid, and later she had been mammy in turn to each of the children of "Young Massa," and last of all to Polly. Polly had never known how old Aunty was, but later, when the old records were hunted up, it was found she had passed her seventy-sixth milestone.

Once during the waiting hours of the long night the tired old eyes opened drowsily and looked into Polly's face.

"Light up all de tapers, chile," she whispered. "Behold, de bridegroom cometh!"

“Aunty, dear, dear Aunty, here’s your Polly, don’t you know me?”

Polly knelt beside the bed, her face wet with tears, her strong young hands holding fast to those wrinkled brown ones that had so faithfully cared for her all her life. But they only pressed hers ever so slightly, and a little smile of contentment rested on the closed lips as Welcome’s soul went out into the dawn of the new day.

“Don’t you weep, li’l missie,” old Uncle Peter knelt down beside Polly and took her hands gently. “You must be strong now, and do all she tol’ yo’ to, honey, an’ comfort our hearts. Doan’t yo’ cry.”

But Mandy swept her up in her arms as though she had been five instead of fifteen, and left the Admiral standing in the room beside the bed.

“Cry all yo’ want to, Mis’ Polly,” she insisted, when she put her to bed. “What yo’ s’pose men folks know ’bout our tears? Dey come from de wellsprings ob de heart, and de more yo’ let ’em loose, de better yo’ gwine to feel. Doan’t yo’ go ter mo’rnin’ too much, though. Jes’ look hyar.” She pulled back the curtains to let the morning sunlight stream in. Down beyond the

trees the bay sparkled. "See dat glory a-pourin' down? Somewhere up yonder, honey, Welcome's a-wingin' her way up, an' mebbe Mis' Car'line, an' Mis' Mary, yo' lady Ma, an' young Marse Phil is all a-troopin' down to meet Welcome. Ain't dat a heavenly thought? Den you quiet down an' go 'long ter sleep."

But in spite of Mandy's comforting it was many weeks before Polly could get used to Glenwood without Aunty Welcome's familiar figure. She went about quietly, eyes wistful and sad, and all of Mandy's tidbits and dainties could not coax her back to her old gayety. New responsibilities had fallen on her shoulders too. Welcome had always made a child of her, in spite of her admonitions and scoldings. Now, Mandy would come to her every morning as the real little mistress of Glenwood, for the day's orders.

After the first few weeks, Polly settled on a plan. Straight down to the kitchen she went, her face radiant.

"Mandy, I've thought up a plan. Now, listen. You've been cook here at Glenwood for twenty years and more, haven't you?"

"Twenty-six years, four months, and five days

last Monday, Mis' Polly," Mandy rattled off easily. "Ah distinctly remember the day, 'case it was de Monday after Easter—"

"But, Mandy," Polly interrupted, perplexedly, "Easter's a movable feast. You mustn't count by that."

"It comes once a year, doan't it? Ain't any better day to count by, is dere? Dat's when Ah come here, an' Ah was Peter's li'l bride."

Mandy shook all over with laughter for now she weighed well up to two hundred, and Polly had to laugh with her.

"Well, what I came down for is this. Of course you know everything about what we like best and what we have for dinner. How would it do for you to go ahead, and cook what you think best, and Lucy Lee can do the upstairs work and wait on table."

"Not Lucy Lee, Mis' Polly. De Admiral, he allus wants Peter behind his chair, and Stoney's in trainin' for it later." Mandy held firmly to the old law of promotion in the household. "Lucy Lee's all right for dustin' an' makin' beds and she kin sweep some too if she sets her mind dat way, but she ain't got de style, Mis' Polly, yo' understand me, de style for waitin' on table,

even if she is mah daughter. She takes after me, and Stoney he takes after his daddy. Ah kin fry chicken for kings an' emperors, but Ah neber could lay a table cloth straight an' fashionable. Peter and Stoney take to it jes' like flies to 'lasses."

Polly went back upstairs smiling, but she felt that the situation called for consultation with the Admiral. He listened patiently, Polly sitting on the broad arm of his chair, one hand ruffling up his grey curly forelock the way she always loved to do.

"You see, grandfather dear, nobody, not even you, knows how I miss Aunty Welcome. I keep wondering how you will get on this summer while I am away. Mandy is kind and good-hearted, but she hasn't direction like Welcome had. I'm wondering honestly whether I am old enough to take the head of things here. Do you think I am?"

The Admiral looked up at the face bending over him. He noted the brown hair, parted a trifle on one side, and swept back with a loose curly wave, the wide dark eyes that Ted always insisted were just like those of a curious squirrel only for the little droop at the corners that be-

tokened mirth, the eager pointed chin, the lips ever ready to smile or laugh.

"I think," said the Admiral, thoughtfully, "that I had better write to your Aunt Evelyn at Richmond, and ask her to make her home with us until you are fairly grown. How would you like that, Polly?"

Polly did not answer, but gazed down at the two logs, the big back one that had burned all night long and still held its shape, and the crackling new one Stoney had just put on.

She had four aunts. There was Aunt Milly who had given Lost Island over to the girls for their first outing, but she had her own family and lived in Boston.

Next came Faith. Polly loved her Aunt Faith. She was slim and tall, and always low-voiced and restful. Ever since Polly could remember, once a year in the late fall when the last leaves clung to the bare boughs like flecks of gold, Aunt Faith would come to Glenwood for a few days. She always wore gowns of grey or violet. Welcome had told Polly how, long ago, Miss Faith had been "crossed" in love. Polly never asked questions but she would slip her hand into the cool satiny

palm, and go down to the little riverside burial ground of Glenwood. Faith would sit by one grave quietly, straightening out the tangled myrtle that covered it thickly, tending the plants that held their own until the first frosts.

Evenings after dinner, when the Admiral went out to doze a while on the terrace at the rose seat, Faith would sit at the old sweet-toned piano and play all of Polly's favorite tunes over and over. Polly loved her voice, a low, vibrant contralto that made one think of the 'cello's notes.

"Oh, I wish I could have Aunt Faith, grandfather dear. Don't you think she would come?"

"Yes, perhaps she would," the Admiral responded heartily, "but would it be fair to Faith to ask her to guide a sky rocket safely? She takes life very seriously, matey, and has always lived a sheltered, self-centered sort of existence. You need a woman like your Aunt Evelyn who is cheery and modern and can safely steer a certain craft into the safe harbor of young womanhood, eh?"

"I wonder if Aunt Evelyn ever believed in fairies," Polly said, thoughtfully. "She never seems to dip into any of the things that girls like, you know, Grandfather."

"You're too old to believe in fairies." He pinched the ear nearest to him.

"I don't mean that I do. I just mean all the things that go along with belief in fairies. Aunt Faith is such a dear. Of course, 'loyally,' I love Aunt Evelyn too, but some way you can get nearer to Aunt Faith."

"Better that Evelyn comes," the Admiral said firmly. "It would be too great a charge to place on Faith, and she is not strong. I will write to Richmond today."

It was almost the first time he had ever objected to anything she had wanted greatly, and Polly pondered over it, but said nothing. Probably it was selfish of her to want the aunt who was dearest to her, when Aunt Evelyn could take more of the responsibility off the Admiral's shoulders.

So in March there came a new influence into the home circle at Glenwood, and after the first strangeness wore off, Polly noted a distinct feeling of relief.

Mrs. Langdon was a widow, and the youngest daughter of the Admiral. She was only thirty-four, and very much like Polly's grandmother,

the gracious "Mis' Car'line" whom Uncle Peter loved to tell about.

"Peter says when she come soft-footed along de garden walks early in de mo'nin'," Mandy would say admiringly, "he lifts up his head, and hears her skirts trailin' over de flowers, swish, swish, swish, and he mos' thinks it's thirty years ago, and Ole Missus walking 'round lookin' at her posies."

The first evening after her arrival Polly sat beside her in the large west chamber that had been hers when she was a girl. In a way, Polly was testing the future basis of companionship, trying to discover whether Aunt Evelyn would be "one of the girls," or whether she was totally grown up. So she rambled on, talking of the summer plans, and of the previous vacation trips.

Mrs. Langdon leaned a trifle forward in the deep, high backed arm-chair. All of the furniture in this room was covered with apple green chintz scattered over with apple blossom sprays. There were tall slender candlesticks on the high white mantel, and quaint paintings in oval gold frames. One of them was of Polly's father leading a young girl down a flight of winding stairs.

He wore an old fashioned high waisted coat, with broad lapels, and a high stock. His curly hair was tufted in the center, and brushed forward from his ears into curls. He was smiling up at the girl with the white dress, a dress of many flounces, little clusters of rosebuds holding them in place. Her hair was dressed in curls that flowed down over her shoulders, and her little feet were encased in black slippers with "crossties" over white stockings.

"That was my very first fancy dress party," Aunt Evelyn remarked, tenderly, as she saw Polly looking at the picture. "Your father escorted me, and we both wore our grandparents' costumes. In about two years more, Polly, you will be going to little informal evening affairs too with your young girl friends. It will seem strange to have our youngest growing up."

Something in her voice and manner opened up the wellsprings of Polly's confidence, and before she realized it, she was telling all about the different girls at the Hall, and all the intimate little stories of the happy times they had there. Aunt Evelyn liked the idea of the club.

"It unites you girls by a spirit of fellowship and friendship that is very beautiful. And

working as you do for the summer trips, it brings out self-reliance and co-operation. I will gladly do all I can to help you," she promised. "I think I can suggest several new entertainments to help you add to the nest egg."

One day the second week in March Sue came over very importantly. It was almost the first breath of real spring weather after the February thaw.

"Polly," she announced, sitting on the extreme edge of the broad davenport in the little study that was Polly's downstairs den, "I have hired out as assistant gardener after school hours. I don't see why we haven't thought of it before. You know old Mrs. Warren? I am to clean up her front garden and the rose garden at the back, and trim off dead branches and twigs from the raspberry and blackberry canes, and look the grape vines over, and clip off any dead tendrils on them. Ted's going to help me, and when I am fairly started she is to do the rectory hedge. Now, Polly, you needn't look incredulous, for Mr. Ellis said so himself. It is only a matter of keeping your eye and hand steady and true. We are going to visit every house up here on the hill and find other places to clean up. Of course we

are not real gardeners. We do not pretend to plant or plough. We just clean up after the winter, and prune and clip."

"I think it's a splendid idea, Sue," protested Polly, admiringly. "I wonder how you ever thought it up. Uncle Peter's getting old and has 'kinks' as he calls his rheumatism, and I know that grandfather would be glad to have you clean up our lawn and garden too. Let's ask him now."

The two invaded the Admiral's precincts at once. He was peaceably reading, but Sue won his promise of steady employment until the grounds were clear of all winter rubbish and dead leaves and twigs. Also the hedge was to be carefully clipped, and though during the ensuing days old Uncle Peter shook his head and chuckled over his two eager assistants, still Sue and Ted worked faithfully adding their garden "spoils," as Ted called the earnings, to the general treasury.

Natalie had said she would be official candy-maker.

"It's the only thing I can do, girls, you know," she explained cheerfully, "and there is a large profit in it. All the day girls up at school will

buy and so will the residents. I can sell candy at every entertainment we have, besides canvassing the highways and byways for sweet tooths. What is Doctor Smith's favorite candy, Polly, do you know?"

"Marmalade," interjected Crullers. "He had dozens of jars of it at Lost Island."

"That's not candy, that's a preserve," Peggie protested. "I know what he likes best. Preserved ginger and candied orange peel."

Polly shivered laughingly.

"It sounds like cavemen's food, table delicacies for mastodon pot roast. Never mind, he shall have it, girls. Nat, make up pounds of candied orange peel and preserved ginger for the Doctor, and we'll coax him to buy a whole summer's supply."

"Miss Calvert likes thin pink peppermints and small lemon drops. She carries them in a little comfit box in her handbag," Isabel told them. "And Miss Murray always watches for old Mammy Linda who sits on the church steps week days, and sells cocoanut pralines. We can make her those. I'll help if you'll let me, Natalie, for I seem so helpless among all you girls who find things to do."

Even from day to day new ideas and plans were constantly cropping up to swell the rapidly growing fund in Ruth's desk. But Hallie succeeded in getting her share in her own way. She skirmished around amongst the hill residents of Queen's Ferry until she had thirty mail customers. It was nearly a mile to the village where the post office was, and by rising early she could make the trip on her bicycle, get the morning mail, and distribute it before class hours.

"Well, Hallie Yates, you say you're neither talented nor beautiful," Crullers said in her comically direct way, the first time Hallie laid her earnings down on the table before the girls, "but you're a business girl. Seven dollars and fifty cents! How much do you charge for running around on that bicycle?"

"Twenty-five cents a week each, and I have thirty customers," answered Hallie gaily. "I've been late for school three times, but I got my lessons the night before and made perfect recitations, and when I explained that I had missed part of the morning study hour, Miss Calvert said it was all right, so long as I made it up the night before, and was perfect."

One day the Admiral surprised the girls as

they sat in solemn conclave at Glenwood on the wide vine-covered veranda. The climbing rose and honeysuckle vines were just beginning to bud, and already the bees were around prospecting for the future golden store.

"The Senator writes me that Miss Harmon is now a member of the American Automobile Association. You may carry their pennant on your car then, children, and it will be the best help possible to you. It entitles you to club privileges along the road, information and assistance in case of a breakdown. Miss Pen has written to them for their list of hotels and garages with rates, and ferry rates also at different points, so you will be all right."

"Until we strike the unknown trails," Polly put in. "But I feel, grandfather dear, as though the Association did not really approve of our undertaking, for when I wrote and told them all that we wanted to do, they wrote back and told me it couldn't be done in such an unsettled country, better come up north and try, or go over into Kentucky. We'll fly their pennant, but put our own on the right hand side."

"Polly, don't be inhospitable, even in pennants," Ruth reproved. "You may need their

help, and perhaps they were perfectly right. I do think myself it's awfully risky for you girls to go out into these uncharted roads, as it were. But it's started now."

"Oh, and by the way, this may also interest you," the Admiral looked down at the circle of eager girl faces with twinkling eyes. "The Senator mentioned that I might tell you your car was about ready."

There was a tense, expectant hush, an audible drawing in of breath from Crullers's corner, and Polly's joyous gasp of surprise. Flushed and smiling she stood up at the head of the table.

"Girls, isn't it splendid to think that things really come true if you believe they will and keep working for them to?" she cried enthusiastically. "We'll be riding down the turnpike by June twentieth!"

CHAPTER X

THE START OF THE "SCOOTERS."

DURING May, Aunt Evelyn suggested flower picnics as a diversion after the dinners and costume suppers of the winter. Nearly every week the flower calendar changed in the woodlands around Queen's Ferry.

Ted's two brothers were pressed into service, and drove the supply wagon to the different camps chosen by the girls.

The refreshment tents were red and yellow, and were under the supervision of Crullers, with Hallie and Peggie as assistants. Ruth was cashier in a little tent surmounted by the club pennant. Ted managed the games, the flower gathering, and the awarding of prizes, with Isabel and Natalie to help, and over all was Polly—here, there, and everywhere, making things run smoothly.

One Saturday they went far down the bay shore and held a clam bake with the Doctor as

master of ceremonies. Fifty cents each was the charge, and Ruth's face was wreathed in contented smiles when they made the return trip. Nearly all of the club's faithful admirers and constituents had responded and the treasury was in an excellent condition.

"Girls," Polly said the following day, "it's almost June, and Commencement Day looms ahead of us. I really think we surpass our own records each year."

Crullers sat up straight with a fervent cheer.

"'Ray! 'Ray!"

"Jane Daphne Adams, hush yourself," protested Ted, using Annie May's favorite admonition. "Don't you know what it means when the spirit of oratory lights on our president's left shoulder?"

Polly joined in the laugh.

"I don't know whether it's the spirit of oratory or not, but it moveth me in sundry places to arise and shine. Commencement Week will be here and gone before we know it. And Senator Yates and Mrs. Yates, and Miss Harmon are coming to see Hallie make her first Freshman bow. Don't you blush so, Hallie," sympathetically. "We've all been through it. But

the great good news is this. The Senator will bring our car up with him, and return to Wenoka by rail. Isn't that dear of him?"

Isabel rose. She was always the first to rise on a point of courtesy.

"Madam President, I move that we pass a vote of thanks to Senator Yates."

"Second the motion," flashed Ted quickly. The motion was carried with a ring of enthusiasm in every voice. Sue said she would write and tell the Senator at once.

"So we will see our 'scooter' pretty soon," continued Polly. "I don't know yet what the bill is, girls, but Miss Pen says it is a beauty. All home comforts, and side pockets. And Mrs. Yates has given us the handiest thing, just what we have talked of—a small single fireless cooker. It's encased in leather, and takes up hardly any room. We can stop the car, hop out, start up a gypsy fire with a pot hung on three sticks, get our dinner to boiling point, pop it in the cooker, and ride on."

"Who will be the fireless cook?" asked Natalie. "It sounds delicious, and I'm hungry now."

"I know a plan, girls," Ruth proposed soberly,

but with fun in her eyes. "Let Polly start in as fireless cook, and the first one who finds fault with her cooking has to take her place."

"No fair," laughed Polly, shaking her head. "I know you'd never dare to complain. Miss Pen will oversee it anyway, and we can all help her. Now here's another last point to consider. We have plenty in the treasury, besides what we will earn. Don't you think we ought to buy a wedding present for Miss Murray and the Doctor?"

Crullers rose with immediate zeal.

"I move that we buy a chime clock or a chest of silver."

"Won't they be handy on a motor trip to Wyoming," chuckled Ted. Sue scratched her nose with her pencil thoughtfully.

"Don't you think we ought to buy something portable?"

"They have a dandy camera."

"I don't mean that they can carry on their backs, Ted—"

"Susan, remember your French," warned Ted, soberly, "Porter, to carry. *Je porte, tu portes, il porte, nous portons—*"

Polly rapped for order.

"She said portable, Madam President—" began Ted.

"Oh, be good, Ted," pleaded Ruth. "You're too distracting. Polly, how would it do to ask your aunt?"

"Splendid. Aunt Evelyn could give us any kind of advice and love to, I know. She'll know just the right thing for us to buy. And that makes me think. Next Saturday morning at ten, everybody must come to be fitted. Little Miss Reid is coming up from the village, and we are all to be measured for our skirts and middy blouses, white for Sundays, tan for everyday, and trimmed in bands of red or blue according to taste and complexion, as Miss Reid said. Then we are to have three-quarter length coats of light weight blanket cloth for the chilly nights."

"Oh, will there be any chilly nights, Polly?" asked Crullers anxiously. "Won't that be lovely!"

"Of course there will when we get into the mountain region. You can choose your own colors for the cloaks, girls. Mine is red."

"Danger signal for motorists," Ted said gently. "I shall take a very discreet navy blue."

"And I think, if all goes well, we can leave

here the twentieth of June," Polly went on. "We will receive general directions from the road committee,—suggestions, as the Senator puts it, for he says if we see any likely sidelines we feel like exploring and marking down on the map, we may follow them in our scouting. Any way, we are to rally the morning of the twentieth, girls."

Commencement Week passed swiftly. There were so many events happening at this time that the girls overlooked their own club affairs, and threw themselves heart and soul into the school spirit.

"Aunt Evelyn," Polly exclaimed after her class luncheon, "I think I have never enjoyed Commencement Week so much as this time. You have just made every day happy for us. And tonight there is the Senior dance. We have had only two Seniors from our club, Kate Julian a year ago, and now dear old Ruth. You know we call them Seniors and Freshmen and the rest, although we are really only a 'prep' school. Lots of Calvert girls go on to real college though."

"Would you like to, Polly?" asked Aunt Evelyn, smiling at the flushed, eager face. Polly loved to take a certain stool she had had for years, and sit on it squarely in front of Mrs. Langdon's

desk, hugging her own knees, and rocking to and fro as she talked.

"I'm not so sure yet, Aunt Evelyn. You see Grandfather and I have always planned something, oh, for years, and I've looked forward to it so. He promised me that some day when the school days were over, we would both of us go away on a long trip, just a drifting trip, to places that I want to see. Grandfather said of course somebody would be with me besides himself, somebody like Miss Murray or Miss Harmon, who could help me learn about things. And instead of starting from this coast, I always planned to go the opposite way, follow the sun I mean. I should like to chase summer for a whole year."

"Well, you have a whole year and a half to plan in, and if the Admiral approves, it might come true. Wouldn't you like to take the girls with you?"

"Every one of them," said Polly emphatically. "I wish I could have the Senator's yacht and cruise everywhere. But it's half the fun planning, isn't it?"

The closing function at Calvert was always the reception the last evening, when Miss Honoria

herself received in state at the foot of the great staircase. There were resident girls and their friends and relatives, day girls and their friends and relatives, and, lastly, former Calvert girls, now grown up and married, who enjoyed coming back on the final evening of the year to meet Miss Calvert, and feel the old time school spirit fold them all in a common bond.

“I’m so sorry to leave it all, girls,” Ruth said as the old group closed in around her with interlacing arms, and bore her away to a quiet corner out in the great hall. “We’ve had such good times, haven’t we? Won’t you make me an associate member for life?”

“Dear old Grandma,” Ted exclaimed, hugging her without regard for ruffles. “You may have anything you like. You’ve scolded me regularly, and disregarded all my little airy flights of temperament—you call it that, don’t you?—but I think the world of you, and forgive you freely. Sue do you forgive her too?”

“Go away, both of you,” Ruth laughed. “You are a couple of teasers. Where is Polly?”

“Don’t you see her standing by the piano talking to the Senator?” Isabel answered. “She has kept him backed up against that spot for ten

minutes, and I know she's asking questions."

"About the trip," Ruth smiled a bit wistfully. "I do wish I could go with you all. Write good long letters when you have a chance, any way. You don't know how lonely it will be here without you."

Polly came toward them, smiling, after leaving the Senator with Miss Calvert.

"Girls, we've got our chauffeur at last, the 'land captain,' as Grandfather called him. His name is Patchin, Columbus Patchin. We won't go astray with that name to guide us, will we? Don't all ask questions at once," laughing as they began to talk all at the same instant, "he is one of the road association's most reliable men, and is warranted not to do anything to run us into disaster. The Senator says he has worked for him in Washington, and he knows he is perfectly trustworthy and a dandy machinist. We're to make our start from here Monday morning at seven. Miss Pen says we will do best traveling early in the morning and in the late afternoon when it is cooler. We won't mind, girls, will we, for that is the best time of the day any way."

"Is the machine here yet, Polly?" asked Nat-

alie. "Right here in Queen's Ferry this minute?"

"Yes, right over in our stable. Mr. Patchin is there too. They made the trip in it from Wenoka, and Mrs. Yates and the Senator are visiting at the rectory tonight. After that they will be at Glenwood until we leave. Come over in the morning, and we'll have a splendid time looking the machine over."

It was a very dignified group that advanced on Glenwood the next morning to inspect the new treasure. Polly led the way to the old ivy-covered stone stable where Uncle Peter and Balaam, the coachman, watched Mr. Patchin testing different parts of his car.

There it stood at last, the complete realization of all their winter dreams. It was a large body, seven-passenger, and seemed to monopolize all the available space in the old stable.

Mr. Patchin turned around when he heard their voices, and raised his leather cap.

"I'm Patchin, young ladies, and this is the machine. There ain't a car on the road her equal. She climbs a hill like a two-year-old."

"Isn't he funny?" whispered Crullers, staring with all her might at the short, stocky figure of

Mr. Patchin. He was in a blue and white jumper and overalls, and both fit him tightly. "He looks exactly as though he had been stuffed into them like the rag dolls we made Christmas for the kiddies up on the ranch."

Polly and Isabel were coaxing Mr. Patchin to "take her bonnet off." Not a word did he say, merely smiled at them. They found out later that was his chief characteristic, his everlasting smiling silence.

"He is like a cheerful big-eyed baby," Ted remarked thoughtfully, when he crawled under the machine to explain something to the others. "His eyebrows and lashes are ever so much lighter in color than his face, and that is tanned and rather pink. And he hardly ever winks his eyes, do you notice that, Sue?"

"Uncle says he's a perfect jewel," Hallie told them. "And you ought to hear Cousin Pen put him through his paces. He says she knows more about a machine than most men do."

"I do like the color of the car, girls," said Polly emphatically, "Don't you? It's such a rich tone. Before it was overhauled, it was a deep olive, but I thought maroon with silver trimmings would be more effective. And we can pile our suitcases

on that top place. There's a sort of net that goes over them and fastens to the side supports, and we've got a rubber cover for rainy days, or an oiled one, I forget which it is. Let's look inside."

The interior was upholstered in buff canvas for summer travel. There were plenty of side pockets for which Polly had yearned, and in the corners tall narrow mirrors were set obliquely.

Along the running-boards were two long narrow leather compartments that could be taken off and on. At the back were the extra tires, and snug round leather trunk boxes set neatly into the centers of these.

On the radiator in front was the brass emblem of the A. A. A. Fastened at one side on a little staff of brass, was the pennant of the Association also, with its two wheels and triple A's.

Besides the deep compartments on each of the doors for various odds and ends, there were also capacious pockets with buttoned flaps at unexpected places in the car interior. The girls explored each of these, and found several evidences of Mrs. Yates's thoughtfulness. There was a tiny alcohol tea kit, with aluminum cups in Chinese shape, set into each other. In another pocket Polly found six wash-up kits, each in its

black leather case, only six inches long. Inside was a folding rubber bowl, soap, towel and wash cloth.

"Girls, just look here," she cried, happily. "Isn't it dear of Mrs. Yates to do this for us? Just the kind of things we need."

Everything about the machine was of interest to them, but the machinery seemed one great tangled problem, fascinating but mysterious. It was the "little handy things," as Sue said, that they liked best, and the big roomy tonneau. Mr. Patchin explained everything carefully. He took off "her bonnet," as he told them it was dubbed, and explained all about spark plugs, carburetor, radiator, connecting rod, brake bands—

"Oh, please wait a minute," laughed Polly. "We'll never remember them all. What's this thing?"

"Ammeter for testing dry cells."

"Look out, Crullers. Polly will be testing your brain cells with it," teased Ted.

"Mr. Patchin, what's an eight-inch clearance?" asked Crullers, curiously. "I heard Doctor Smith say his car had an eight-inch clearance, and I hoped ours would too, but I don't see one anywhere."

"It's the foot brake, Crullers," Sue told her gravely. "And you work the sprags with it to keep in the middle of the road when the moon is full."

"Put the muffler on her," Ted suggested very loftily, having just had the muffler explained to her. "The clearance is the distance under your car, goose, from the road bed, so you won't go bumping merrily along over thank-you-ma'ams. We've got a high clearance on our car, Mr. Patchin says, because some of the roads we'll strike have grassy ridges in the middle of them where they haven't been used much in country places."

"Out so early, chicks?" called a gay voice behind them, and Miss Harmon stood there, smiling at the picture they made around the machine. "Have you learned all the names of things yet?"

"Almost," Polly replied. "It's a darling car, Miss Pen, and we're so proud of it. I can hardly wait to start."

For nearly an hour Mr. Patchin held court over the new treasure, and by the time luncheon was served, the girls felt as if they might have dispensed with his services, thrown in the clutch, and taken to the open road.

He was always Mr. Patchin to them during the next five weeks, although Miss Pen called him Patchin in the Continental fashion, as she explained. Polly called him Columbus sometimes, but in a spirit of veneration. He was Columbus the explorer, Columbus, the intrepid adventurer whom no road daunted, no grassy lane appalled, no mountain baffled.

"He's funny looking and he has three distinct double chins," said Ted firmly, "but he has my undying respect. He never loses his temper, and he never seems to mind anything, us least of all. Why, we don't bother him any more than if we were a lot of grasshoppers."

Sunday they went up to the Hall in a body to say good-bye to Miss Calvert and the Murray girls. Their wedding present to Jean was an odd one, but very appropriate. With the help of Mrs. Langdon, they had chosen the handsomest saddle and bridle they could get for fifty dollars, and many of the other girls who were not in the club had contributed also, loving Jean as they all did.

Her eyes filled with tears when Stoney lugged in the gift valiantly, and laid it before her. It

was beautifully embossed, with silver mountings, and her monogram on the bridle.

“Girls, I shall think of you all every time I ride now, and thank you so very, very much for your dear gift. We have taken a ranch near the Alameda, and will spend part of each year up there, so you see how often I shall use this.”

By Monday morning the last farewells had been said all around Queen’s Ferry. Ruth at the final meeting, held on Saturday, had turned over her office of treasurer to Isabel, and the two had gone down to the rectory to see the Senator and pay over the money for the overhauling of their machine.

“One hundred dollars will set us about even,” Senator Yates had told them smilingly, referring to his note book. “You will have Patchin’s salary to pay while traveling, and his board wherever you put up. I have been paying him seventy-five a month, and he has helped with various duties around our Washington home besides. I should think that would be a fair amount to pay him now. You will be gone about four to five weeks, I suppose.”

“Perhaps longer,” said Ruth honestly, “if our money holds out. I am not going with the girls

this year, but I do want everything to turn out all right for them. Do you think they will do good scout work on the roads?"

"To be sure they will," said the Senator heartily. "If I were not certain of it, I should never have encouraged them to undertake the trip. Patchin understands the State roads better than any other chauffeur I know. He has been out with me prospecting, so to speak, and has worked last summer directly with the pathfinders of the association. He is familiar with the campaign as we have planned it, and all the routes. Penelope has the road maps, and I have gone over them with her, marking in red in the doubtful thoroughfares and the sections we want inspected and mapped. She will explain it fully to the rest of the party. You will have plenty of enjoyment and fun out of the trip and plenty of work too to keep you out of mischief. I do not yet know how it will develop, or whether you can keep up the pace in the warm weather, but if all goes well, you will have a check when you get through to pay at least half of your expenses. Report regularly to me, and if I can help in any way, be sure I will respond at once. You see this way you are supplying your own chauffeur and

car, where usually the association has to pay for both for its uses."

"And we couldn't have turned a wheel without your help," Isabel said fervently. "Do you think, Senator Yates," she hesitated, and Ruth wondered what Lady Vanitas had thought up now at the last minute. "Do you think it would be all right for us to wear dust caps on the road, pretty silky ones, I mean?"

She said it so earnestly that the Senator barely smiled. He was a Virginian and a courtly old gentleman, even with these girls in their early teens.

"I think they would be excellent, Miss Isabel," he replied, "and vastly becoming. I should suggest vari-colored ones, and then at a distance, the machine will look as though laden with flowers."

Early Monday morning, about half-past six, the girls assembled at Glenwood. The Admiral stood on the broad veranda watching the get-away a trifle anxiously, but Mrs. Langdon was beside him, confident and cheery, and she hurried Polly away from his half-reluctant farewells, while the Senator was assuring him that every precaution had been taken to keep the "scooters" from danger.

Finally they were all packed into the tonneau, with Penelope Harmon on the front seat beside Patchin.

"Two on the rumbles, three on the seat," called Polly, merrily. She turned to wave a last good-bye to Mandy and Uncle Peter, Lucy Lee, Stoney and old Balaam, all standing at the kitchen door under the vine-clad portico.

"Good-bye, Grandfather dear, and Aunt Evelyn. We'll meet you next week up at Richmond," she cried.

The motor throbbed. Patchin raised his cap in a final salute, and Penelope wiped her eyes in a last little flutter of emotion, as she said later.

"I always have to shed a few tears from habit when a ship sails, or I say good-bye to any one. I can't help it, and it's no use fussing over it. It's just a habit."

Crullers and Ruth stood with Isabel and waved to them. Only five could go at a time, so Natalie and Hallie, as the two new members, were to have the first two weeks, then Crullers and Isabel would join the party, and finish the rest of the tour with it. Yet at that last minute, it seemed too bad that any had to be left behind even for part of the time. Ted and Sue had offered to

give up their two weeks, but they were needed too much as official photographer and secretary of the expedition.

One last salute on the horn was given as they turned down on the shore road. Polly liked the new horn. Marbury had chosen it, and it was a sweet, soft-toned siren instead of a blood-curdling "honker."

There was no answer. Already they were out of hearing. Only the call of the road could reach them now.

CHAPTER XI

HIGHWAY SCOUTING

“OUR first scouting duty, girls,” said Miss Harmon, “is to follow the road from Chaucerville to Turnbull Corners, return to main road and follow to Matoax, one hundred and twenty-two miles southeast, and report conditions. We’re about thirty-nine miles now from Chaucerville, aren’t we, Patchin?”

“Barring accidents we are, ma’am,” replied Patchin with caution. “We’ll be at the Corners easy about five, and still have a midday rest-up. We’ll make Chaucerville in an hour at an easy clip.”

“Please let’s not do any clipping,” Polly begged. “It’s cooler not to rush, and we want to see everything. It’s all so new to us. Did you say Matoax? We had that name in history, didn’t we, girls? I wish Ruth were here. She always remembers dates and points of interest.”

“Wasn’t it one of Powhatan’s pet names?”

asked Sue. "I think I remember calling it Battle Ax, and Miss Honoria said 'Ridiculous!' You know that funny way she has, when she is feeling fearfully dignified, and puts her chin 'way down on her lace jabot."

"We should have brought along a megaphone, so Sue could sit up on top and sing out historic facts as we pass by places," Ted remarked, thoughtfully. "Did Powhatan live around here?"

"Further south, Ted, between the James and the York," Polly replied. "Oh, see, we're leaving the dear old bay behind us."

The machine swung away from the shore road, and turned towards the low rolling inland country. It seemed like parting from a friend to leave the deep blue waters of old Chesapeake behind them, but Patchin assured them they would catch up with it again on the return trip.

"We will do considerable crossing on our own tracks one way and another," he told them. "The routes are all mapped out carefully, and the Senator said if we failed to cover a point one day to follow it out the next."

"And we're prepared to follow his directions

exactly," Miss Harmon agreed. "We want to touch at White Chimneys on our way up the end of the week, and Sunday we will spent quietly in Richmond."

"Where do we lunch today?" asked Hallie, wistfully. "I was so excited over leaving that I hardly ate any breakfast, and I'm starved already."

Polly promptly dipped down beside her, and drew out a narrow flat box.

"Mandy handed me this the last thing before we started, and told me it was to 'stay' us until we found a place to eat. Honey jumbles, and egg sandwiches, girls, and plums."

"It's a mere teaser," Ted protested, drawing in deep whiffs of the salt air. "If this keeps up, I shall want fried chicken and corn bread, and sweet corn, and baked potatoes—"

"Throw her out," called Sue. "No fair making mouths water when it's hopeless getting anything to eat. I'm hungry too."

"Then you'll all be ready for luncheon at the old Carisbrooke Inn," Penelope laughed. "We will reach it about eleven when we come to the turnpike, and I thought we could rest there until about four, through the heat of the day. We

won't make any runs at all while the sun is highest."

Just at this minute a flock of white turkeys loomed up in the road ahead of them. There was a boy driving them along, but the minute they saw the machine, they scattered frantically, filling the air with distressed gobbles.

"Oh, dear," cried Polly. "Why doesn't he run after them?"

But the turkey tender stood squarely in the middle of the road, waiting for the car until it halted within a few feet of him. He was brown as a caramel, with a sleepy friendly smile, and rolling mischievous eyes. As they all stared at him, he hitched up his one suspender, and hung his head.

"Mah fowls dey's all gone and mah paw's goin' ter lay for me if Ah doan't bring 'em all back safe. Maybe you all'd help get 'em back."

"Let's, girls," said Ted, impulsively. "It's only fair when we scattered them. Let's do it."

Out of the car they all got, even Miss Harmon, and started to coax back the recreant turkeys. They had taken refuge in the locust trees along the roadside and behind the old-fashioned rail fences, half buried in tall ferns. All the time

the girls were hunting them, the turkey tender perched on a fence rail, and eyed the machine interestedly, asking questions of Mr. Patchin every minute or two.

"Why don't you help gather in the turkeys?" asked Miss Harmon.

"Dey gets all frazzled when Ah chases 'em," replied the little darky, innocently. "What's dat shiny end sticking out dere?"

The girls came back, breathless and flushed, but triumphant.

"They're all over the wall, and not one missing," Polly announced. "It was hard, but we coaxed them, and we're so sorry the machine frightened them, Buddy."

Miss Pen slipped a quarter into the moist, brown palm as a finally comforting compensation for damages, and its owner smiled broadly. When the girls had climbed back into the machine, he whistled, and lo, the white turkeys came over the fence meekly, and followed at his heels.

"Dey all comes when Ah whistles," he called after the car. "Ah jes' forgot to whistle to 'em."

"Well, the idea!" exclaimed Natalie, "I believe

he has them all trained so they'll fly away when a car comes along, and he can stand still and collect damages."

The turkey tender rambled leisurely off down the road, and the girls laughed over the way he had managed the situation.

They rode for miles through the rolling country, until a long up-grade climb loomed ahead. As far as they could see, the road wound its way under an arcade of beautiful locusts. The long pendant clusters of leaves looked translucent in the bright sun glow, like the wings of the real locusts. At the top of the hill they came to an old toll gate, or pike house, as Miss Harmon told them it was called. Here they made a stop to get a drink of cool well water, and look at the old toll house.

The roof was built over the road in an arcade, with rooms on each side, and a huge rock chimney on the kitchen end. The toll bar let down like a long well sweep across the road, and there was an old sign board up on a post giving the toll rates.

Polly stood reading these figures over, when the toll gate tender's wife came out smiling, a baby in her arms, and rosy cheeked twins cling-

ing to her skirts. She was tall and thin herself, with but little color in her cheeks, and her hair straggled down in straw colored wisps behind each ear, but she looked radiant when the girls praised the children, and made the baby laugh.

“His name is Lemuel like his father, and the twins has got sort of curious names, but I liked ’em,” she told them. “This one with the freckles is Florella, and this one without freckles is Florinda. I was so thankful one of ’em freckled up, ’cause it’s all their paw and me kin do to tell ’em apart.”

Florella and Florinda dimpled and giggled at the girls’ petting, and hid their faces in their mother’s apron.

“Isn’t it lonesome here in the winter time?” asked Sue.

“Kind of, but we’re used to it. I never think about it, myself, ’cause I was born here. We all kept toll long before Lem come out this way. He used to peddle, and he’d stop over night here and talk to my folks, and he liked it so well he married me when Paw gave out.”

“It’s a beautiful place to live, ’way up on this hill,” Polly said. “You can see the bay when the leaves are gone, can’t you?”

The woman's faded blue eyes grew wistful and dreamy.

"I don't know much about it. I never was any further off than Tottenville, six miles down yonder, but Lem's been all over. He's been up to Delaware and in Pennsylvany, and in North Carolina. I never talk about places to him, 'cause he gets to feeling the road pulling him away. Once he did go for four months, but we got on all right. I was glad to hear the bells on his horse, though, when he came back. Used to sit out here in the shade with the twins, they was babies then, and listen for those bells down the road all day. I knew for sure he'd come."

Miss Harmon was smiling over a story that Lemuel was telling her and Patchin, and she called to the girls to listen too.

"See that sign of rates up thar?" Lem began. He was nearly six feet tall, with stooped shoulders, and his head looked sunken between his shoulders. Polly said she believed it was from sitting on his peddler wagon, all hunched up. His eyes were half closed from squinting, and had fine crows' feet around them. He perched on a cracker box, and continued.

"That's been nailed up thar more'n seventy

years. And it's plain enough too, ain't it? One penny for single man, two penny for man and horse, three penny for man, horse, and team. Well, one day years back when I first came here to live, there comes along a woman riding a sorrel mare. She was bound up state some place, she said, to her folks, and I declare if she didn't look just like that mare. Both red haired, and big eyed, and skittish. She reined up in front of the sign, and the mare danced sideways. I hadn't let the bar down, seeing it was only a woman coming along.

“ ‘Them yer rates?’ ses she, pert like.

“ ‘They are,’ ses I.

“ ‘They don't say anything about a woman and a mare,’ she ses, and gives the mare her head. ‘Go long there, Jennie!’

“And the two of 'em loped down that road, and me standing here scratching my head. For she was right; it don't say anything about a woman and a mare.”

“What does it say about a machine and five girls, and a chauffeur and chaperon?” asked Miss Harmon, but Patchin said he had paid the twenty-five cents toll, and they climbed back into the car, and waved good-bye to the whole family.

“Isn’t that queer, Miss Pen?” said Natalie, bending forward. “His wife doesn’t mind staying there one bit because it’s always been her home, but she says he feels the road pull him away.”

“I guess it won’t pull him very far with all those little anchors to hold him steady,” replied Penelope confidently. She turned and waved once more to the lone figure watching them out of sight, before the road dipped, and they sped down into a long sweep of valley.

The grass along the turnpike looked trampled and yellow, but there was not so much dust on the road as in the side one they had just left. The houses lay farther apart too. Once in a while they would come to a cluster of low cabins, with great white chimneys taking up nearly all of one side. There would be a scurrying of bare brown heels as the siren called its warning, and by the time the machine passed, up on the whitewashed fences would perch half a dozen or more little colored children, with wide smiling mouths and round staring eyes, watching the speeding car out of sight.

“I love the patches of yellow the sunflowers make banked up in fence corners or against the

houses," said Ted, shaking back her hair from her eyes. "I wish I could paint pictures. I can see bits everywhere that would make such dandy pictures or sketches, but I don't care. If I can't be an artist, I'll be a photographer, an art photographer, I mean."

"Taking pictures with a camera isn't like being an artist, is it, Miss Pen?" asked Natalie. "Artists are a different kind of people."

"Oh, I don't know about that, young lady," Penelope declared, turning in her seat, so she could see the girls. "I think that everyone is a real artist who achieves the dream or inner vision, as somebody has called it. Whether he is a builder of cathedrals, or bridges, or subways, if he builds true and perfectly, lending all the beauty of structure and line and curve that he can to his work, is he not a true artist?"

Polly leaned over eagerly.

"That makes me think of something that happened at Glenwood last fall, and I was so puzzled over it. There was a dear friend of Grandfather's from New York, and he was a well-known artist, National Academician and all that. And what do you suppose, girls? He said he hoped he'd find something inspiring around Glen-

wood, so I trotted him to all of my pet views, the rose arbor that overlooks the river, and the old tree seat with the vines that cover it like a leafy cave, and the sun dial in the garden, and everything I could think of that we thought beautiful. And what do you suppose he finally painted? Mandy sitting out beside the kitchen door, peeling potatoes. She'd sit and chuckle all the time he was sketching her, and it did turn out to be the dearest picture when he was through. The vines climbing all over the trellis work, and the bright sunlight slanting through, and Mandy in her pink checked dress with a nice starched white handkerchief crossed on her breast, and a pink one over her hair. Behind her are the asters, pink and purple and white. It hung in the Exhibition in Paris last year, he wrote us, and just think, it was only a painting of old Aunt Mandy."

"Because he 'painted the thing as he saw it, for the God of things as they are,' " quoted Penelope softly, her grey eyes keen and full of reverie. "That is true art, and I think, with Ted, if she wants to take photographs of outdoor types and life, she is surely taking up a branch of art that is developing marvelously. I saw in New York a

stained glass window that was copied directly from a plate taken with the new color process, for they can photograph in color, you know. This was a clump of fox gloves in a garden, with the green bank of shrubbery behind them, and full sunlight pouring down over all."

"I have a girl cousin who works in stained glass," said Natalie. "She says it's the most interesting work, and you have to keep your patience, matching the tints with pieces of glass layer on layer until you catch the exact tone."

"Isn't that true artistry?" asked Miss Harmon. "Doesn't it make you think of character building, tone on tone, layer on layer, until it makes a perfect blend for the light to shine through?"

"Oh, just look at those watermelons!" Sue exclaimed, suddenly pointing to a wide stretching field of corn with watermelons showing up and down the rows.

"I thought we had left Crullers behind," laughed Polly. "Whenever we are soaring on poetic wings, Miss Pen, she always brings us down to earth by talking of something good to eat."

"Poetic wings are all right," insisted Sue, "but watermelons grow on vines, and you don't

need any wings to get to them. May we stop and buy one, please, Miss Pen? I see a cabin roof right over those trees."

So art was shelved while they stopped at the watermelon-patch and persuaded its owner, an old grey-haired mammy, to part with a fine ripe melon. She was sitting out on the little "lean-to" porch at the back of the cabin, shelling peas in her apron, and she refused to trust even Patchin's selection when it came to melons. Taking her cane, she hobbled out to the field, up and down the cornstalk rows, pushing aside the tall pink and red poppies and morning glory vines that clambered around in the tall grass, until she found the melons. Each one she would thump gently with her knuckles, and listen, her head on one side.

"Doan't turn 'em over, chillun," she protested, "dey's jes' as nervous and pernicky as babies. Ah nevah disturbs 'em. Turn 'em over and dey gits all discouraged and quits tryin' to ripen. Ah jes' knocks on 'em, and if dey go pank, dey's still green, and if dey goes punk, dey's ripe."

"Isn't that queer, Miss Pen," Polly exclaimed delightedly to Miss Harmon, who had followed



"IF DEY GO PANK, DEY'S STILL GREEN, AND IF DEY GO PUNK, DEY'S RIPE"

the girls into the field. "We've got a little recitation at school that Crullers used to say, and it has just that same thing in it about watermelons, but I didn't know it was true."

"Dar it is!" cried the old mammy all at once, finally tapping one that suited her. "And when you a' gwine ter cut it open, it'll be all mealy and red inside, and glistenin' like dew."

Ted and Sue lifted it in their hands to carry, and Polly opened the club pocketbook to settle the bill, but the old woman put up both hands and shook her head.

"Go 'long, chile, go 'long. When de good Lord sends me down watermelons jes' like hailstones, what he gwine ter say ter me if Ah charge his chillun twenty-five cents for one li'l, lonesome melon? Go 'long, now."

"Wasn't she a dear to do that?" said Sue, when they had started again, with the melon safe under the rumbles. "How are we to cut it open, though?"

Miss Harmon opened one of the side pockets, as the girls called the compartments tucked around in the tonneau in handy places, and drew out a narrow leather case. Inside were three knives of different sizes.

“Just part of my emergency outfit, girls,” she explained. “I have brought along first-aid-to-the injured things too, but I didn’t think my first duty would be to carve a watermelon.”

It seemed to the girls that first day as though every turn in the road brought out some fresh adventure. Everything was new to them, and full of surprises and novelty. The watermelon tasted better than any other melon they had ever eaten, they all declared, as the last rind flew back of them on the roadway. It was half past ten when they finally rolled into Chaucerville. While Patchin looked the machine over, the girls strolled around the center square and looked at the old ivy-covered church with its date on the cornerstone, “1714.” Dozing comfortably on its wide stone steps was an old colored man with a covered basket beside him.

“Maybe he has some pralines,” Ted suggested. “Let’s just joggle his elbow a little, and when he wakes up, buy a lot of them.”

But Polly protested against disturbing the old uncle’s dreams, for he looked so peaceful and happy. Then they stood around and called pleadingly: “Uncle! We want pralines. Wake up, wake up, wake up!”

"I'm surprised at you, every single one," laughed Miss Harmon, coming up to where they stood, but the old man wakened to find five merry girl-faces bending over him.

"Jes' a minute, jes' a minute," he protested. "What yo' all want? Pralines? An' here Ah jes' got mint bunches."

"Never mind, we'll buy some of those," Polly declared; "mint is good to munch on."

He handed out the little clusters of fresh green mint, shaking his old grey head, and chuckling.

"If you all come 'round dis way agin, Ah'll sure have pralines, but dey ain't a mite ob good lessen dey's fresh and soft. An'—an' de Lord bress you all, chillun, an' keep yo' wandering feet on de road to Jerusalem."

"And Matoax too, uncle," Polly said. "Good-bye."

He covered his basket again, as they went down the square, and tilted his old straw hat over his eyes, slipping easily back to dreamland.

"If we do come back this way, we'll watch for him and those fresh pralines," Polly said. "I wish we had a recorder, or a reporter of events on this trip. So many things are happening, and

we'll forget the days and dates by the time we're on the last end of the trip."

"Get a book and start right in, Captain," Ted returned, cheerfully. "You see everything that's exciting and interesting, and we'll all be your reporters. You can be the editor of the *Daily Squeal*."

"Oh, not a name like that, Ted," Hallie protested. "Have an inspiring one. The *Daily Speeder*."

"Call it *The Scooter*," said Sue. "I'll be the society editor."

"No, I think we must have a more dignified name, for it may turn out to be history," Polly replied. "It will come to us all at once when we're not thinking about it. When I want to remember anything, I just walk around the thought, and make believe I don't see it at all, and pretty soon it comes up and tells me its name."

So the last errand they did in Chaucerville was to buy five notebooks and pencils, and Polly bought one good-sized ledger. It was in this little stationery store too that they learned how the town got its name. The proprietor was blind, and though he was tall and thin and quite

bald, he looked young in the face, and he smiled perpetually. His old black alpaca coat was shorter in the back than the front, and he wore blue glasses, which seemed queer to the girls when he was quite blind. The sign above the door read, "Happy Carter."

"Yes, that's my name," he told Natalie when she asked about it. "Folks gave it to me long ago when I was a little shaver, because I always had a pretty good time just being alive. My great grandfather founded this town. He was old Judge Ellery Carter, and he named the place after Geoffrey Chaucer because he always said it was the end of his pilgrimage in the New World. We lost our plantation during the '60's, but I've got this store and good health, and everybody's my friend, so the world seems mighty bright to me."

"Were you alive in war time?" asked Hallie, impulsively. "You look so young."

"Do I, now?" He smiled. "I'm glad of that. Yes, I was about sixteen when the war broke out. My hair is white, what's left of it, and I'll be seventy next spring. I lost my sight with old Stoney Jackson."

"Just think of saying all that and meaning

it," exclaimed Polly, when they went out. They had told him their names, each one in her own voice, at his request, for he said he never forgot names or the voices that belonged to them.

"It makes one feel ashamed of ever complaining about anything," replied Sue. "We're a lot of ungrateful midges, fretful midges, I mean. Where did I read about fretful midges? I know I liked the expression because I've felt just like one, and wanted to spin around in the air, too."

Ted linked her arm in her chum's soothingly.

"Midge, girls, meaneth mosquito," she explained. "Sister Susan's mind wanders from Happy Carter to 'The Blessed Damosel.' It speaks in that of the earth spinning around like a fretful midge, and she had to copy it five times last term for hiding butter-scotch under her pillow and forgetting it, and behold, it did melt in the night watch, and Sister Susan was like Br'er Rabbit, all stuck up."

Patchin was waiting for them, and Miss Harmon came out of the little post office where she had been sending postcards.

"Keep your eyes wide open from now on, girls," she told them, as they all climbed into

the car. "From Chaucerville your work begins."

"Won't we be at the Inn pretty soon?" asked Hallie, wistfully. "I'm awfully hungry."

"In twenty minutes on the post road," replied Patchin.

Polly was hunting for the camera to be in readiness for the first necessary snapshot, and the other girls were jotting down their first impressions in their notebooks, to be used as copy in the motor journal later.

CHAPTER XII

THE RECORD OF SUNNY HOURS

CARISBROOKE INN stood far back from the main road. It was an old red brick house, with huge white pillars across the front, half crumbling away with age, but covered over with clinging vines.

There seemed to be a little village of out-buildings stretching behind it: the smoke house, forge, granaries, stables, tool house, well house, dairy house; and still farther on beyond these, the girls discovered a rare old garden, and enjoyed this most of all.

Miss Penelope had decided to take a nap after the plentiful dinner of fried chicken, sweet corn fritters, baked ham, corn bread, and a peach pudding to top it off. Even Crullers, if she had been along, could not have complained of that dinner, Ted said, contentedly, when they started to explore the garden.

“I always lie down during the heat of the day,”

Miss Pen declared, "and I find it conserves energy. Of course you girls don't have to consider that yet, for you're every one just live wires of energy as it is, and I do believe you have private storage batteries at that. When you turn the forty milestone, you'll begin to conserve."

But the girls were too much accustomed to the summer temperature in Virginia to mind it, and they preferred looking the inn over to resting indoors. Polly found the garden first. On each side of the tall iron gate was a low stone house hardly five feet tall, and the girls looked inside these curiously.

"Little smoke houses for hams and bacons," Sue said, sniffing.

"No, they were garden houses, I think," Polly answered. "See the little shelves on each side, and here are old flower pots and a trowel. Let's go into the garden. I smell plums, girls."

It was a perfect wildwood of old-fashioned flowers, that garden. A high rock wall surrounded it, and there was an old wrought iron seat half buried in the tall ribbon grass and phlox. The ground along the center walk was carpeted with myrtle, and tall trumpet flowers

reared their flaming chalices out of masses of wild pinks and lilies. The roses had been untended for many seasons and grew everywhere in straggling happy-go-lucky fashion. The pink ones struggled for life on low, crooked bushes under the tall spreading branches of syringa and flowering quince, but in one far corner the stately bride roses held their own and the girls gathered a full cluster of these for Miss Penelope.

There was a sundial at the center of the walk, rusty and almost illegible, but the girls traced the letters on it with their fingertips until they made out the motto.

“I record only the hours that are bright.”

Miss Harmon was in the old-time sitting-room when they returned, fully refreshed from her nap, and looking at the oil paintings and steel engravings on the wall.

“Girls, do you know this inn was built in 1767 of brick brought over from England?” she exclaimed. “See the date on this rock fireplace.”

“It’s out on the carriage block too,” said Ted. They leaned forward to read the inscription chisled deeply in the rock.

“Rest thee, heart, and take good cheer,
For food and fire and friends are here.”

“And now all are gone excepting the chairs,” Polly said, looking around at the semi-circle of old rush bottom arm-chairs drawn in stately array around the room. “I haven’t seen any proprietor, Miss Pen, excepting the old house-keeper. Who owns the inn?”

“Miss Philippa Carisbrooke. She lives up at Richmond, and is a dear friend of Mrs. Yates. That is why I wanted to bring you here to see the inn. It is part of the large Carisbrooke estate, and is her special hobby. She will not permit any changes to be made since her father and mother died here within a few hours of each other. Upstairs in their room you may see their chairs standing close together, and beside them on the little low candlestands their Bibles with the folded gold bowed spectacles on the covers just as they left them. The garden has lain untouched, and even the old fire irons and candlesticks stay as they did fifty years ago. This is one of the first inns built on this turnpike, and long before the railroad went through, travelers always stopped here over night on the weary overland journeys by carriage. I believe it was

a tavern originally, before this new part was added."

"What's the difference between an inn and a tavern?" asked Hallie.

"Well, not so much, only in dignity. An inn is less transitory, I should say. It caters to travelers, and has an atmosphere of fine old hospitality and good cheer that the tavern lacks. Do you girls remember how Omar speaks of the inn where we all sojourn for a little while?"

"Let's send postcards to Miss Carisbrooke from here," said Polly impulsively, "and tell her we sojourned at her inn, and enjoyed being her guests ever so much."

"Polly always thinks of the nicest thing to do," Natalie told Hallie. "I always remember afterwards, but it's too late then."

"Have you seen the old bell in the back yard, Miss Pen?" Ted interposed. "They used to ring it to call the field hands in. It has a date on it too, but it's so far up you can't see it. Crullers would have climbed the post, wouldn't she, girls? The place seems such a queer mixture of gentility and wildness."

Miss Harmon nodded her head and smiled as they all went out on the wide veranda.

"I have heard Mrs. Yates tell of the gloom that seemed to hang over the old inn. People said the first Carisbrooke was somewhat of a scapegrace, who came over from England in a spirit of adventure. He was a great help in fighting the Indians, so he received this grant of land, but he married an indentured girl—"

"What kind of a girl?" Sue asked, eagerly.

"Indentured. You have read of the first servants of the colony, haven't you. They were mostly indentured, leased out to service, so to speak, for a certain time, instead of serving their time in prison."

"Had his bride been in prison?" the girls broke in.

"No, but she had been transported to the colonies for some misdemeanor, and he took her here as a servant. She nursed him back to life after a long spell of fever following the Indian campaigns, and he married her. I think they were very happy too, but the old families never forgave him for stepping outside the magic circle for his bride."

"Perhaps she planted some of the roses and vines," said Polly thoughtfully. "I think I'll

just go back and get a little slip of the myrtle to plant when I get back home.”

“And who’s to tend it now?” asked Ted, cautiously. “A sprig of personally conducted myrtle to be nourished for five weeks on a motor trip. Polly, send it by parcel post to Glenwood, or press a piece of it.”

“No, I want it to be alive and growing all over our garden. I won’t be a minute.” She ran back to the old garden, and returned presently with a slip of myrtle in a three-inch flower pot.

“The old colored gardener gave it to me, and his name is Ichabod,” she declared.

“‘Ichabod, thy glory is departed,’” quoted Sue, solemnly. “Hurry up, Polly, because Mr. Patchin is ready, and we’re going to hit the pike again.”

“Sue is lapsing into what the doctor calls the vernacular, Miss Pen,” Polly teased. “She’s talking about hitting the pike.”

“It may be a fact,” warned Sue, placidly. “If we run into some of the things I’ve heard of.”

The heat of the day was waning when they left Chaucerville. Ted said they were real pilgrims now, and must put from them all frivolities, and attend strictly to business.

Polly had the road map outspread on her lap, and every mark on it was to be verified as they passed along.

"We're running between the Rappahannock and the York now," said Miss Harmon. "At Creighton Courthouse we put up for the night, and will reach Matoax tomorrow."

"Ford ahead!" called Hallie, excitedly springing up. Sue promptly sat down on her lap, and the car dipped to a little creek that crossed the road. It looked innocent enough and the water was low, but the girls held their breath when the machine struck the water, and ploughed its way through.

An old-fashioned rockaway had halted on the high side of the road across the stream, and when the car made its hasty appearance, the mule began to back, ears pointed straight forward. There was an old lady driving, and two little girls sitting behind, very clean and prim, and holding hands tightly.

"Now, be still, Chickahominy, be still," exclaimed the old lady, vigorously tugging at the lines. "You cut up just as if you were some silly two-year-old, instead of a sensible old creature 'most twenty years old. Go right along,

strangers, we won't do you a mite o' harm. I can manage Chickahominy, and she knows it."

As soon as the car had passed, evidently Chickahominy plucked up courage, and went down to the ford for a drink, but she turned her head, and stared distrustfully back at the strange apparition that had frightened her on the familiar road. The old lady was still scolding her as if she understood every word, and as Sue said, she might have, at that.

"Mark down in your book, Polly, Rickadee Ford, good condition. Met Chickahominy and passed in safety," suggested Miss Harmon. "I declare, girls, I've never been over your roads down here before, but we meet as many odd characters, and have as much fun as you do traveling abroad. Did you notice the meditative droop to Chickahominy's left eyelid as she watched us go by?"

"The map's marked 'woods' right after that ford," Polly said presently, poring over her map. "And there are two roads ahead of us. Is there a signboard up, Mr. Patchin?"

Patchin shook his head doubtfully, and lowered speed. At the fork in the road the girls got out to do some surveying. There was no

signboard on the post, but smoke curled lazily out of the woods ahead, and they followed it to see if they could find a house. After about half a mile there was a small clearing with many stumps of trees scattered about, and a row of children lined up, staring at the intruders anxiously. Beyond the house was a barn with the hay doors wide open, and an ox team standing outside. In the meadow at the far side grazed some thin cows.

Polly went up the path, and spoke to the tallest girl. She was about ten, with straggly hair cut off below her ears, and wistful eyes far too old for her years.

"Could we see your mother, please?" Polly asked in her friendliest way. One of the younger boys spoke up instantly with most disconcerting promptness.

"Can't. She's dead."

It was awkward, but Polly persevered, even with Sue pinching her arm to be careful.

"I'm so sorry. I didn't know anything about it, of course. Could we see your father then?"

"He's gone to the Corners for grain. You can see Pete."

Before the girls could agree to interviewing

the unseen Pete, all six children took to their heels and ran towards the tumbledown barn, calling at the top of their lungs, "Petey! Somebody wants you."

Whereupon the real master of the house appeared. He held a long pitchfork in one hand, and seemed to be about fourteen, but was tall for his age. His hair grew long around his face like taffy-colored fringe, but it was a cheery, happy face it framed even though it had small pretensions to good looks. He seemed to quiet and reassure the whole pack of excited youngsters with a word and a smile, as he listened to the complaints of the pathfinders.

"The two signboards are missing up at the crossroads," Polly explained. "And it's very important that they are found, or people may lose their way going through."

"Nobody ever goes through here 'ceptin' Paw," volunteered the same boy.

"But they must be replaced, for that's the law of the road."

Petey scratched his head and surveyed the landscape as if he expected the signboards to rise from the grass and come towards him.

"I ain't seen 'em," he said, "nor I ain't noticed

'em being gone. Cissy, have you all seen them signboards anywhere?"

Cissy, the tall, shy-eyed girl at his elbow, smiled, and ducked her head behind him.

"Does she know where they are?" Polly asked, laughing. Petey bent his head and listened to Cissy's confession. Then he nodded gravely.

"She says they was all loose anyhow and rotten, and she an' Wingate there, they clum up and pulled 'em down to tie on the old cow's rope so she wouldn't ramble too far into the woods. We can get 'em back again."

"You'd better do it at once," Polly said firmly, "for we'll be back this way probably, and unless the signs are up, there'll be a fine."

"Put 'em up tonight," promised Petey. "Cissy didn't mean no harm, I know, only they come in handy like."

"But you'll see they are nailed back, won't you, Petey?"

He promised faithfully he would take the signboards off Bess and Buttercup, and the girls trudged back through the old wood road to the pike, and told Miss Harmon of their success.

"There they are, six of them, and a father

some place around the landscape," Sue said tragically, "and no mother. Just looking after themselves, coming up like the lilies of the field."

"They don't look a bit like lilies," Polly protested. "More like hardy little thistles that will flourish in any soil. And they all had straight taffy-colored hair and stubby noses and freckles."

Ted was busy taking a picture of the two roads as a warning to be put on the new map, and when she had secured it, they went on down the right hand one which Petey had said was the road to the Courthouse.

"I wonder if we will ever see them again," Polly said.

"Well, you did your scout duty at all events," Penelope told her comfortably, "and you can't take every family we meet on the road under your wings, girls. Human nature is the most interesting and wonderful study in all the world. It is never quite the same, and if you keep your eyes opened wide you find stories of romance and adventure lying all about you."

"Oh, I know," Natalie cried with sparkling eyes. "We lived at a big hotel in 'Frisco, and

there was a roof garden on top of it. You could see out all over the harbor at night from it, and the hills around the city seemed lit up like the gnome hills in the Island of Rugen. I used to stand there with my father and wonder what kind of stories lay behind each light."

"Where are the gnome hills in Rugen?" Hallie asked, her chin on her palm. "I have never heard of them."

"Read Whittier's 'Brown Dwarf of Rugen,' or may be it is Lowell, I forget now. I found it long, long ago in a volume of St. Nicholas, and it told how the hills of Rugen raised up at night like little tents, and the gnomes and brown dwarfs came out to dance in the starlight."

"Hallie, aren't you too old for fairy tales?" teased Sue, pulling Hallie's long brown braids like reins behind her.

"No one is too old for them," Miss Harmon said happily. "I love to listen to them even now, and in some parts of Europe the people really believe them. It is fun to be in Ireland. I used to catch myself sidestepping every flower for fear it might be a fairy in disguise."

"Town below!" called out Polly suddenly, as the car swerved around a turn in the road. Be-

low them a church spire with a weathervane reared its gilded crest above the tree tops.

“This must be Painted Rock,” said Miss Harmon. “Look on your map, Polly. It used to be called Mattawossac, and it was said at Jamestown among the colonists that the Laughing King of Accomac held his summer court here. Then he was driven back, and the colonists found strange painted inscriptions on the face of a great rock and they thought it must be some Indian spell left to inspire dread in the hearts of the white conquerors.”

Patchin needed some oil, and they waited while he hunted up the village store. The girls had not quite grown accustomed to being objects of interest, and it embarrassed them to find the car surrounded by all the children and half-grown boys of the town, to say nothing of six dogs and four black pigs that sauntered leisurely out of a yard and crossed the road to discover the cause of the commotion.

“You’ll not mind it after a day or two,” Miss Harmon told them, when they were on the road again. “In fact, I found out if I didn’t make a little bit of a sensation when I came into a new place, I felt almost disappointed.”

It was just sunset when they neared Creighton Courthouse. The distant hills deepened to amethyst, then to purple, with a rim of gold along the summits. The sun rays streamed out in long radiating paths of light, and far below lay the cool dim valleys. The girls did little talking now. It was too still and mystical. Above them in the clear, amber sky, the swallows darted and circled in their vesper dance, and every now and then a bat would hurtle past them.

"Oh, girls, look off there where that fringe of willows is," cried Ted suddenly, pointing to a river course far down the valley. "Just see how the mist is rising and stealing along those meadows. It looks like a lot of shrouded figures, doesn't it?"

"Like the Moon people in Doré," Miss Harmon added. "It seems alive, girls."

Patchin halted the car for a few minutes so that they could watch the mist rise. Each hillock and clump of trees turned into an island in a grey shoreless sea.

Polly was singing, her cap in her lap, the wind blowing back her brown hair.

"Since I found the wander rose,
Smiling skies are o'er me.

Dew wet lane and hawthorne hedge,
Open now before me.

Rain may fall, I heed it not,
For, whate'er the weather,
Luck and I go hand in hand,
Down the world together."

"Oh, Polly, you old dear," exclaimed Sue with one of her rare outbursts of affection, as she gripped Polly's nearest arm impulsively. "Luck does go with you, too. I'm so glad you thought this all up."

"I'm more glad that you girls carried it out. Lots of good my thinking it up would have done if you hadn't helped and helped until it all happened," Polly returned heartily. "Let's sing as we make the last stretch tonight, girls."

The clear young chorus of voices carried far on the twilight air. Polly led off with some of Aunty Welcome's old plantation songs. There was one camp meeting hymn she had always loved.

"I'm a'gwine away, by de light ob de moon,
And I want all de chill'un for ter follow me,
I hope I meet you darkies soon,
Halle-halle-halle-hallelujah!
In de mo'ning, in de mo'ning by de bright light,
When Gabriel blows his trumpet in de mo'ning."

Three verses of this, and Ted started up "Polly-wolly-doodle," with Sue singing alto, and Ted beating a drum tattoo on the new ledger. It was dusk and about half past seven when they finally rolled into Creighton Courthouse, with a solemn chant about "Old Uncle Peter."

"I always change the words of this," Polly had explained. "Aunty Welcome taught it to me, but she said while the real song suggested that Uncle Peter took too much hard cider, still it was better just to say he had a bad dream." So they sang accordingly:

"Ole Uncle Peter had a dream las' night,
 He looked out de winder and he saw a sight,
 Dissa am de story dat he tole me,
 All about de animals he did see.
 Skunk on de wall was a'blowin' his nose,
 Toads in de grass wif dere sojer clo'es,
 Cats in de pantry catchin' mice,
 Spider in de cobweb frowin' dice.

CHORUS:

Den hop along, hop along, hop along Peter,
 Hop along, hop along, hop along Peter.
 Oh, hop along, hop along, hop along Peter,
 Nevah go to sleep on gooseberry wine."

Miss Harmon and Polly secured the rooms

for the party at the hotel, a comfortable red brick house with two galleries covered over with vines. The girls had a large double room and Hallie slept with her cousin. Just as they were slipping away into dreamland, Sue screamed, and covered her head with the sheet. Polly sat bolt upright in bed, but ducked under as something swished past her head in the darkness.

"It's a bird," she said. "Don't be frightened, Sue."

"It's not a bird," moaned Sue. "It's a bat and they clutch your hair and won't let go. Oh, Polly, there it is again!"

"Don't light up," Ted cautioned. "The light attracts it. Just keep perfectly cool and calm, Polly. We'll all keep under the bed clothes till you get it out."

"Can anyone remember where the door is?" Polly cried, striking out with a pillow at the bat as it brushed by her. "Oh, dear, it hit my shoulder."

"Throw a pillow at it, Polly," advised Natalie from under her bed. "Or my shoe. It's right over there."

"Hadn't I better ring one of these little bells," Ted suggested, reaching over to the wall.

“Ring them all,” said Polly, desperately. “Water, fire, porter, and chambermaid. I think there should be a special bell for bats.”

“There it goes now,” Sue opened the door wide, and the bat sped out, a strange, swift shadow of darkness. She pushed the door shut, and sat against it exhausted, and laughing. “It went upstairs, girls.”

“Maybe it has a nice little nest in the garret,” said Ted sleepily. “And I was not under the bed, Polly. Nat was under the bed. I was only under the sheet.”

“Do let’s be quiet,” whispered Polly. “We’ll wake up everybody. If any more bats come, get under the bedclothes and say nothing.”

But no more came, and silence fell at last over the first night’s bivouac.

CHAPTER XIII

CAMPING OUT IN THE CABIN

WHEN the other girls wakened the following morning, the first picture that greeted their sight was Polly in her night gown, with her brown hair streaming over her shoulders, seated on the floor studying the road map.

“You must wake and call me early, call me early, mother dear,” chanted Sue. “Is it time to get up, Polly?”

“Six o’clock. Look at this map, girls. We follow the old road back to Matoax, and then strike down across the valley to the Rappahannock. We cross the York after that, I believe. Mr. Patchin says this road on to Matoax has been explored but once, and if we can’t get through we will have to turn back and report it impassable.”

“Automobiles should be made to go either on land or in the air,” mused Ted, tugging at the knots in her hair. “To go by land or sea as

emergency or fancy dictated. Then when we came to a road that was impassable, we could go flitting over it."

"You won't do any flitting on this trip," Polly returned. "You'll go roundabout. Yes, Miss Pen," as a tap sounded on the door. "We're all up. Good-morning, lady chaperon."

Miss Harmon came in, smiling and trim in her motor costume of grey waterproof silk. She laughed over the bat adventure, and told Ted to be sure her camera was well loaded.

"You will see a good many interesting places as we go further south on this trip, girls. We go over some of the old Indian sites, and also some of the early settlements. All along the York River and the James there are old colonial homes that used to be part of large grants and plantations. This part of Virginia is dearest to me, of course, for White Chimneys lies in it. The western and northern borders with their memories of the civil strife, seem to bring only sadness."

"Shall we see where Pocahontas lived, Miss Pen?" asked Sue.

"I am not certain, but we do pass close to one place that is called Powhatan's Chimney near

the shrine of Uttamussac. The Indian braves used to go out in canoes and drop pieces of copper into the water there to propitiate their god whom they named Kiwassa, or 'One-Alone-Called-Kiwassa.' ”

“I wonder if some day another race will go poking over our ruins and wondering all about us,” Polly said, brushing out her long curls vigorously over her head. “Mandy always gives Stoney the broken dishes to bury down in the back lot by the river, and some day perhaps antiquarians will be digging there and find them, and they will be put up in museums a thousand years from now, as rare antiques of a lost race.”

After breakfast they all went out to look at the large courthouse that gave the town its name. There was a green square in front of it, surrounded by an iron railing, and on court day, the girls were told, every inch of space at the railing, was taken up as hitching places.

The courthouse was of red brick, and had long, low steps leading up to it. Four o'clocks grew thickly along the fences, and far in the back stood a little stone cabin where the caretaker lived. He came hobbling out, and will-

ingly opened the doors for the girls to take a look inside.

"It actually smells important, doesn't it?" said Polly, sniffing at the shadowy interior and up at the tall paintings on the wall. There was one of John Randolph of Roanoke, very stern and weighty looking, and another of an old judge with his grey hair brushed up straight like a cockatoo's tuft.

"This is a very old building," the caretaker told them, his head fairly shaking with pride. "It stands on the foundation of one of the first assembly houses in this country, and Patrick Henry himself has spoken from the bench."

"Let's all go up and sit down on it for a minute and meditate," said Sue the irrepressible. "We may gain wisdom by reflected glory."

"Sue, don't," Polly begged. "It's so wonderful even to stand where they have been."

"Also the Minute Men of the Rappahannock met here," went on the caretaker happily, and he brushed off a fleck of dust from the polished door handle.

"I remember about them," Hallie exclaimed.

"And Morgan's riflemen too; remember them, girls?" asked Ted, lifting her head like a war-

horse at the smell of powder. Ted dearly loved wars. "They were all bordermen in hunting shirts and had 'Liberty or death' on their breasts. And when they met Washington, Morgan saluted and said, 'From the right bank of the Potomac, General.' Wasn't that bully, though, after that long march?"

"I'd hate to try the effect of a real fife and drum corps around Ted," murmured Sue in an undertone. "She'll fight any old battle over any time, and whoop for old Old Glory in her sleep."

"I'm going to be a Red Cross nurse, any way," said Ted stolidly, unmoved by criticism.

"Yesterday you were going to be an art photographer, and tomorrow you'll turn into an antiquarian as soon as you see ruins. Do I not know thee, Edwina, and still put up with all thy little vagaries?" Sue leaned an affectionate arm around her chum's shoulders.

"My vagaries? Just listen to Sue, Miss Pen—"

Miss Harmon laughed at Ted's mock indignation.

"I refuse to arbitrate on such a weighty matter. Let's get away from this Patrick Henry atmosphere that breeds contention. We shall

want to leave in good time any way, as it looks like rain."

About thirty miles out of Creighton around ten o'clock they sighted the first machine they had met on the road so far. It was a grey roadster. Polly insisted that it looked piratical at a distance, being "long, low, and rakish" in appearance, but when it overtook them, the occupants turned out to be four young men bound for Newport News. They flew the A. A. A. pennant also, and the girls felt their scouting responsibility heavily when asked advice on the condition of the roads and toll rates.

"You haven't got any canned goods to spare, have you?" asked one of the boys anxiously. "We've run out of supplies. Just sardines and crackers, or baked beans?"

Polly exchanged swift glances of consultation with Miss Harmon, and the private supply of food was dragged out from cover and opened up.

Two tins of sardines and a box of crackers changed hands, and the boys, for they seemed to be all under twenty, passed over four large canteloupes and several oranges.

"We've lived on these since yesterday noon,"

one of them said sadly. "Did you find any places to eat?"

"Lovely ones," called Ted and Sue in one breath. "Fried chicken and peach dumplings with whipped cream. You took the wrong road. Mark Carisbrooke Inn down on your maps."

"Oh, we'll be all right when we hit Newport News. Randy here at the wheel has an entire family anxiously awaiting our coming." Here Randy blushed and smiled good-naturedly. Then all four cheered lustily for the scouters, and waved their sardine cans and cracker box until they were out of sight in a swirl of dust.

"Let's make this pike the road to Jericho," suggested Polly. "I feel all smiley and glowing like the best Samaritan that ever was. And they were the best sardines too."

"Rain!" cried Hallie, putting out her hand. "I felt a splash."

"We won't melt like sugar if it is," Natalie protested. "It won't last long, will it, Mr. Patchin?"

"Hard to say. It's coming from the east, and pretty squally," Patchin told her. "I'll put up the shields."

“And cover the suitcases,” warned Polly. The machine came to a standstill while all hands helped “reef sails, and trim for bad weather,” as the Admiral would have said. The skies were rapidly being cloudswept, and the grey mists seemed to fold them in on all sides after the first shower had passed.

“It has settled down for a day of it, I think,” Miss Harmon remarked, as they picked their way with caution over the new road. “And there isn’t an inch of this mapped between here and Matoax, is there, Patchin?”

“No, ma’am, and no hotel or stopping place that I know of unless we run across a house where they’ll take us in.”

“And think of those poor boys bound straight for Newport News,” exclaimed Polly. “They’ll never get there before night with this going. Maybe our sardines and crackers are all the food they will have until tomorrow. There comes a man walking. We can ask him.”

The stranger looked to be very tall, with brown jeans tucked down into the tops of his high boots, and his hair and beard mingled in one curly mass of white ripples. On his head he wore a broad-brimmed straw hat without any

crown, and as he neared them, he lifted the brim jauntily and smiled.

“Howdy, travelers. Looks like it had set in for a spell of rain, don’t it? It always rains when it’s a mind too, I’ve noticed, and there ain’t a thing we can do about it. Bound south?”

“As far as Matoax,” said Patchin. “How’s the roads?”

“Middlin’ good for walking. I don’t know what this fancy carryall of yours would do. And it’s coming down steady. I’ve walked about nine miles since five, and I expect to get as far as Pitching River tonight.” He leaned one foot up on the running board confidentially, and removed the hat brim, fingering it with tender fingers. “I work awhile here and there till I feel I want to set out and walk, and nothing seems to satisfy me but seeing the miles unroll ahead like ribbons under the sky.”

“Are you a Virginian? You don’t talk like one,” said Miss Harmon.

“No’m. North Carolina. Hickory Nut Gap. You ask anybody in northwest Carolina if they know Wandering Joe Pattens, and they’ll tell you all about me. Like enough say I’m crazy, but I ain’t. Got my notions like everybody.

Like to sleep outdoors, and don't like to feel anything on top of my head, and like to walk twenty miles a day and more." He shook back his long curly hair like some old scout or hunter, and his eyes twinkled as he looked at the eager young faces bending towards him. "I had a little mite of a gal once, looked like this brown-eyed one," pointing at Polly, "an' she liked blueberries. We lived in a lonesome part of the mountains, and her mother'd gone down to the settlement after some things. Do you mind my talking about it?"

"Oh, go on, please," Polly urged.

"Well, I took her up in the woods where I was chopping, and she kind of slipped away from me. We hunted for her over a week. Ever hunt through the woods for some one who was lost? No? It's mighty fearsome and wearing. Some nights I wake up now, and find myself calling her, and I guess that's why I can't stop wandering around. 'Cause we never did find her, and after a while her ma' jes' natcherally pined away and died too. It's thirty years back now, but I kinder keep on walking. Seems like I can't stand it this time of the year when the blueberries ripen. If you ride over to the Gap, ask folks

about Joe Pattens, and they'll all speak a good word for me."

"Oh, we're all so sorry," Sue exclaimed fervently, just as if it had happened yesterday. "Can't we do anything for you, Mr. Pattens?"

He shook his head, and replaced the old brim. The top of his head was soaking wet from the rain and it trickled down his beard like tears, but he was still smiling.

"No'm," he said, cheerfully. "There ain't anything for me to do but keep on walking. Reckon I've walked all over this state and Maryland and the Carolinas, and a good part of Kentucky too. Sometimes I feel all right and settle down in one place, but soon as I do I can hear Annie calling me out in the timber, so I have to move along."

"Isn't that sad, Miss Pen?" exclaimed the girls, almost in one breath, when they had started on, and the dreary old figure could be seen trudging down the road.

"There are strange sorrows in this world," answered Penelope, her forehead puckered into fine wrinkles. "It is hard to find the answer to the universal why of things. Poor old Wandering Joe! It's good he can wander and feel that

it eases his mind a bit. I suppose in New England they would catch him and pack him into some institution, but down here in this dear happy-go-lucky land they let him wander on and follow the voice of his dreams.”

“I got him, just the same,” Ted said contentedly. “While he was talking, you know when I stepped down and went after the flowers, Sue? Well, I snapped him then as he stood by the car.”

“It won’t come out good in this rain, goose,” Polly laughed, “and if it doesn’t it’s a judgment on you for trying to take a picture when he was telling such a sad story.”

“Oh, look, girls,” exclaimed Natalie just then. “There’s that grey car stopped dead short at the foot of the hill.”

They soon caught up with it, although the road was getting heavy to travel through.

“The engine died just as we started to climb the hill,” one of the boys said. “Can you give us a pull up?”

“Hadn’t we better all get out first?” Polly said when she saw Patchin was agreeing to give the necessary “shove up.” “Maybe we’ll start to back down.”

“No, we won’t. The brake bands are new, and

we can all stay in," returned Miss Harmon. "Pull ahead, Patchin. Now, Polly, you are a real Samaritan. This is even better than feeding thy neighbor sardines and crackers."

When the tug up-hill was over, and they all rested at the crest, Patchin gave the boys some gasoline from his tank, and helped them get their car into shape again.

"He does it easily enough," said the boy they called Randy, "and here I crawled underneath her in the mud, and coaxed her to work, and she died just the same. She's a great old Sally Waters. What's your machine's name? I don't mean her make. I mean just her pet name."

"We haven't named her yet," began Polly, apologetically, but Ted interrupted.

"We call her the Scooter."

"That's bully. My sister Cary named this one for us because she's temperamental like the far-famed Sally Waters. She sits in the sun and weeps, then rises and wipes her eyes, and turns to all points of the compass."

Polly stopped him with a little exclamation of surprise, her brown eyes wide with interest as she leaned forward.

"Oh, I know you now. I've been wondering

and wondering who you looked like. You're Randy Dinwiddie, Cary's brother, and I met you last Christmas at White Chimneys."

Randy turned a deeper red under the scrutiny from so many pairs of girls' eyes, but smiled. He was tall like Cary and blonde, with blue eyes and a dark coat of tan. His motor togs were splashed with mud where he had crawled under the car, but in spite of this, he made a very manly and courtly appearance as Polly proceeded to introduce him to the whole party.

"You've all been so mighty fine to us, we don't know how to thank you," he said, warmly. "Do we, fellows? These boys are friends of mine from Castlewood Cadet 'Prep.' Mr. Andrew Forbes, Mr. William Wolcott, and Mr. Ted Burdick."

Andy, Billie, and Ted acknowledged the introduction with all the grace possible under the circumstances.

"Is Cary down at Newport News?" Polly asked. "Because we're going to drop in and see her at Sunnyside when we reach Richmond next Sunday."

"She'll be home by then. We're only running down for three days to meet Uncle Brock Cary.

He comes in on one of the battleships, the *Kentucky*, I think it is, Thursday morning, after a year and a half in the Pacific. We all want to be there to say hello to him, so it's to be a grand clan meet of the Carys and Dinwiddies."

"Grandfather knows him well. I'll write and tell him he's coming back," Polly had forgotten all about the rain, and her face was shining with the glistening drops. "Isn't it splendid we just happened to meet you, and the second day out, too?"

"How long are you going to stand on top of this hill and exchange compliments and news, girls?" asked Miss Harmon firmly, putting her head out between the storm curtains. "It is getting on, and I see no chance of making any town in this downpour."

"There's some kind of a house yonder," one of the boys declared. "Looks like a deserted cabin and there's a wagon shed we can run the machines under. It's no use pushing through the roads until this lets up a little bit."

Patchin nodded his head in agreement, and they all went down the hill to the old weather-beaten cabin. The door hung loosely on one hinge, and the ceiling had fallen down here and



THE GIRLS MADE STACKS OF SANDWICHES

there leaving huge bald spots that Polly said at once made her think of the continents on relief maps. There was a great open fireplace across one side, blackened with soot and smoke, but very welcome to the drenched boys, and "the chilled members of the relief expedition," as Randy called the girls.

"We'd be at the bottom of that hill yet, if it hadn't been for you," he said. "Hustle in wood, fellows, and build a fire."

"Everything is wet through out in the sheds, so we took some slices off the side porch," said Andy, coming in with a load of kindlings, with Bill treading solemnly on his heels with a huge log on one shoulder. "We'll keep up the fire if you can find anything to cook on it."

Penelope was already unpacking her "nest" of aluminum kettles and dishes, and the girls brought in supplies from the machine. They were mostly what Polly called "tabloid food," and butter and milk were both missing from the feast, yet it was a joyous one. The girls made up stacks of sandwiches with crackers and peanut butter, deviled ham, and pimento cheese, and for the crowning feature Miss Harmon gave them all delicious soup.

“Chicken bouillon, with one package of noodles in it, and one can of peas strained and mashed. It needs a half cup of cream, but we must do without that. There’s coffee on the hearth and a can of evaporated milk beside it, boys. And we have also four canteloupes to divide, fine, large, golden-netted ones given us by passing strangers this morning.”

There was no table, but Patchin brought in the double blankets from the machine, and the boys found another in the roadster. These were spread out on the floor, and the party sat around Indian fashion, and enjoyed the feast. Towards its close Randy excused himself. When he returned he held his cap filled with cherries, large ox-hearts and white beauties.

“There are heaps more, Miss Harmon,” he said, emptying the cap’s contents in Penelope’s lap. “I happened to see the tree as we came up the road. Come along, you cherry pickers now. It isn’t raining much.”

“They’re nice boys, aren’t they?” Ted said, eating the cherries happily, when the four guests had gone after more. “With brothers of my own, I know what boys can be when they take a notion.”

“Cary’s brother would just have to be all right,” Polly answered, thoughtfully. “No, that isn’t a rap at you one bit, Ted. I never rap, don’t you know that? But Cary’s almost grown up, and she’s, oh, I don’t know how to tell you, but she’s eveything all the girls in books seem to be, and everybody loves her. When she looks at you you can’t talk much, just for watching her.”

“Well, Randy doesn’t inherit the family beauty much,” Sue declared, “but he’s a nice boy, and a good cherry picker.”

When the cherry pickers returned with a plentiful supply, Randy announced that it was really clearing off, you could see blue sky over beyond the hills.

“I think we’d better go on if we’re to make any headway, but I wish we could do something to help make up for all this bother, Miss Harmon.”

“You have paid me back,” Miss Harmon smiled up at him. “Aren’t we munching cherries this minute, and how would we have found the cabin if it hadn’t been for your guidance? We will look for you at Richmond next Sunday. The girls want to stay over for church service there, and motor out to see the Admiral at Mrs.

Langdon's home in the afternoon, so we ought to reach Sunnyside about sundown."

"Let's go to Sunnyside in the afternoon and out to Aunt Evelyn's later, because she'll be sure to insist on our staying over night at Robin's Rest. Isn't that a dear name for a house? I always liked it when I was little. Besides," here Polly's tone grew very practical and businesslike, "we want to save hotel expenses. You know this is all our own undertaking, Randy. We are scouting for the State Roads' Committee and earning our own way, so every hotel bill counts."

"I think you're mighty plucky," Billie Wolcott exclaimed fervently, his hands deep in his pockets. "My sisters have been sitting on a hotel veranda up in the Delaware Gap for two weeks, and there are six more to come. I know I'll get seventeen different shades of crocheted silk neckties by the time they come home. I only wish they were working for a road committee."

"Each in his varying star," quoted Ted, promptly.

"Each with her varying necktie, you mean," Billie replied grimly. "Good-bye, anyhow."

"Give our love to Cary," Polly called last of all

when they stood about the low grey car and watched its crew pile in recklessly. "Even if we don't all know her yet, tell her we will."

"We'll tell her," shouted back Randy, and as they rolled away, the yell of Castlewood floated back to the watchers at the cabin.

"Boom! Get a rat trap, bigger than a cat trap. Boom! Get a rat trap, bigger than a cat trap. Boom-a-lacka, rigadoon, good, good, good. 'Rah! 'Rah! 'Rah! Castlewood!"

"We haven't any college yell," Sue remarked reflectively when they returned to the cabin to gather up the lunch debris and wash the aluminum dishes. "Miss Honoria said she didn't approve of them for girls; remember, Ted?"

"Well, it seems to me that a good, healthy yell all together helps to foster the—the *esprit de corps*. Hear me, Polly? *Attendez, s'il vous plaît.*" Ted spoke French very slowly and with much emphasis, as if it were Low Dutch. "Can't we make up a class yell to keep up the proper class spirit? I don't want a lot of Castlewood Cadets to get ahead of us that way. There we stood, like a row of clothes pins, and not a squeak in answer."

"Let's think it over," Polly suggested, as she

washed cups at the old pump in the sink. "It must be very musical and well mannered or Miss Calvert will never own it, girls."

"But very rousing," Ted insisted. "I guess I'll have to make it up all myself to get the real proper inspiration in it."

"Never mind wandering away in a fine frenzy while there are dishes to do," Sue warned. "That's the way with inspired poets. Their frenzies happen so unexpectedly."

"Well, I don't know how it is with other geniuses," Ted replied cheerfully, "but I have to exercise a different set of muscles. Don't you know when English composition day comes around how I always have to go up in the gym and fight it out there with Indian clubs?"

Ted seized a fresh dish towel and wiped vigorously, all the time trying out different rhymes under her breath.

"Hurry, girls, the sun is out, and Patchin says he will be ready in a minute," called Miss Penelope.

"But aren't the roads all slushy?" Natalie stretched out her foot daintily like a cat, and drew it straight in again.

"The rain has stopped any way, but we'll need

our coats. It feels cool and damp. Where's Ted? She was here just a minute ago."

"Getting ready to take a picture of this crowd of gypsies I guess," Polly returned. "Does that go with the official films, Ted?"

Ted was outside waiting for them with the camera, and as they all came trooping out, she caught them neatly.

"It could go in with the rest, for it certainly proves that even in stormy weather you are still out on scout duty," said Miss Harmon.

"I shall certainly send it to the Senator," Ted declared, "as evidence of zeal under trying conditions, and it's lucky it doesn't show the remains of the feast. I wish I had a picture of that long, low rakish car too. Listen, now, to my Calvert yell."

And throwing back her head, she let out the first version of what afterward became famous in Calvert history, the "Polly yell":

"Zizz boom, Zizz boom, Zizz boom bah!
Calvert forever! 'Rah! 'Rah! 'Rah!"

"Neat, concise, ladylike, expressive, and lends itself fully to the lung capacity," declared Ted modestly. "How do you like it, girls? I pre-

sent it to our honored president with my highest regard. And while we're on the road if we want to change the Calvert, we may put in Polly instead."

"Ted, dear, you are a genius," Sue exclaimed, proudly. "I always did stand up for you."

"You go to grass," said Ted stoutly. "Polly, am I eccentric?"

"I don't know," laughed Polly, climbing up to her seat in the car. "Remember, girls, when Crullers said she didn't think the Doctor would make a good husband, as he was too concentric?"

"Stop your chatter," said Miss Harmon. "We have miles to go yet before we reach Matoax, and the roads are heavy. Climb in, all of you."

Polly was busy marking on her road map the site of the cabin.

"Just as a refuge for others," she said. "I called it the Wayside Inn."

CHAPTER XIV

THE LADY OF FAIR VIEW

“THIS is really work,” Polly declared when they reached Matoax late that afternoon. Every ford had been noted and its condition and safety for crossing. Every house along the country roads, had been marked, every church and cross-roads, and even where there were supplies to be bought. Ted took pictures of all bad places in the road that needed mending, and one lone pullet had been nearly run over in its frantic flight across the way. So altogether it had been a strenuous day.

Matoax looked very cheerful to the tired eyes of the travelers when they came upon it suddenly lying in a hollow between hills, as if it were held in a hand.

There were mineral springs here that had been famous among the Indian tribes centuries ago, and before dinner at the hotel they all went up to have a drink from them.

There was a large cavern with an iron grating across the entrance, and you had to pay toll to get in. From the rocky plateau where it was situated there was a splendid view out over the rolling country with its ever-varying verdure, and the glint of the York in the distance like gleaming quicksilver.

There was a passage back in the cavern, which widened out into quite a fair-sized space, and in the center of this was the spring, bubbling up from the sand in a clear jet about two feet high. The sand around it moved and shifted constantly like the sands in an hour-glass, as if they were perpetually being sifted down and replenished.

“Now this is the kind of mineral water I should have in my garden,” Polly said, tasting it slowly. “I don’t like sulphur water very well, do you, Miss Pen?”

“No, but it does you a lot of good,” laughed Miss Harmon. “I drank some abroad at the different watering places, and it used to seem to me the worse the waters tasted the more popular the resort was, and the higher the rates. Drink plenty of it, girls. The Indians had a legend about this spring of Matoax. They believed it renewed strength and vigor. When a brave was

wearily or sick from wounds, they would bring him here, and lay him beside the spring, and lave his face and hands in the magic water. And you'll all need plenty of energy if we keep forging ahead tonight."

"Oh, aren't we going to stay here tonight?" pleaded Ted and Natalie in one breath.

"The hotel is full of summer guests and rates are high," Miss Harmon answered firmly. "They haven't any double rooms, either. We can make the ferry in short order after dinner, and Patchin tells me of a town farther down the river that has not caught the summer colony fever yet."

"But we're all so tired, Cousin Pen," pleaded Hallie, leaning her head on Miss Harmon's shoulder. "And the hotel looks so clean and comfy. Couldn't we stay just tonight?"

"Hallie, you only tease me because you're in my family and have no restraining respect," insisted Miss Penelope. "You'll be rested after dinner and it is the prettiest time of the day for motoring. We can reach Seabrooks by eight and it is well worth the extra exertion."

"Obey orders, comrades," called Polly, happily. "Shall we get more rations here, or wait

for Seabrooks, Miss Pen? We haven't much left after feeding those hungry boys."

"We'll replenish at Seabrooks tomorrow morning. I have sent for some concentrated bouillon cubes and plenty of milk chocolate, and tomorrow we will try our first fireless cooked chicken which will give us more time on the road. We won't have to put up for lunch, and we can probably buy some fruit and bread along the way. In Brittany I would stop at the little chocolate shops in the villages, and buy fresh hot rolls that tasted delicious after a long drive. They bake them about four of an afternoon, and the odor as you go along the street is so appetizing that it simply pulls you in to buy them."

"Don't you miss your nap, Miss Pen?" Polly asked suddenly. "You've not had any today."

"I forgot all about it, we were so busy," Miss Penelope replied laughing. "That proves it is not essential, doesn't it?"

"Let's change into our white middy blouses for dinner here," Natalie suggested. "I can hear music starting up," as they neared the hotel in its grove of locusts.

"It looks festal to me," Ted agreed, eyeing the broad verandas speculatively. There were small

tables on them, and vari-colored electric lights hidden in the thick vines.

Later when the girls came demurely in, all in white, very unlike the tramps of the afternoon, the little party attracted considerable attention, for somehow the news of their undertaking had spread.

“No giggles, girls,” Sue warned. “Be on your dignity for the honor of Queen’s Ferry and Calvert.”

Patchin waited outside for them. They wrapped up in their warm woolen cloaks as there was a decided tang of coolness in the air after the rain. Polly had the start of the others and had been looking over the machine.

“We’ve got a new name for her,” she told the others. “I have just discovered that she has to be fed on oil, gasoline, and water all the time or she refuses to go ahead. It seems that poor Mr. Patchin has to keep one eye on the radiator, gasoline tank, and oil reservoir, and the other on the road. So we call her Henrietta.”

“Henrietta?” repeated Ted. “Sounds harmonious. We could sing words to it on the way along. But I don’t see—”

“Henrietta,” explained Polly impressively,

“worked for the Senator in Washington as cook, and just so often, Mr. Patchin says, she would collapse and declare her own cooking wearied her, and she needed ‘coaxing victuals, or she couldn’t go a step further.’ Therefore we call this after Henrietta.”

“Oh, do you think she is fed enough now, Mr. Patchin?” inquired the girls in an anxious chorus.

“Enough for a starter, if she doesn’t get temperamental,” answered Patchin.

But Henrietta behaved with great restraint and moderation during the twelve-mile run down to the river bank, and rested on the ferry. It was beautifully picturesque on the old river with the afterglow still shining in the western sky, throwing a rose haze over land and water. The ride from the south bank down to Seabrooks was an easy one, following the river until the lights of the town appeared about six miles down.

Patchin drew up at the railroad crossing and asked the old flagman the name of the best hotel to put up at overnight. He was leaning back in a wooden chair against the side of his sentinel box, thumbs hooked in his vest armholes, dozing lightly until the big lights of the machine blazed two paths in front of him.

“You go straight ahead until you come to the barber pole,” he answered slowly, “then you turn to the right and go along ’til you come to the drug store, can’t miss its colored lights, you know. Then you turn to the left and you’ll find Mrs. Crispin’s Roanoke House, good enough for any one.”

And the girls agreed with him later, after Mrs. Crispin had conducted them to their rooms, and fluttered over them like a mother hen. She was plump and rosy-cheeked, dressed in snow white linen, with white hair curled in puff’s on each side of her face, and when she was a bit excited, the puff’s escaped from their confining hairpins, and dangled tremulously.

“You’d better all take a good hot bath after being out in this rain all day,” she said. “I’ll bring up some mustard to put in the water too, and hot ginger tea for you all to drink when you’re ready for bed. Yes, I will now. It isn’t a bit of trouble.”

The girls sat speechless looking at each other as she hurried downstairs.

“We’ll have to take it or hurt her feelings,” Polly said resolutely. “You go first, Ted. You’re always so anxious for new experiences.”

"I mustn't, Polly," Ted replied. "You're the president of the club, and it wouldn't be correct for any member to take precedence over the president."

"Who's afraid," laughed Polly, wrapping her blanket around her like a squaw's, and leading the way to the hot mustard bath. When she came back, she had the bowl of ginger tea, and was very pink looking, Natalie said.

"Anyhow, girls," she told them, sitting cross-legged on the foot of her bed, "I'm all through with the ordeal. Now, march ahead like good soldiers and take your medicine."

"It's not the bath I mind, it's this ginger tea," Sue spluttered helplessly. "And I never catch cold, never. No fair sprinkling yours out the window, Hallie. I can see you making believe to admire the moon over there. Guess we'll all remember Seabrooks."

Miss Harmon declared it was splendid treatment for them even though a little heroic, and there were no symptoms of cold the following morning. They had all slept delightfully. Mrs. Crispin's snowy beds were draped in canopies of pink mosquito netting and resembled royal couches. Polly and Miss Harmon rose early and

bought new supplies, for theirs had been pretty well depleted by the impromptu luncheon they had given at the cabin. One of their purchases was a chicken. Mrs. Crispin cooked it for them to the boiling point before it was packed away in the fireless cooker to "steep," as Ted said.

"First time I've ever had steeped chicken," she remarked, helping Polly to cover it and tuck it away in the cooker which was strapped on the running-board beside the refrigerator basket. "Now, lemons and sugar for lemonade, and bread. Who's got the bread and butter, girls?"

"I have," Sue answered, right at her elbow. "We bought freshly baked raised biscuit from Mrs. Crispin this morning. We've got plenty of fruit and Miss Pen's gone after peas and potato chips. We'll buy fresh corn along the way, she said."

"How'll we cook it?" asked Natalie.

"You have never camped out, Nat, or you'd never worry over what you were going to cook things in. We'll probably use the water pail and make it a gypsy camp."

"You struck the right note there, Sue," Polly exclaimed. "We could have a real gypsy camp."

We'll keep our eyes open for a good shady grove where it looks cool—"

"Pines preferred," added Ted.

"And running water. It will save stopping anywhere for lunch, Miss Pen, and we want to make Richmond by Saturday."

"Well, it's mighty funny about the distance to Richmond," Sue interposed in her rather stolid way. "I was talking to Mrs. Crispin's boy this morning, and he said he had made the run from Richmond to Old Point Comfort in two hours and a half, and had not run over any pigs or chickens either."

"Don't be so indignant, Sue," Miss Penelope replied, laughing. "He probably did make the run in that time. So could we if we wanted to, but we are intersecting and crisscrossing all the country lying between the rivers, and every stop takes time. We had to come roundabout in the very beginning to get around the river where they had no ferry, remember. The roads are in fair condition, but there are missing links here and there, and we are reporting each one. The direct route from Richmond to Old Point Comfort has had nearly \$10,000 spent on it in the last two years, so it should show results. Nearly every-

body coming down uses the Valley Road, the Senator says, but it is roundabout. I think you want to speed up Henrietta, Sue."

Sue sighed, staring at the road ahead of them.

"I can't bear to have any one get ahead of us."

"There speaks your trueborn 'scooter,'" Polly teased. "We're workers, Ted, and we mustn't mind how the other cars slip by us. This is just like land surveying, and today we'll go through the Indian country, won't we, Miss Pen?"

They started from Seabrooks, fully equipped for the day's run. The fords were swollen from the rain and the roads still somewhat muddy. Several times Patchin stopped short, and had to use a little persuasion to induce "Henrietta" to fulfil her duties.

Once a runabout caught up with them and its lone occupant asked what had brought them so far out of their way from the Valley Pike.

"My home's farther down along the river, or I'd never travel this side at all. Can I help you out any?"

"I don't think so, much obliged, though," Patchin replied good-naturedly. "We're scouting along these crosscuts for the committee. Is the road any better past Richmond?"

“Fine and dandy,” the stranger said warmly. “That’s where they’ve done real work. How far have you traveled? Better come along after me and visit. We’d be glad to have you.”

“Thanks, no. We’d better push along. We’ve come from Queen’s Ferry. Ran up-state to avoid the river as it was, and made a detour to reach Creighton Courthouse. The ferry wasn’t working on the river. There’s only one ferryman and he was down with rheumatism, so it took us about thirty miles out of our way, more or less, going around the ridge.”

“I didn’t know all that,” whispered Sue to Polly. “Patchin must have found it out before we even started.”

The stranger in the runabout looked back over his shoulder at the far-off rim of grey-blue mountains.

“Why didn’t you take the Valley Pike?” he asked again. “My grandfather used to tell me about the old Telegraph Road from Washington down to Fredericksburg, I think he said. It wasn’t kept up much after the war. Reckon it was about the best short-cut there was, too. I’d risk those boys finding the quickest way down. Sorry you don’t feel like coming home with

me. Peach shortcake for dinner, and whipped cream."

"We are sorry too," called the girls as he went on ahead, chuckling. "That's the first real invitation we've had," added Polly. "It seems good to be wanted somewhere."

All the way along the beautifully shaded roads Miss Harmon told them about the early days of the colony, how the colonists gradually spread up from Jamestown along the fertile banks of the two rivers, the James and the York, and of the haughty "Heads of Hundreds," who might wear gold on their coats.

They had studied it in their early colonial history at the Hall, but traveling through the heart of the country made it real and vital to them.

"And besides," Ted said, "it all sounds different when we're right here on the ground, discussing it together. I never can get the real picture fixed in my mind by just reading over dates. Tell some more, please, Miss Pen."

"Do you know the first name given to the tide-water stretch of land all along the coast of Virginia and North Carolina? It was Wingandacoa, and means 'the good land.' Think of those two brave ships, girls, that sailed out from Eng-

land to explore these new coasts of chance. In 1585 I think it was, but I forget the exact date. They followed the coast line all the way up from Florida and came to anchor off what is now North Carolina. It was called 'Axacan' then, a little Indian kingdom. I can remember that, for my first horse's name was Axacan."

"Was that when they all died or were captured, Miss Pen?" asked Natalie, eagerly. "There was one little white girl born there, and they called her Virginia. I used to wonder and wonder about her, for the records only say that she disappeared. When the ship returned from England, everybody was dead in the settlement, and they found only a strange word carved on a rock, 'Croatan.' Do you know what it meant?"

Penelope shook her head, smiling.

"You're ahead of me, Natalie, on your data. I can get a bird's-eye view of it all, but I forget the dates and details."

Sue had been silent, but now she announced hopefully.

"I know that Chesapeake means the Mother of Waters, and the Bermudas are the scene of 'The Tempest,' and the colony there was mighty kind to the colony here."

“Next, Ted, can you tell anything?” asked Miss Penelope.

“I don’t know any dates at all,” Ted said flatly, “but I know all the Indian seasons. They used to call the winters ‘cohonks’ and they got the word from the cry of the gild geese flying south. And they held five great feasts of the seasons too. The Budding, the Corn Eating, the Highest Sun—”

“We’ll be right in the middle of those last two today,” Polly interrupted. “Do go on, Ted. It’s dandy. I don’t see how you can remember it all.”

“Autumn was the Call of the Leaf, and winter Cohonks,” Ted finished in triumph. “Now, don’t any of you say I can’t remember history. I never liked dates either, but the fancy touches always stay put. Remember, girls, how old Captain Carey up at Lost Island used to say we never’d stay put? The Indians down here had three great festivals each year, too, the coming of the wild fowl, the return of the hunting season, and the great corn gathering. Then at the peace feast all old fires were put out and new ones built, and all crimes excepting murder were pardoned.”

"Well, Edwina," exclaimed Sue, solemnly. "I never really respected you until this minute. Did you make any of that up?"

"Where did you learn it, Ted?" Polly asked. "Is it all true?"

"See how they doubt me, Miss Pen," Ted appealed. "Of course it's true. I got it from an old history of father's. Can't you remember any of those old legends and stories, Polly?"

Polly shook her head, a gleam of fun in her eyes.

"I only liked the ones about Pocahontas and the queens of tribes. I know one was the Queen of Appomattock, and Grandfather has an old colored wood engraving of her going into battle. Another empress held the shore tribes under tribute, and they used to go up twice a year to where she held her court, just a wrinkled, brown old woman holding all those wild warriors under her thumb."

"That's Polly's imperial instinct showing forth," said Ted. "Hallie, are you going to sleep?"

Before Hallie could answer there was a loud report like a gun from one of the back tires, and the girls screamed.

“Just a blow out,” Miss Harmon called, reassuringly. “Sit down, all of you. We should have put on the chains over this strange road, Patchin. Shall you need any help?”

Patchin said no, he would fix the tire himself, if they pleased; so they all alighted, and set off to explore what seemed to be a timber road which looked invitingly green and shady. It was getting very warm although they had made an early start. After a walk of half a mile or so, they came to a lake. It lay so placid and still beneath the sky that the reflections of the great fleecy clouds, coming up from the west in endless procession like some majestic flotilla, seemed as perfect as the real ones overhead.

A few startled wild birds flew up at their approach. One dignified old gentleman of a crane, standing on the exact edge of an island in the distance, refused to be disturbed. He never budged from his station, but seemed to watch them lazily, speculatively perhaps, but without resentment. Along the old half-submerged logs, rows and rows of turtles sunned themselves, and water lilies with pink-edged leaves lay languidly in the shallows where it was shady. On every side rose the wooded green hills, overlapping each other, and

far out in the tall reeds and water grasses were other little islands.

“Oh, girls, what a place for a camp,” exclaimed Polly. “There has been one on the beach here, I think. There are ashes here and tin cans, and old fish poles. I do wish we’d brought our bathing suits.” She plunged into the bushes, and pulled out the fishpoles, wound around with lines, and the hooks neatly stuck in the poles.

“I’ll go back for your suits, girls,” Hallie volunteered. “I’d love to. Cousin Pen, you’ll come too, won’t you?”

“Now I’m divided in loyalty,” Penelope began, but the girls assured her they would be all right and safe, so she and Hallie retraced their steps after the bathing outfits. Ted began deliberately to take off her shoes and stockings.

“The boys turn up rocks and stones in the water and find funny looking, crawly things they call Dobsons,” she said. “My brothers use them for bait, and if we can find any now, we can fish. It’s too bad to waste time.”

“We’ll all hunt Dobsons with you, Ted,” returned Polly soothingly. “I rather like their name. It sounds so respectable.”

So they all waded out into the shallow water,

catching the queer crawfish-like Dobsons. Ted agreed to put them on the hooks. Natalie protested openly with a shudder.

"I can't do that part. They look as if they knew more than worms, some how. I think they ought to be chloroformed, Ted."

"No, Dobsons are courageous. Don't put your fingers in your ears, goose. They don't squeal." Ted went calmly on with her baiting. "All ready now, and let's see who catches the first fish."

They cast out their lines, and sat waiting results, all excepting Polly, who tried trolling up and down the bank. It seemed to grow warmer every minute there in the sunlight, but they persevered, although Dobsons seemed the favorite morning luncheon of only a frantic swarm of minnows.

All at once there came an audible chuckle from the opposite side of the bank. The girls all looked around, and there, peering at them from the tall reeds, was a perfect Topsy head. Its owner wriggled out like an Indian and sat up. She was in bright pink calico. Even her black kinks of hair were tied tightly with narrow pink ribbon. There she had been lying flat on her

stomach kicking her heels in the air, and watching them through lazy, mischievous lashes.

"Hello, have you been fishing too?" called Polly, in friendly fashion.

"No'm. Dar ain't no fish ter ketch till it gits cool—'ceptin' punkin seed, an' dey jes' snatches at de bait and skips."

"Perfectly true, girls, look here," cried Ted, holding up her line with its empty hook. "The 'punkin seed' are holding a Dobson banquet. What's your name, honey?"

"Name's Annie Louisa Biall," answered the little girl. "Mammy calls me Annie Lou for short."

"Where do you live, Annie Lou?" asked Polly.

"Up at Fair View, Missus Wimbleton's place. See dat hill?" pointing across the lake. "Well, dat ain't de one, but it's behind dat one, an' you turn up a road wif two high stone posts in front of it."

"But what are you doing away over here?"

"Ah jes' followed you all along ter see what you gwine ter do," innocently. "Ah hyar dat big 'splosion, den Ah come ter find out all about yo'. My mammy and Miss Wimbleton, dey allus like

ter know what strange folkses are prowlin' 'round."

"Are we fishing in Mrs. Wimbledon's lake, and will she care?" asked Polly.

Annie Lou shook her head contentedly, chewing on a long blade of grass.

"She doan't mind. She's sittin' in a chair all day long, and de best thing she likes in all de world is company. She'd like ter have you all come up an' see her. She's ole Colonel Wimbledon's widow, and my Mammy's her special maid, and Ah'm her second maid. Dey ain't no more help only Joe in de garden."

"I see," Polly answered, meeting the other girls' eyes and finding the same thought expressed in them as in her own mind. "Well, listen, Annie Lou. We want to have a swim in the lake, and when we get through, we'll come over the hill to Fair View, and call on Mrs. Wimbledon. Will you be our messenger and tell her? Say that we're a scouting party sent out by the roads committee, and that we're working under orders from Senator Yates. Can you remember that?"

"Some of it," Annie Lou said truthfully, blink-

ing and parting her lips in a wide happy grin. "She'll be glad to see you all anyhow."

After the bare brown heels had vanished over the edge of the bank, Sue exclaimed:

"Polly, how can we all go visiting, and what will Patchin think?"

"We'll take him along and the machine, of course. Didn't we have to get rid of Annie Lou before we could go in swimming?" Polly argued, laughingly. "Besides, it will be a new adventure, and as real ladies of the road, we can't afford to pass by any adventure. I'm going to change my name to Donna Quixote."

"Why do I think of windmills," Ted murmured thoughtfully. "Don't you dare go tilting off hand unless you're sure you're right, Madam President, because we've got so much faith in your judgment, you know, and so much affection for you, as it were, that we'll all tilt where you tilt."

"But if the old lady is really sick, and likes company—" began Polly.

"It's an act of charity to go to her, even if we are all just as anxious as we can be to see the lady of Fair View and her colonial retreat," Ted teased. "But we will follow, won't we, girls?"

“Follow where to?” asked Miss Harmon cheerily, as she climbed up the bank, Hallie behind her, bearing the swimming suits, caps, and towels. “What have you been planning the minute my back is turned?”

They told her eagerly, all talking at once, as they dressed behind clumps of bushes, until she declared she could not hear a distinct word, but after the cool, refreshing plunge into the quiet lake, she listened during the walk back through the woods, and agreed that it would be part of the day’s work, and pleasure too, to pay a call on Annie Lou’s lady in the arm-chair.

CHAPTER XV

SKELETONS IN RED COATS

THE new tire was on, and "Henrietta" ready to start by the time they reached the main road. The only direction they could give Patchin for finding Fair View was what Annie Lou had told them. It lay just past one hill on the next hill. So they ran leisurely along the road that circled the base of the hill, and sure enough when they came to the next one, they found the private entrance turning in to the left. Stone pillars overrun with wild trumpet vine and creepers stood at each side.

"I'm sure this is right," said Polly confidently. "It goes up this other hill, and it's certainly very private."

"Supposing that Mrs. Wimbleton doesn't expect us, or doesn't want us to visit her?" suggested Ted thoughtfully. "Maybe that Annie Lou is a false prophet, and we're plain everyday trespassers."

"Look at her waiting for us yonder," Polly answered, reproachfully, pointing to a lone figure coming down the road. "Does she look like a false prophet?"

"Indeed she doesn't," exclaimed Miss Harmon merrily. "I think she is a herald bearing gifts."

Annie Lou had been hastily incased in a fresh pinafore even pinker than the first, and "perfectly brand span clean," as she told them happily, her smile wider than ever.

"Dis ain't mah fav'rite pinnyfore," she said holding it out on each side, as they stopped beside her. "Mah fav'rite one's plaid, and dat's mah fav'rite color too, plaid. I jes' rushed ter get dis on before you all came, an' Missus Wimbledon, she's all perked up waiting for yo'. She certainly loves company."

"Don't you want to hop in with us, and ride up?" asked Patchin, in his slow, good-natured way. Annie Lou graciously accepted the invitation and was helped up to the front seat. It was her first experience in a machine, and her round eyes opened to their widest capacity as they sped up the driveway. She gripped the edge of the seat, but not a sound did she make to show that

she was scared. All the pride of the house of Wimbledon was in her endurance.

The road led uphill through a beautiful old grove of locusts and elms, and at last, standing back amongst them in stately splendor, Fair View came into sight. As Polly said afterwards, it looked as if it might have been "somebody's headquarters," and Mrs. Wimbledon told them all later how Tarleton had seized it years back and held it for several weeks while one of her ancestresses indignantly held her own court in a far wing of the house, refusing even to speak to the invader.

The car drew up before the spacious entrance with its fine Colonial doorway and white arch above. The doors stood wide in silent greeting. Annie Lou led the way with many a backward glance and smile of encouragement. The great center hall that divided the house seemed rather silent and bare. On either side were tall closed doors with old cut glass and silver handles, the latter badly dented and tarnished but none the less silver.

A few clusters of flowers stood here and there, and before the wide open fireplace were tall ferns in abundance, freshly gathered.

“She ain’t in hyar,” said Annie Lou, in a hushed tone. “She’s yonder on de back po’ch.”

It was a broad, shady porch, as large and imposing as the one in front, with the same colonnaded support, overrun with a perfect tanglewood of vines that clambered and intertwined unchecked clear to the upper story. Here in this cool retreat, the girls paid their court to the mistress of Fair View.

They had expected to find some tall and very dignified grand dame, but the slender old lady in the old-fashioned high backed rocker, who held out her hand in greeting, was not one bit like the picture. The hand fairly trembled with eagerness, and it was fine and blue-veined, colored like old ivory. Her eyes were very bright and dark, her hair iron grey and waved thickly back from her face. She did not look patient, either, the girls said later among themselves. She was an invalid, having been hurt years before in a fall from a favorite horse, but her face was full of restless eagerness still to be up and doing her share of the world’s activities.

“My dears, this is kind of you to seek out an exile, just a sick irritable old woman, to please her whim. Little Annie Lou heard the noise

when your tire burst, and came running in fear to tell me of it, so I sent her to make an offer of shelter and assistance. I hope she proved a good messenger."

"She surely did," Miss Harmon replied smilingly. "And we think it is you who are most kind to take pity on a lot of wayfarers this warm day. May I manage the introductions, or will you, Polly?"

Polly, a little flushed over the responsibility of being President, performed the introductions safely, and each of the girls bent over the thin white hand that welcomed them as guests. Annie Lou had disappeared, but after they were seated, and hats put to one side, she reappeared with her mother, bearing trays of cool refreshments.

They sat for almost an hour, visiting with Mrs. Wimbledon, and telling her of their trip, and the two previous ones to Lost Island and the ranch in Wyoming.

"When you feel that you would like to, I hope you will go through the Hall," she told them finally. "I only wish that I might show you all its charms. I am the very last of the Wimble-

dons on the distaff side, and am but a sorry survivor of a gallant old line. Aunt Martha will show you over the house in my stead."

"Oh, Miss Pen, did you hear her telling me of all the famous people who have been guests here years ago?" Polly said, as they followed Martha's portly form up the staircase. "Generals and Majors and Presidents. Alexander Hamilton visited here and the Marquis de Lafayette. There is a portrait in the upper hall of Dorothea Wimbledon whom the Marquis declared the sweetest maid he had met in all Virginia."

"I can see her now," called Ted from the topmost turn of the staircase. "Oh, girls, she's a darling, truly she is."

They stood without speaking for a minute under the old full-length painting of the girl so near their own ages. She held her satin skirts daintily on each side, as if ready to take a descending step on the old staircase, evidently the same one which they had just come up. Her face was brimming over with the awakening joy of life. Her lips were parted in a tantalizing, provocative smile of mirth, her chin cleft by a dimple, her eyes fairly dancing with merriment

and mischief. She seemed almost on the point of opening her lips and welcoming them, her first youthful visitors in years.

“Dorothea, you are a dear,” Polly said, seriously. “I don’t wonder at all that the Marquis admired you. Did you dance the minuet together, and feel all fluttery and excited when he bent his head and whispered, ‘Ah, Mistress Dorothea, thou art the fairest, sweetest maid I have found in all my travels in thy land’?”

“Hear Polly make believe,” teased Sue, yet she stretched out her hand, and danced the minuet in stately step down the long corridor, holding Polly’s hand.

All through the upper chambers there was a curious air of readiness, as if for expected guests. Fresh flowers were on the old-fashioned mahogany dressers and highboys. None of the furniture was swathed in linen covers. The beds were made up in spotless coverlids and long, lace-edged linen bolster slips.

“Mis’ Wimbledon likes it dis way,” said Martha gently. “Dis is de ole Colonel’s room. He allus liked sweet peas ’round. His desk’s yonder jes’ as he left it. De room ’cross de hall is young Marse Carleton’s room. He’s been out

west a long time, but Ah reckon we'll see him come along one ob dese days."

"Doesn't he like Fair View?" asked Polly impulsively.

"Yas'm, he do like it, but way out west he's tryin' ter get lots ob money to run it like it use to was when de Colonel was alive. An' Ah guess dere's a li'l gal he's courtin', too, an' she doan't wanter come way down hyar nohow, and he won't give up Fair View, so it goes."

"I'm glad he won't leave his mother and Fair View," Natalie said. "And if the girl really loves him, she'll come, won't she, Miss Pen?"

"Well, she'll have to, if she gets young Marse Carleton. Fair View is jes' woven right in de warp and woof ob his life same as all de Wimbletons." Martha spoke serenely and with dignity. Polly said afterwards she knew Aunt Martha had no opinion at all of the western girl who wanted Marse Carleton without Fair View.

Room after room they passed through. There was the stately guest chamber with its canopied bed, and little candle stand, a fresh bouquet of honeysuckle and late roses in a tall silver-glaze vase upon it. Another room that looked, as Sue said, "resty" was all in pink chintz, with satiny

wall paper covered with clambering roses. The chairs were low, and had deep frills around them, and the little dressing table was covered with all manner of baby trinkets and toilet articles.

"Why, it looks like a little girl's room," cried Hallie. "There are even some toys here too."

"Dis is Miss Rosamond's room," explained Martha. "De Missus when she cum hyar a bride took dis li'l room, and put all her own baby and childish toys in it, jes' like you see it now. Ah cum along too dat time, when she was a bride. She was Miss Virginia Fairfax, and she allus saved up her belongin's 'spectin' some day she's gwine ter hab a daughter. And sho' nuf, it cum true. First Marse Carleton, and bymeby Miss Rosamond. Means rose ob de world, Rosamond. An' de rose only lasted one summer." She ended softly, and no one asked a single question about the sunny rose tinted little room. Its whole story lay in her few words, and the girls went out softly, and closed the door.

After they had finished looking at the house indoors, Martha led them out to the gardens to ramble, while Miss Penelope talked to Mrs. Wimbledon. Annie Lou had been sitting waiting very patiently for them to emerge, and now

she watched her chance and sidled up to Polly.

“Got sumfin down cellar to show you all. Make yo’ ha’r stand right up on end.” Her dark eyes rolled with fun. “Missus won’t mind nohow.”

She led the way through the open cellar doors under a lattice of vines. It was cool and clean in the whitewashed interior, and Annie Lou led them on through several divisions, never stopping until she came to a heavy oak door with strange old hand-wrought iron clamps and hinges on it. They descended about five steps into a subcellar from here, and Annie Lou waited to light a lantern.

“How much farther?” asked Ted, suspiciously.

“Jes’ yonder,” Annie Lou replied in a whisper. “Jes’ right along hyar ter de next do’r.”

Twenty yards more, and they came to it, solid oak and iron clamped like the first. She pointed to it, her eyes shining in the semi-darkness like sparks of fire.

“What is it, Annie Lou, ghosts?” asked Polly gaily.

“*Five* ghosts,” corrected Annie Lou proudly. “An’ all in red coats. Dey come ridin’ along one day hyar, lookin’ for somebody at de Hall

way back in Independence war time, and nobody was hyar but mah great-great-great-great-great—”

“Annie Louisa, you stick to facts,” warned Ted.

“Yas’m,” grinned back Annie Lou delightedly. “Mah great-great-great-great-great grandma it was. Name was Lucinda, an’ her young missus was Miss Jessamy Wimbledon. An’ upstairs in de garret hid away in de ole clothes press was a—a—young gentlemun wif a message for de great General George Washington.”

“Lovely,” exclaimed the girls. “Tell more, Annie Lou.”

“An’—an’ Mis’ Jessamy she’s mighty afraid dey gwine ter find him, and she’s sorter sweet on him too. So she tells de red sojers she’ll show dem all over, an’ she makes believe she’s terr’ble ’fraid when dey comes along down hyar. An’ she beg, and she beg dat dey don’t open dat do’r yonder. So, course dey smashes it right in, and plunges ahead, and it’s all dark inside, and dey all drap down kerplunk in de ole cistern. Den she jes’ ca’mly shuts de do’r and bolts it, and goes upstairs. An’ bymeby comes along some more

sojers in red coats, and she tells 'em de oder gentlemun took a young man prisoner and rode 'long to Richmond wif him."

"Forevermore," exclaimed Polly, "and what about the five down in the cistern?"

"Dat's all," finished Annie Lou simply. "She got awful sick, and had de fever, and when she gets well, she don't 'member nuffin, and she marries de nice young man wif de message for General George Washington, and long time after dey's bofe dead somebody opens up de ole cistern, and finds *skeletons in red coats*. Yas'm, and de gentlemun ain't got reconciled to it yet. When de leaves begin to tumble down and de wind blows, de voices cum up from de cellar in de night time."

"What do they say, Annie Lou?" asked Sue eagerly.

"Dey say," Annie Lou gathered all her lung force and let out a wild yell, "Lemme out! Lemme out! Lemme out!"

She turned with the lantern and fled back along the passageway, leaving the girls to shiver and grope up to the sunlight.

"You wait till I catch you," said Polly, laughingly, finding two pensive eyes watching her

from the cellar steps. "Telling us ghost stories till we were all gooseflesh."

"Doan't tell Missus," coaxed Annie Louisa. "Ah was jes' a foolin'."

"We won't if you let us take your picture," promised Polly, and, permission being granted very promptly, a snapshot was taken of Lucinda's great-great-great-great-great grandchild standing back against a mass of hollyhocks, grinning widely and innocently, as if she had never told a ghost story in all her life.

It was close to noon when they left Fair View. Although Mrs. Wimbleton pressed them to remain for lunch, they went on, remembering the work ahead as well as the chicken in the fireless cooker. But they bore away with them besides many happy memories, and piles of ears of sweet corn heaped in the car. Miss Harmon had said it was all they lacked, and asked where she could purchase some, but the Colonel's widow would not listen to guests purchasing anything from Fair View, and Joe was sent down to the cornfield after the best ears he could find.

"I don't feel as if we had wasted the morning," Polly said, when they were on the road again. "It has been dandy, and I know we helped Mrs.

Wimbledon have a happy day of it. Let's mark down Fair View on the road map just off the main road as a historic spot, and then she'll have other visitors."

About half past twelve they came to a grove that held the darker green of pines among its many trees. A brook rambled in gypsy fashion down the upland pasture at one side. There were a lot of cows grazing, but, as Ted, said, they only made nice touches of local color on the landscape.

"This is regular brigand fashion," Miss Harmon told them, when they had started to get dinner. Martha had given them a deep tin pail, wide at the top, narrow towards the bottom, and they hung it over a fire on rocks, from a crosswise pole. Patchin had helped put it up so it would be steady. The chicken was all ready, but the corn had to be cooked, and Hallie and Natalie were busy husking it.

"You know," she went on, helping Polly set the tablecloth on the ground under the pines, "the old poet of the Sierras, Joaquin Miller, used to hold brigand feasts in his wonderful canyons around 'The Heights' out near Oakland, in California. He would hang a great iron kettle over

a fire like this, and cook up some strange Balkan stew of lamb and tomatoes and green peppers and plenty of pilaff."

"What's pilaff?" asked Polly. "It sounds like dessert."

"No. Just rice, but cooked perfectly, and served with lamb broth."

"Oh, please don't tell any more," begged Sue. "I'm just starved after the drive. See how beautifully the butter kept, girls, in the refrigerator basket."

"And when the Doctor presented it to us, I never realized its full value," Polly declared. "Has any one taken out the chicken?"

Nobody had, but everyone wanted to help take it out of its nest, and open it up. The appetizing odor that escaped was satisfying enough to silence any scoffer, Miss Harmon declared. With fresh corn and biscuit, peas and potato chips, and lemonade, the luncheon was almost a function. Joe had brought up a watermelon also, and this gave the finishing touch to the feast. Nearly two hours passed by in the grove before they started on their last lap towards the James River.

"Only two days more, and we'll be saying, 'On

to Richmond,'” Polly said happily. “What are you thinking about, Ted? You look so far-away.”

“I am inventing a tire that will burst noiselessly,” replied Ted dreamily. “It’s of far more importance than Richmond, at least to this section of the road committee. I should think that rubber tires could be dipped into something boiling hot—”

“Ted! They’d melt,” Sue objected.

“Maybe not boiling then, but pretty hot. Something we could put on soft and it would harden to a firm coating so that no tacks or glass or anything sharp could cut it open and let out that fearful pop.”

“Just wait until Crullers and Isabel join us,” exclaimed Polly, her brown eyes sparkling with mischief. “I’d love to see Lady Vanitas jump at the first explosion.”

“We’ll all have letters at Wyeth where we stop tonight,” promised Miss Harmon. “So there’s something to look forward to.”

The girls breathed audible sighs of relief at the prospect.

“Goodness only knows what may have happened to Crullers in a week,” Ted exclaimed.

"If she is well, I think I shall wire back congratulations."

"Make up a song about Wyeth, Ted. If you're going to pose as poetess laureate, I think you should be ready at any time to spout verse. Go on, and we'll help you out."

So Ted began slowly to chant, with frequent hesitancy and return for a rhyme,

"Oh, we caught our breath at Wyeth,
And found our letters there.
Then took the trail in a howling gale—"

"There won't be any gale," Hallie protested.

"That's poetic license. Gale, fail, whale," Ted stumbled over the last line. "Help out, girls, please. Polly, you said you would."

"And motored away on air,"

finished Polly. "Now, you needn't bind all the laurels on your noble brow at all, Ted. I can fashion a rhyme myself. All together now!"

Even Patchin's face relaxed into a grim smile as the chorus swelled behind him, and they covered the last lap of the afternoon ready for real work after the fun of the morning.

CHAPTER XVI

THE ROAD TO RICHMOND

WYETH turned out to be the first place they had found so far without good hotel accommodations. It was well off the main road of travel, and the only hostelry turned out to be a rather rickety affair on the rambling main street.

“I don’t like the looks of that one bit,” Miss Penelope declared. “Supposing, Patchin, that you take the girls around to the post office, and get our mail, while Polly and I hunt lodgings for the night. We’ll meet you right over at that corner under the mulberry tree.”

“Under the spreading mulberry tree, the patient chauffeur stands,” Ted remarked when half an hour later, the two searchers finally put in their appearance at the corner. “We’ve been waiting here ever so long, and we wanted to open your mail, Polly. It looks awfully inviting. There’s one from the Admiral, and one from Miss Jean—”

"Mrs. Penrhyn Smith," corrected Polly, reaching eagerly for the letters.

"Never mind, there's one from her anyway, postmarked Deercroft, Wyoming. And we all have cards from Ruth and Isabel. Crullers decorated her cards with original sketches of our trip, and they're wild. Wait till we get hold of her."

"Did you find any place to stay?" asked Sue, plaintively. "I'm ready to tumble in now."

"We did," Miss Harmon answered cheerily. "Don't fret, Sue. A good soldier never looks behind. Drive slowly, Patchin, to the left until you pass the white church and then on ahead to the burial ground. It's opposite that."

"O-o-o-o!" breathed Natalie and Hallie together. "After Annie Lou's five ghosts in red coats, too. We won't sleep a bit."

"You'll have to," Polly told them merrily. "It's the only place where we could find any rooms for the night at all. The school teacher is away on her vacation, but her brother is at home, and he said we might stay at their home overnight. He is the sexton and town clerk, and his name is Mr. Ogle."

"Funny name, isn't it?" Ted said thought-

fully. "But there was a Governor Ogle and a Bishop Ogle too, wasn't there, Miss Pen, somewhere around Virginia?"

"It's a Maryland name, I think," Miss Penelope told them. "And fine colonial stock lies back of it too, even if our present deponent does look like the apothecary in 'Romeo and Juliet.' There he is now, waiting to welcome us at the porch."

Polly had already met him, so she ran upstairs to the bedroom to read her letters, while the other girls were introduced to Mr. Ogle. They all liked him too, even though he was almost alarmingly thin. He was stoop shouldered and scholarly in appearance with a refined, rather whimsical face, and such an evident desire to make them all comfortable for the night that Miss Harmon assured him he must not treat them as guests, but only as wayfarers whom he had taken in.

The girls sat around the bedroom coaxing Polly to read her letters, for she had received more than any of the others. Ruth's was a club letter anyway, brimful of Queen's Ferry gossip. Miss Honoria had found the Hall too lonely after the last of the resident girls had left, and

she had gone west to the Alameda Ranch for the summer. Crullers had been trying to ride horseback on one of Dr. Ellis's horses, and had declared war on the English saddle and trot. She would ride a Mexican one at a lope, or not at all. Isabel was equipping herself for the motor trip with all manner of dainty conveniences.

"She has a folding toilet case, and a folding sewing case, and a folding sketching case, and I don't know what else," Ruth wrote. "I think if she could, when the Lady Vanitas goeth abroad, she would take with her a pavilion and a retinue of slaves like some fair lady we read about in Scott, remember? Didn't she have a different colored pavilion for every day in the week? Isabel would love that sort of thing."

But the end of the letter was mystifying. It merely asked, "Have you heard about Senator Yates?"

"Now, isn't that just like Grandma," exclaimed Ted. "Lead you up to the most exciting point, then let you wait in suspense just to teach you patience. Go on, Polly. Goodness knows what ails the Senator. It can be anything from chickenpox to the *Hippocampus* wrecked at sea, for all Ruth tells us."

"You always look so funny when you splutter, Ted," Sue said soothingly. "Cuddle right down, and let me pat your head the way Annie May always wants to do to us."

Polly had opened the Admiral's letter, and was too deeply engrossed even to notice their nonsense. He was visiting at Mrs. Langdon's home in Richmond, and felt fairly reconciled now, although for the first few days after the departure of the club, he had seen visions of smashups and collisions every half hour. The postcards had relieved him, however, and now they were both looking forward to Sunday, hoping the car and occupants would arrive *in toto*.

"In what?" asked Hallie, anxiously.

"Altogether, goosie. No parts missing," laughed Polly. "I hope we do too. Now, listen, for here is the news about the Senator." She read aloud while the girls crowded around the bed:

"I know you will be as sorry as I was myself to hear of the Senator's misfortune. White Chimneys where you visited last summer, may possibly pass out of the family's hands, as he has met with severe business losses, and the end is not yet in sight. I hardly think you would un-

derstand if I told you, matey, but it is not at all the Senator's fault, and he has the sympathy of everyone. The blow has fallen unexpectedly when his own health was somewhat precarious. I believe Mrs. Yates has taken him home to Virginia from the Capitol for a rest. If you travel in the neighborhood, stop and see them, for you may not have another chance of visiting at the old country seat.' ”

“We'll go there right after Richmond, girls,” Polly exclaimed. “I'm awfully sorry for both of them, the Senator and Mrs. Yates have been so good to us.”

“But they're not the sort that depend on money for happiness,” began Sue thoughtfully.

“Maybe not, but all the same it's hard losing a place one loves the way they do White Chimneys,” Polly answered. “Where's Hallie?”

They had not noticed her slipping quietly away as Polly read the news.

“Probably gone to tell Miss Pen,” Ted said. “It's her own uncle, you see, and Hallie says he's been so good to her all her life.”

“They've been good to everybody, and perhaps that's the trouble,” Polly declared. “I know grandfather says the Senator gives, gives,

gives, all the time to people who need help. Now, that he is in trouble, I wonder who will help him?"

Miss Penelope had very little to say about the news. She was a trifle quieter, but still cheery and full of happy companionship. When Polly told her of the proposed trip to White Chimneys, her face brightened.

"I would have suggested it, only I thought possibly you girls would not care to go where there might be a shadow," she said.

"There must be no shadows there," Polly answered firmly. "There must be some way to fix things."

It was Polly's inevitable conclusion whenever there was any trouble to clear away. She had unbounded confidence in the sun shining no matter how stormy the skies might be. It even lightened Miss Pen's secret burden of anxiety to see how hopeful and full of faith she was. Later, when the girls had all fallen asleep, she stepped out on the gallery that ran across the front of the house. It was very still out of doors. In the west a far-off mountain peak seemed cloudy and nebulous in the faint glow of the moonrise. Out of a bank of low-hanging grey clouds, the

moon rose, a dusky tender red like some wonderful flower of the night. Miss Pen sank into a low willow rocker, and drew her long dark green golf cape close around her. And so Polly found her when she slipped out, a slim wraith in white, with two long brown braids of hair over her shoulders.

“Polly, you’ll catch cold!”

“No, I won’t, surely I won’t,” whispered Polly, eagerly. “I’ve got a flannel kimono around me, and my slippers on. I won’t talk, truly, Miss Pen. I just want to sit on a stool beside you, and think too.”

“You’re the best coaxer I ever met,” Penelope sighed. “Come along, but you won’t find me very good company, Polly. I’m rather perplexed.”

“Don’t you want to talk just a little bit?” Polly asked when she had found a stool, and drawn it close to the rocker. She leaned her chin on her hand, and rocked to and fro gently. “Aunty Welcome used to tell me always to talk trouble out of my mind if I could. She said if you kept it close and petted it, it sat right down in the inglenook and you couldn’t get it out with a poker. She used to say a little verse about it,

something she found in the *Atlanta Constitution*. I think Aunty felt the whole nation really rested on that paper, for she was forever quoting from it, and cutting out pieces. Can I say this one?"

"If you like, dear."

And Polly repeated the quaint darky verse in the soft droning tone she had caught from Welcome.

"Laugh it away,
Chaff it away,
Quaff it away,
Let not blear-eyed Sorrow sit,
At thy fireside,
Throttle it!

"Sing it away,
Fling it away,
Ring it away.
Come, thou virgin Joy, and be
Love and life and hope to me."

"I like the part about 'throttle it,' " she added. "It's so sort of settling, you know."

"It surely is," laughed Miss Pen, "Polly, I'm not sad. I'm just trying to figure out things to myself about the Senator. I know why he is in trouble, but you would hardly understand. I know he is very impractical as a business man.

His ideals are high. I have heard him called a typical old-time Virginia gentleman and that means a great deal more than our generation can quite compass in thought. One of its rules was to stand fast in friendship to the uttermost, and the Senator had a dear friend who was his first law partner too, years ago. No, don't ask his name, child. Better not. But I may tell you that he failed in his work and in health lately, and to save him the Senator signed notes and bonds."

"And didn't he pay back?" asked Polly, in a hushed whisper.

"He could not. He died."

"And now the Senator must pay everything?"

"Everything that his word and name have been given to. If he were a wealthy man, it would not matter so much, but as it is, White Chimneys will have to be sold, and perhaps the Richmond home too. Mrs. Yates has a smaller place in Maryland, and of course the house in Washington. White Chimneys has been in reality a happy playground for us all, and more or less of an indulgence, so it will be the first to go."

Polly was silent. So many things raced through her mind. If only the Admiral could help, but she knew it was impossible. There

was plenty at Glenwood, but not enough to save White Chimneys. She reached up and put her arms around Miss Harmon's neck, her cheek pressed close to hers.

"Let's sleep on it," she said softly. "When he did the best he could to help a friend, somehow I think everything must turn out all right, don't you? Grandfather always says if you steer by the north star you can't go off the course. Let's keep hoping and hoping and believing things must come right."

Penelope framed the eager young face in her hands, and smiled down at it.

"Polly, you're a honey, that's just what you are, and I declare if you haven't comforted me too. I'm going to bed and steer by the north star in my dreams. Good-night, dearie."

The following day was Friday, and the girls found plenty of work before they started towards Richmond. One place was a strip of road along a pond above a sawmill. They heard the hum far off before they even came in sight of the mill. It sang in rising cadence as the big saw gnawed its way into the heart of the logs, then one last zip! as it fell, and back again to the song.

They had come down a long hill road so narrow that the low hanging boughs sometimes had to be jammed back so the car could get through, as its luggage top, as Polly dubbed it, made it higher than others. It had been a short cut over the hill, and the road looked well beaten. But the first sweeping turn brought them to the mill pond. There were ducks floating tranquilly about among lilies and drifting pieces of wood. The willows hung far over, trailing their tresses in the water. Farther down they could see the red roof of the mill. But Polly never noticed the mill. It was the unprotected road by the deep pond that caught her eye.

“Supposing a machine came along here at night and just scooted over that edge into the water,” she said. “Ted, take a picture of it at once.”

So the official photographer got out and proceeded to snap the offending pond. All at once there came a voice from a tree overhead, a large overhanging ash.

“We don’t care how many pictures you take.” It was a happy encouraging voice. The girls glanced up quickly. From parted branches a girl’s face looked down on them, the fun in her

eyes fairly sparkling. "It's a mighty pretty view, ain't it?"

"Do you live at the mill?" Polly asked.

"Part of the time. I go to school at Halliday winters. Where you all from?"

She swung down easily from the branches, and faced them, brimful of interest and some antagonism too, for were they not saying her pond was not all it should be?

"Queen's Ferry. Why don't you put up a fence here to protect people in the dark?"

"Folks that have got sense don't try to drive by here after dark." She said it so simply and confidently that the girls chuckled, and even over Patchin's face there dawned a slow grin of appreciation.

"Well, we're going to put it down on the road map," explained Polly firmly, "so there must be a fence put up. What's the name of the pond?"

"We call it Willow Pond. And the mill is Blow-me-down Mill, and my father's name is Tate Rogers. I'm Cherry Rogers." She stopped a minute, and added naively. "I'd like some of the pictures you took mighty well."

"I'll send you some, Cherry," Ted exclaimed impulsively. "If you'll coax your father to put

a fence up here, I'll send down a lot of pictures."

Cherry agreed to use all her home influence, and they went on. The mill never stopped its humming as they went by. Through the wide arched entrance they could see the shadowy interior, and the rain of golden sawdust from the log. Outside stood an ox team, but the patient beasts hardly flickered their eyelids as the car flashed past.

"Wasn't she pretty?" Hallie said musingly. "Her hair was just as curly as could be, and her dimples were deep like Polly's. I wonder if she never gets tired of staying here in the woods."

"I'm going to send her the pictures surely," Ted declared. "She was as old as we are, girls, but she looked younger with those short skirts. We have plenty of surprises anyway, even if we don't get much chance for amusement."

"I think we get lots of chances," Sue flashed back. "I'm having fun every single minute."

"That shows that you have the soul of the true worker, Sue," Polly announced. "When you really love your work you're an artist, and art is a sort of adventure, isn't it, Miss Pen, for you never quite know yourself what sort of art you may turn out."

"That's me," Ted returned happily, with a fine disregard for mere grammatical rules. "I have taken so many snap shots that I know I shall saunter around hereafter in my sleep, snapping views of Hallie's pigtails obstructing the pillow expanse, and of Polly chasing bats."

She picked away industriously at a stubborn cartridge that refused to budge from the little camera.

"Borrow a pair of tweezers from Mr. Patchin," suggested Natalie.

"Tweezers! Listen to the infant. Borrow a wrench and a pair of pliers and a jack. This hairpin won't budge it, Miss Pen."

"I don't see, Polly, how you can write post-cards on your knee like that while we are bumping over this road," Sue said, after the offending film had been lifted out with ease by Patchin's thumb and forefinger as a jack. "How many are there of them? Fifty?"

"Thirty-five," answered Polly, scribbling her messages industriously. "I'm always afraid I'll miss somebody so I send to everyone from the Big Chief up and down the line to little Stoney. Here goes one back to Mrs. Wimbledon to let her know we'll always love her."

Sue wrapped an affectionate arm around the shoulders beside her.

“You are really an old dear, Polly Page,” she said solemnly. “If the world is a looking-glass, as Miss Pen said, I should think it would almost get tired smiling back at you and waving a glad hello.”

“It hasn’t yet, anyway. Let’s all send word to the Senator and Mrs. Yates that we’re coming to see them next week.”

The message was posted at the next town they came to, and they decided they would go direct to White Chimneys from Richmond.

It was late Saturday afternoon when they rolled into Richmond, rather tired and dusty, but happy. The Admiral and Mrs. Langdon were sitting on the upper veranda when the machine turned up the long winding road from the main thoroughfare of Forest Vale. Polly knew the house well, but it was new to the others. Built of dark red brick with wide outreaching wings like hospitable arms, it stood far back in a garden. Across the front of it stretched a broad veranda, with upper gallery, and large white columns supporting it.

Polly led the way upstairs. She had always

loved best to play up there when she was little. The great upper hall was carpeted in dark red, and was always cool in summer and warm and cheery in winter, with a broad fireplace at one side.

Across one end of it near the windows stood Aunt Evelyn's old-fashioned square piano, with a few of the ivories missing from the keys where Polly had picked them off years before.

"May we have tea up here, please, Aunt Evelyn," Polly asked, after the greetings were over, and the first budget of news had been talked over.

"You may all do just as you like, child," Mrs. Langdon assured her smilingly. "Dear me, I sent you all away so fresh and sweet and now you look like a lot of gypsies. Cary and Randy rode over this morning and said you were to go there for tea tomorrow night, and you could stay over, they would like to have you, as Monday night some of Randy's boy friends and Cary's college mates are to have a little informal dance."

"We must stop our businesslike ears with cotton," Ted announced resolutely. "Polly, if you see Nat or Sue twirling, hobble them. We are just hardworking pioneers of the road."

“Just for one day,” Polly suggested hesitantly, her eyes beginning to widen and sparkle with anticipation. “Girls, one day wouldn’t matter much, would it? And by resting over another day, we’ll save gallons of gasoline, whole gallons, think of it, besides two days’ hotel expense. I know it isn’t nice to mention that,” as even the Admiral joined in the laughter over her notions of economy, “but it is really true. So let’s stay. We’ve worked hard all the week, and really have results to show for it.”

“What do you think, Penelope?” asked the Admiral from the corner where he and Miss Harmon were engrossed in a discussion over the best routes to take from Richmond north to the National Highway.

“If I may stay here while the girls go on to Sunnyside, then I shall vote to remain over until Tuesday. This is the coolest, and most restful spot I have found since we left Queen’s Ferry.”

It was settled therefore, and word sent over to Sunnyside that they were to stay over for the dance.

Sunday morning the girls walked to old St. Paul’s. It was about a mile from Mrs. Langdon’s home, towards the city. The Admiral and

his daughter preferred to drive leisurely behind the plump span of greys, "Lady Grey" and "Prince Charlie."

"I used to go here when I was ever so little," Polly said, when they came in sight of the old church on a rise of ground with the quaint burial place beyond the rows of tall evergreens. "Out in the burial ground there are flat tombstones, and I was always trying to push them over a little bit, I remember, because they seemed so heavy to be on top of anyone."

It was very quiet within the old-fashioned brick edifice. There was no rustle, no passing to and fro of cassocked altar boys. Behind a curtained enclosure sat a choir of young girls and women. Polly recognized Cary's face among them, wonderfully sweet and fair with its look of almost consecration when she sang the grand old canticles.

After service the girls were greeted by Dr. Marden, the rector, who, as he told them, had often patted Polly on the head just as he himself had been patted by the Admiral in years gone by for being a well-behaved lad during service.

Polly wanted to show the girls the rare

hand-carving on the pews and arches. The pews she had always liked because they were high and had lots of cushions in them, and little doors that closed.

"Ted," she said softly, "remember the little old school-house at Beaver Ford in Wyoming? Everything is so easy to love and hold fast down here in a dear old church like this where everyone holds fast with you. But think of what it is like away up there."

"The Missionary Bishop rides hundreds of miles all the time," Ted answered thoughtfully. "I shall always think of him as riding through miles and miles of sage brush holding up a great cross like the old-time crusaders. There's Cary waiting to speak to you."

She was behind the Admiral and Doctor Marden, waiting to reach them, but smiling a welcome over the intervening shoulders. Polly was radiant as she introduced the girls a minute later. She had told them so much about Cary Dinwiddie, and she knew by the expression on their faces that they admired her at first sight just as she had done.

"Randy told us of how you rescued him and the boys last week on that old side road," she

said merrily. "So we have planned a sort of reunion dance for you as the survivors, you know. Uncle Cary will be there too, and the Admiral must come to meet him. I believe they were old navy shipmates one time—"

"One time, young lady," the Admiral swung about, beaming down on them proudly. "Why, God bless my heart and soul, we were flying up and down the coast and around to New Orleans through the hottest part of the Civil War. We watched them set fire to the bales of cotton in the harbor at New Orleans and float them down to burn the ships. My best compliments to him, and tell him I shall be most happy to attend the dance and salute him."

"Then you are coming?" Cary smiled up at him. "And the girls too?"

"But we haven't any dance dresses to wear," interrupted Polly. "We are all sober-minded business persons on a tour of inspection and you mustn't beguile us, Cary."

"Oh, wear what you have so long as you come," Cary told them merrily. "We will dance out on the veranda anyway, with Chinese lanterns for light."

"Well," Sue said later, when they were ready

for Sunnyside, "there is one great advantage in having only one party dress with you. You're not all flustered over what you're going to wear. These white middy blouses are very tidy."

The ride out from Richmond to Sunnyside was about fourteen miles. Miss Harmon preferred to drive with the Admiral, as she said she was almost weary of jolting in the machine, and would welcome a carriage, but the girls coaxed Mrs. Langdon to act as chaperon in her place, and they found the glow from the Chinese lanterns already shining softly through the foliage like great glow worms when they reached the spreading lawns of Sunnyside.

CHAPTER XVII

CARY OF SUNNYSIDE

“THIS is just splendid, Cary, after chasing around in a dusty roadster for a week,” sighed Polly, leaning back in a cushioned swing settee that hung on long chains from the veranda roof. Indoors Ted was rattling off dance music that fairly made you tingle to the tips of your fingers, and Randy and his boy friends, looking very manly and natty in their white duck cadet suits, were hovering around the girls. “There’s Sue listening to Billie explaining a new kind of axle that won’t break. Billie’s got a 16-power run-about, and thinks he knows all about cars and upkeep.”

“I just passed by Natalie, and she’s telling Andy Forbes something about a spark control,” laughed Cary, drawing her silver spangled scarf around her shoulders. “I suppose you girls have learned all about the mechanism of the car and how to run it and everything.”

“Well, no, we haven’t,” Polly answered frankly, turning to cast a suspicious glance over at Natalie. “I think Nat’s just making believe a bit. It would never do to let the boys think we didn’t know anything about it, you know. Cary, have you heard how the Senator is?”

Cary shook her head sadly. She was looking down at a new ring on her left hand, a diamond that sparkled like a drop of dew in the center of a circlet of gold.

“He is suffering from a nervous breakdown, I am afraid, from what Mrs. Yates wrote to mother. I understand they were going to take him north on the yacht for a week or more. He is such a splendid friend and has given that friendship so lavishly to all who needed it that it seems doubly hard we cannot help him now.”

“You mean to buy White Chimneys over?”

“Oh, it is more than that, Polly. Of course the dear old estate must go, but the shock has been a severe one besides, and it is more a case of his personal health just now, Marbury tells me.” She hesitated before adding, “You know that Marbury and I are engaged, so I feel as though their trouble were my own.”

“I’m awfully glad, Cary,” exclaimed Polly.

“Trouble is hard to bear, of course, but it slips away. Somehow I can’t feel as if White Chimneys would be lost. I want to have a good long talk with grandfather about it. If the Senator and Mrs. Yates have gone away on the *Hippocampus*, of course we girls can’t go down there from here as we had planned. We were only going to stop in for a few hours as we passed. Perhaps after he returns we may be able to see him.”

“Perhaps,” assented Cary. “Mother and I are going there the fifteenth of July for two weeks, so they are sure to be back by then. I’ll ask Marbury tonight when I write to him.”

She rose to start the dancing, but Polly lingered a few minutes more, her chin resting on her palm as it always did when she was thinking seriously.

The trip down to White Chimneys would have to be postponed for a while, that was certain, owing to the Senator’s trouble and absence from home. Perhaps it would be better to circle around over the routes laid out up the state, and then make the run direct to Wenoka at the end of the trip. They could leave the car there and come back by rail to Queen’s Ferry.

Randy came swinging along the veranda, hunting her.

“Don’t you know they’re waiting for us to lead out in this reel, Pollykin?” he said cheerily.

“What a funny name to call me. I’m not a bit ‘Pollykin.’ I’m fifteen and very dignified.” Polly kept her seat, looking up at him mischievously. “Go and lead with Sue. I’m meditating.”

“Not tonight can you sit and meditate.” He caught her hand, and made her hurry along with him. “Listen. Don’t you want to get a good look at the Admiral and Uncle Brock? It’s a perfect joy to see them. They’ve forsaken us all, and are pacing the west veranda for a quarter deck, swapping all the piled-up sea tales of thirty years back. Come along.”

Polly laughed, and they ran like a couple of children down the wide veranda to peep around the corner at the two old shipmates, arm in arm, smoking luxuriously, and pacing the veranda deck with dignity and serenity.

“The two old darlings,” whispered Polly lovingly. “Aren’t they having a splendid time, though?”

"Polly!" Cary called from within the long hall. "We're waiting for you and Randy."

She struck the first chord of the reel, but it never seemed to reach the Admiral's ears or his companion's, so the two stole silently away unobserved.

"Well," Ted exclaimed breathlessly, as she sank into a chair after the first dance. "It's worth working hard all the week for this. Andy, don't you start telling me any more about machines or new kinds of oils or tires, or anything. I want to make believe that we are ten thousand miles from gasoline and gears."

"Crawfish," teased Sue. "We'll send you home instead of Nat and Hallie."

"No, you won't," Ted replied, with a little sigh of resignation. "This is a crusade, and I carry something more important than the banner. I've got the camera and I'm the only one that can make it behave itself. Polly said the funniest thing about it. She tried to learn how to shoot last year with a rifle up on the ranch, so when she used the camera, and it didn't act right, she said it 'kicked' just like the Big Chief's old army rifle."

"Uncle Brock's asking Cary to sing some of

the old Scotch songs that he loves best," Randy told them as he passed by. They were out on the veranda in wide arm-chairs, and could look in through the long French windows at Cary, seated at the piano in her soft primrose satin gown with a delicate old lace scarf around her young shoulders. Her hair was dressed in soft loose braids wound around her head with little escaping curls at ears and temples. Polly had tucked two jessamine flowers above one ear.

"Isn't she just *dear*?" Hallie whispered, sitting on the arm of Sue's chair, and leaning forward to see past Polly's curls. Then they kept silent to catch Cary's tender contralto in old "Loch Lomond." Polly's eyes filled slowly. She loved music passionately, and it always sent a quick lump up in her throat and made her want to cry. As the last low thrilling notes died away, she heard Ted whisper exultantly just back of her,

"I got him!"

"Ted," Sue warned in a hushed tone, "don't, just when we're all under a spell."

"You'd have been under something worse than a spell if I hadn't caught him, all the same. Look here!"

She dangled a large fuzzy caterpillar before them, still alive and wriggling, but Ted held him firmly upside down and stood her ground.

“He was directly over the back of your neck, Polly, just ready to ‘light,’ when Cary got to ‘You’ll take the high road, and I’ll take the low.’ He would have been in Loch Lomond before her if I hadn’t caught him.”

“Ted, you have no soul for music,” Polly declared. “Throw it away.”

“After all that concentration? No, I think I shall tame him for a mascot. It never did seem right to call caterpillars just ‘it.’ They have lots of individuality if you only understand them.”

“Uncle Brock’s going to sing too,” Randy whispered warningly. “He’s got a bully voice, regular French horn the way it roars out the impressive notes, you know. He’s sure to tune up with ‘Scots who ha’ wi’ Wallace bled.’ Watch him shake back his iron grey mane now, and let go.”

Polly put her hand firmly over his mouth to make him hush, and she heard the first song of the old Commodore. Cary was at the piano, and nearby Mrs. Dinwiddie, the Commodore’s own

sister. She smiled up at the two faces in the glow of light, the Commodore's, tanned and weathered until it looked like old parchment, tinted rosily. His blue eyes were round and bright as a child's, and had the same surprised, expectant look.

Cary led him deftly on from one old favorite to another until the Admiral took him by the arm, declaring the girls merely wanted to spoil him utterly.

It was nearly twelve before the last of Cary's guests left Sunnyside. The boys were busy blowing out the last spluttering candles in the Chinese lanterns around the veranda, and later, the girls heard them singing college songs as they crossed the lawn towards the rising hill beyond the house, pine covered and filled with fragrant odors and whispering winds.

"Mother has promised them they may camp out in the grove tonight," said Cary.

"I wish we might too," Polly returned wistfully. "I think that next year we'll go straight up to the mountains and camp out like girl scouts. Only mountains seem to shut one in somehow, unless you can be right up near the top."

Ted counted off on her fingers slowly.

“Houseboat club, mountain campers, Gypsy wagon, and some that I forgot to remember. Which shall it be, which shall it be?”

“Ted, go away,” Polly coaxed, laughingly. “You always are so explicit. Anyway, it’s a good thing to have several things to choose from.”

“One summer about three years ago, we motored up through the White Mountains,” said Cary dreamily. She sat on the veranda railing, her hands clasped behind her head. Indoors, the other girls had clustered around Mrs. Dinwiddie at the piano, listening to old-time mammy slumber songs. Ted had rambled away at the rebuff. “There were four of us, Mother and Father and Randy and me. I remember one mountain with an old stone house clear up on top, so far up that the clouds drifted below one like rising mist! There was an old guide who lived there alone, Tommy Woodhead they called him. He told us he had lived there for years, and he liked it because on clear days he could see the ocean.”

“But why didn’t he go down to the real ocean if he loved it so?” asked Polly.

Cary shook her head, smiling to herself.

"Perhaps he never even thought of that. Perhaps it seemed more precious to him seen from afar like some Promised Land whenever the clouds lifted. If you should choose to go camping next year, try the White Mountains, Polly."

"We plan to do so many things, and there are ever so many of the Calvert girls who want to join the club too. I think it is better to work in groups of five or ten, though, and start a new branch as we grow. You don't know, Cary, what dandy times we girls do have all through the winter, and how we work and plan everything out ourselves."

"Polly!" Ted's head appeared in the oblong of light at the nearest window. "Where's Hallie?"

"With Nat and the rest of the girls, isn't she?"

"No. We just missed her. She hasn't been seen since we all stood out on the steps calling good-bye when the machines drove away. That's half an hour ago, and I've asked everyone but she's really and truly gone."

"Where could she go, goosie?" Polly teased. "Tell the boys to look around the garden. She's hiding from you."

Cary had stepped into the house to search for herself. The music at the piano had stopped, and the girls scattered to hunt the missing one. Polly stood still for a minute, hearing them call "Hallie! Hallie!" down in the garden and through the house. Somehow it made her think of poor old Wandering Joe whom they had met tramping the hill roads near Matoax.

"The boys haven't seen her anywhere," Ted declared, coming back out of breath and flushed. "It's the strangest thing, Polly, for Nat says she was right beside her out on the veranda, and she simply disappeared."

"Where's Nat?" Polly turned, and found Sue and Natalie coming in from the garden. "Did she seem sick or anything like that?"

"She was yawning," said Nat after a minute's consideration. "Yes, I remember she was yawning."

"Oh, girls," Polly began, her whole face dimpling with quick fun. Before they could get more from her, she ran ahead of them upstairs to the snug little chamber Hallie was to share with Natalie. There was no light in it. Polly went directly to the bed, and felt of the coverlid. It was very bulgy. At the top her hands

found Hallie's smooth braids, and she tugged at them.

"Don't wake me up," Hallie begged sleepily. "Please, girls."

"Well, of all things," Sue exclaimed, when they crowded into the room, and sat around the bed just like the seven dwarfs around Snow White. "How did you ever get here, Hallie?"

"I was sleepy, and I just came up to bed," Hallie protested. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing," Polly told her, soothingly. "You've set us a lovely example, Hallie. Good-night, honey."

"Good-night, honey lamb," chorused the rest, but Hallie only tucked the pillow under her chin, and went back to sleep.

"Don't stay awake all night talking to each other," warned Mrs. Dinwiddie when they had said good-night to her and Cary. "If there are tired eyes tomorrow, I shall keep you over another day."

In spite of the warning, though, Polly spread out the road map, and the five pored over its routes northward.

"I'll rest easier if I know where we're bound tomorrow," she said. "It's almost a bee line now

for the National Highway, girls, but we take in these mountains between. Miss Harmon said she would be here with the car and Patchin by seven-thirty, so we must be up and dressed and have breakfast eaten by then!"

"Where are you going to sleep, Polly?" asked Sue drowsily, combing out her hair.

"Next to Cary's room. Good-night, children." She gathered up her maps, and went down the long corridor to Cary's room. Just for a moment she paused and tapped on the door. "Only a word more," she said softly, when Cary opened it. "Be sure to find out about the Senator, won't you, Cary, and let me know. If you write to me at any of the places past Roanoke, I will get it. You have the list of stopping places, haven't you? It's only that I feel so anxious about him. He's been awfully good to us girls."

Cary promised she would send the news along as fast as it reached her through Marbury. So the night at Sunnyside passed, and it seemed to Hallie and the rest that their heads had just touched the pillows when Polly's voice aroused them to get up and dress.

"This is like a hunt breakfast," said Randy, as

they all stood around in the long dining-room, helping themselves to the buffet spread. "Roast ham, roast chicken, jellies, and 'toasties.' That's what Cindy in the kitchen calls these strips of toast. She used to feed me on them all the time when I was a poor helpless toddling angel; didn't you, Cindy?"

Lucinda, stately and tall, in blue linen, handed in a plate of muffins, and smiled broadly.

"Ah'd suttinly have ter wait a long time before you'd be a toddling angel, Marse Randy," she retorted. "Ah nussed you faithful and true, and willingly too, an' Ah nevah see sech a rambunctious chile in all mah bo'n days."

Outside came the mellow call of the siren that the girls all knew so well. The morning feast came to a hasty end, but Mrs. Dinwiddie had filled a capacious basket with sandwiches and fruit and Cindy's best cake, to bear them company on their journey.

It seemed odd to find themselves back on the road again. Sue said it was like making a fresh start.

"We go up state to Staunton, then along the Valley Pike to Washington, and that is really the official end of the trip, girls. But after that

grandfather says he will see that we make the run down to Wenoka safely, and perhaps go with us. I know that Isabel will want to get back home, for she has her music, and you know if she's away from those five-finger exercises for a week, she feels her future career is in peril."

"But, Polly, if you like you may ship the car, or let Patchin take it back, and we can go down by rail," suggested Miss Harmon. But Polly and the rest protested that they would welcome any addition to the trip.

"And while I think of it, Mr. Patchin," Ted said suddenly, "don't you think that you could take us, one at a time of course, and let us sit beside you and watch the things you do to the machine? We ought to know more about it practically, girls. Those boys, Randy and Ted and the others, can take their cars apart and put them together again."

"Maybe they can," Sue returned scornfully. "You know what boys think they can do, and what they really can do, are two different things, aren't they, Miss Pen? But I'd love to learn how to run the car, wouldn't you, Polly?"

Polly's eyes sparkled. She held on to her flut-

tering veil, and leaned over to catch what they were saying.

"We'd promise to be very careful, Mr. Patchin."

"They say a woman makes a better driver than a man," answered Patchin judiciously. "She's easier and kinder to a machine. A car's a delicate sort of thing anyway, and when you slew one around, and grind on the brakes instead of 'cutting out,' something's liable to happen. Women coax a machine instead of forcing it on. Most of them like a 'baby electric,' but there's lots in this country and abroad that ain't afraid to put on overalls and crawl under a car to see what ails it."

"I'd love to do that," Polly returned so emphatically that they all laughed at her. Nevertheless when they reached a smooth stretch of road, Patchin stopped the car, and Polly took her first practical lesson.

"You should learn to drive in the dark first of all," Penelope said. "That's the new 'touch' method, the same as on the piano or typewriter, or anything that depends on the fingers and hands for efficiency and speed. That way you learn how to handle your car almost automatic-

ally, and when there is any danger ahead, or need of quick action, you move your mechanism under hands and feet without having to look down first to see what you are going to clutch."

"I'll shut my eyes," Polly said.

"Not with us in the car, please, Polly," begged Natalie. "It's no fair learning with all of us here to stand any jolt."

"Now just look there," exclaimed Polly suddenly. She had been running at low speed, cautiously, with a firm grip on the steering wheel as though it might get away from her, and all at once there flashed into sight a five passenger car with a girl at the wheel, bareheaded, and quite alone, clipping along the road to Richmond as carelessly as if she had been riding a pet horse. Polly stopped dead short to look back at the cloud of dust. "I'd love to go like that," she sighed. "Wonder who she is, girls."

"It seems queer to think of all the people we have met even so far, and may never see again, doesn't it?" Sue said thoughtfully.

"Mrs. Langdon told me of a splendid old hermit that we must be sure to see," Penelope broke in. "He lives up on the side of Squirrel Mountain above Rohansville. We stop there

tonight, about seven, and can go up tomorrow to see him. There's some mystery about him. They say he used to be a Confederate spy, and he declares he has never surrendered."

"The dear old Spartan," cried Ted sympathetically. "And nobody to hold his shield for him while he fell on his sword in honorable despatch. Let's coax him to give one good rebel yell for us, girls."

The road was fairly good for about fifty miles out of Richmond. Here too, they met many machines bound north to Washington and southward towards Norfolk by way of Richmond. By ten o'clock the heat was beginning to be felt, and they turned into a shady grove facing the south where a signboard notified travelers that "Piney Ridge Inn" lay farther ahead.

When it came in sight it was not at all like a hotel, but merely an old-fashioned house a story and a half high with a great brick chimney taking up almost one side. There were two stone deer on the front lawn, one reclining and one standing alert and listening. Baby evergreen trees only a foot high were set out in green tubs around the veranda, and a brightly striped awning made an attractive dash of color among the dark pines.

The girls enjoyed their afternoon rest there ever so much. It seemed, as Polly said, that every place held its own little human story. The mistress of the inn was Mrs. Molly Appley, and there were five little Appleys looking up to her to give them daily crumbs like a nestful of robins. The father bird had lost out in the fight of life and lay up in the old family lot on the mountain side.

“But we’ve gotten along beautifully,” Mrs. Appley told them happily, as she moved lightly back and forth, accomplishing everything with little effort. “I had the home, you see, and we were close to the main road, so I put up the sign, and started out to serve light lunches to the people going by to Richmond or up to the Capital. And now we have a good trade all the time. It would be a bit wearisome and lonely if I didn’t have the children, but we’re lots of company for each other, and it’s a sort of commonwealth for us all. Grace and Margaret are old enough to be a great help, twelve and fourteen they are, and dear girls too, if I do say so.” Her gaze rested lovingly on her girls, talking with Hallie and Natalie over near the grape arbor. “And the boys help too. Gardiner can drive a horse, and

does nearly all my buying for me at the village, and Davie helps weed the garden, and drives the cow for me, and helps take care of Sonnykin, our baby. He's only four, and into everything. We haven't time to be lonely."

After they were on the road again, Polly said suddenly. "It is love that makes the world go 'round, isn't it, Miss Pen? I'll never forget her face. It just fairly shone with love and contentment, and there she has all of those little mouths to feed herself and she doesn't mind it a bit. Why, if Daddy, as Sonnykin called him, had lived, I know he'd have grown discouraged long ago, and shifted the brood right into some asylum while he went west. Let's put down 'Piney Ridge Inn' on our map, with a strong recommendation. Ted, did you take a good picture of the house?"

"Dandy, with the whole group, and you girls at the little green tables under the awning. Girls, I just thought of something. Why couldn't we get up a little travelers' guide book with these photographs of the best places to stop, and pictures of the historic places. It would sell, wouldn't it, Miss Pen?"

"Ted, we have enough to do as it is. Just

feast your eyes on that picture." Miss Harmon pointed to the sweeping valley that lay before them between the rising hills and far-off mountains. "That always rests my eyes and makes the ordinary little business details of life seem so unnecessary."

Ted looked, unconvinced. The details of life were very important just at present, and she had her thoughts fixed far ahead on the net result on the balance sheet that should conclude the trip. But the valley view was so beautiful that she finally took a picture of it for the private collection, under protest.

"Ted, you're getting grouchy," Polly said happily, one arm around the sturdy shoulders of the club photographer. "What's the matter?"

"I don't know myself," Ted returned shortly. "Better send me home, Polly. I'm a wet blanket."

"Indeed we'll not send you home," Polly insisted. "You've got the artistic temperament, and are doubly precious, so we have to put up with you. If you get too artistic, we'll hold you head downwards in the first good cold spring we come to."

"All aboard for Squirrel Mountain," called

Miss Penelope, for Hallie and Natalie were clambering up the hillside after some scarlet trumpet flowers growing high up there. "We have twenty-five miles still to run, and two side roads to take a look at, so pile in, children."

When they took their seats, Polly managed to get beside Ted, and during the remainder of the trip that day she tried to find out what ailed her, but Ted was obstinate and refused to talk. Then all at once it dawned on Polly. Sue was full of fun and talked to Hallie and Natalie, but not one word did she say to Ted, her faithful old-time chum for years at Calvert. When they reached Rohansville, about seven, Polly managed to corner Sue as they were all going down to supper.

"Aren't you and Ted speaking to each other?" she asked, her big brown eyes full of frank trouble.

"Well, Polly, if Ted won't speak to me, how can I speak to her?" asked Sue aggrievedly. "I'm sure I don't know what I've done to her. She's been fussy and cross for several days, and after the dance last night she just flatly wouldn't speak to me at all."

Polly thought for a minute, then waggled one accusing forefinger at Sue's gypsy face.

"I'll bet two cents to a doughnut it's boys," she said. "We always have a splendid time as long as we keep to ourselves, but just the minute you let any boys in on the fun, there's trouble. I might have known what that dance would do. Look what the dance before Waterloo did."

"But, Polly, it isn't my fault," protested Sue. "I couldn't help it if Billie wanted to dance with me more than with Ted, could I?"

"Couldn't you?" Polly met her eyes squarely. "He couldn't take you out on the floor and make you dance, could he? You're a perfect goose to let any boy spoil the dandy friendship you and Ted have had ever since you went to Calvert. It isn't playing cricket, Sue, honest it isn't. Stand by each other always and forevermore, that's the way we should do. Talk it over with Ted."

"She won't speak to me," faltered Sue, almost ready to cry.

Polly looked at Ted, walking ahead beside Miss Penelope.

"I'll talk to her," she said. "Wait till bedtime."

CHAPTER XVIII

ON MOUNTAIN TRAILS

IT was the first break in friendship that had happened since the club started, and Polly could not rest until it was mended. That night after the girls had gone to bed, she went softly to the room Ted and Sue shared, and tapped. The light was out, but Ted's voice said sleepily to come in.

"Is Sue asleep?" Polly sat down on the foot of the bed, and clasped her hands about her knees.

"I'm sure I don't know," Ted replied quite distantly.

"Sue, wake up." Polly pinched the nearest toe, and Sue gave a smothered, half hysterical giggle under the clothes. "You're crying," Polly accused. "Come out and face the music, because I won't let either of you sleep tonight until you make up. What's the matter with you, Ted?"

"Well, if you must know," Ted suddenly ex-

ploded, "Sue gave Billie my very best snapshot. I heard him beg and beg for it, but I never thought she'd give it to him when it was mine."

"It was mine, Ted, you know it was," Sue sat bolt upright, her black braids hanging on each side of her head Indian fashion. "I never thought you'd care like this. He's an awfully nice boy, and he did want your picture so much."

"My picture!" gasped Ted. "He took your picture."

"Oh, Ted, you dear old silly thing, he took my picture of you, the little snapshot of you taken up at the ranch last year on the pony."

Polly said nothing. She was one beaming smile as she watched the two suddenly clasp each other in a good close hug, then she climbed down from the bed.

"I guess you'll be all right now, children," she told them. "And for pity's sake don't get into any more squabbles. That was our first dance, and you see what happened. I don't think that Billie should have coaxed for the picture, and Sue should never have given it up, but since it did happen, we'll lay it to moonlight and Chinese lanterns. Good-night."

"Good-night, Polly," the two answered,

meekly enough, and peace returned to the club.

There was so much work ahead of them that week from Richmond to Roanoke where they were to hit the main road up to Staunton, that the girls had not time for personal fretting over anything. They planned to reach Staunton by the following Sunday, to meet Isabel and Crulers who were at Hot Springs with Mrs. Lee.

Every night Polly worked over her daily schedule and report of things seen and noted along the way. Sometimes she had to ask Miss Harmon to help her out, and Patchin's advice was invaluable when it came to motor terms and general technicalities.

Every landmark along the mapped routes had to be located anew, and any variations or changes noted. The girls had familiarized themselves by now with the routine work, and entered into it with zest. Ted declared she was going to try and persuade the Senator if he regained his health to let her go west with the big pathfinder cars some day, straight over to the Pacific coast.

"I'll never forget this trip, though," she added. "It seemed beautiful between Queen's Ferry and Richmond, but this is more—what shall I say?—stupendous. Yes, it is, too. It fairly takes your

breath away. I had one shock though. You know that gorgeous sunset night before last, girls, when the light lay in great quivering lakes of rose and amber and strange sea green? I took a time shot at that, a long one, and was told to-day that it would come out with a plain sky, and that the wonderful moonlight pictures you see are just sunlight negatives. Isn't that crushing?"

"After Roanoke, we're to try the road up to Mountain Lake," Miss Penelope was saying, tracing the route out with her forefinger. "That is 4,000 feet above tidewater, girls, and you'll see some lovely cascades and old Bald Knob where you look over five states."

"But I love the Blue Ridge," protested Ted. It seemed as if each new road brought out fresh beauties until the girls fairly caught their breath at the unfolding splendors of the mountains. Here too, they found a different class of people. It was rarely that any men appeared at the cabin doors in answer to their hail. No matter how poor the home was, there was always an abundance of flowers. Morning glories that clambered recklessly over the shaky little timber porches, four o'clock's, red and white, sunflowers

in rich plenty, and the elder blooms along the edges of the meadows.

“It is the women who seem to tend them,” Miss Pen remarked. “And weed the vegetable garden, hoe the young corn, and look after five or seven younglings and an ever-present baby besides.”

“But where are all the men?” asked Polly.

“Fishing, going back and forth to the ‘settlements,’ as they call the little mountain cluster of houses around a store or town hall, and jogging back and forth behind the ox-team. Sometimes they go logging down the river too. I read somewhere that that brooding look of pathos in their eyes comes from generations of waiting in cabin doors.”

Sometimes the machine would scare up a Molly Cottontail out of the thicket, and it would jump to the center of the road, rear up, with ears high, and then vanish with a funny little kick and twirl into the tall ferns and underbrush. Once after a shower as the car slipped down a curving road into a quiet valley, Patchin warned them all to be silent, and pointed to the edge of the woodland. A doe with two straggling fawns grazed daintily along the meadow where a little brook

plunged by. In the faint misty light they looked like shadows, but at the first sound they took the rail fence, heads back, noses up, and vanished into the timber.

“They’re not one bit like the western deer, are they?” Polly declared. “They seem so slender and light, like the fallow deer.”

Another time, the road led over a low culvert, smothered in tall ferns, and just as they neared it, a head wriggled up out of the weeds, and grinned at them. The girls wanted to investigate but the owner waved them on, shooing them away mysteriously.

“Ah mos’ got him,” he said, hoarsely. “He’s down back in dis yer hole, but Ah kin get in after him.”

“What are you after, Uncle?” asked Miss Pen laughingly, “Rabbit?”

“Rabbit? No, ma’m. Dat ain’t no rabbit back in dere, dat’s mah Benjamin Eli. His Maw’s back yonder waitin’ ter give him her slipper for stealin’ corn cakes wi’ ’lasses on ’em, and he’s hidin’ on us, but Ah’ll get him in ’bout a minute. If you all’d blow on dat horn he’d jes’ rush out.”

So Mr. Patchin gave a long wailing call on the

siren just as the machine was over the culvert, and there came an answering howl from underground. As the car sped on its way, the girls saw Benjamin Eli dart out from the culvert and get promptly snatched by his collar.

As they neared the southwestern part of the state the land grew more rugged. Pointed peaks of rock loomed up unexpectedly, with rocky summits that in the wonderful sunset light looked like distant castles.

One night they were overtaken by a storm on the mountain side, and sought shelter at a cabin where a lone light gleamed. It had only two rooms, and a sort of loft where the elder children slept, but the tall mountaineer made them all feel that they were welcome to the best he had. Tired and damp they clustered around the fire that night, and it felt good even in July. The children were shy and silent at first, but after a time they slipped out from the shadowy corners and listened eagerly as the girls told their adventures along the road.

Mr. Patchin went up in the loft with the boys, and the father gave up his share of one bed too, so the elder children could climb in beside their mother and leave one bed free. Here Miss Har-

mon and two of the girls managed to get some sleep, without undressing at all, and Polly curled up beside Natalie and Ted on a bed of pelts and blankets beside the dying fire. The full moon shone in through the high window, and outside there came the cry of owls and far-off night birds.

As Polly lay awake listening, all at once she heard somebody moving softly to the door. It stood half open. Nobody bothered to lock doors up there, the mother had said, smilingly. And in the oblong of silver light, Polly saw a little white figure kneel and lift its face to the sky. It was one of the children, a curly haired laddie named Davy. And he was praying softly for a real knife of his own.

Hidden away among her belongings in the suitcase, Polly knew she had a good pearl handled knife with three blades and a file. So after she was sure he had gone back to bed, she got up and found it, planning a surprise for the morning. So at breakfast, Davy wonderingly opened the little thin package at his plate, and saw the knife. The look of dawning wonderment that overspread his face was beautiful. He slipped away from them all, and went out on a fence rail to study the new treasure. After a time, before

the strangers left, he told his mother of the prayer the night before, and its answer, but he did not know where the knife came from, and Polly begged her not to tell.

“It is like a miracle to him, and after all,” she said. “It was an answer, for I might have been asleep and not have heard him at all.”

Miss Harmon had stopped to settle the account for the supper, breakfast, and night's lodging, and here one of the strangest surprises of the journey appeared. The tall mountaineer refused to take any money. They were his guests, he insisted. It wasn't often that any folks came up over the mountain and stayed with him, and when they did he was proud to entertain them.

They had eaten fried salt pork and corn cake twice, with some berries, but it was as if they had feasted with some royal sovereign. There was the same plenteous air of largesse, the same unstinted hospitality. They looked back and waved at the lonely group standing in front of the sunflowers.

“Those are the kind of men that made our western Virginia what it was in the early days,” Miss Penelope declared. “They were the most daring and hardy, and they fought the Indians

and wild animals to make their homes safe. In a way they are a little like the Gaels of northern Ireland and parts of Scotland in their pride and clannishness. Did you hear the name the eldest boy called his squirrel rifle, girls?"

"Bonnie Beauty, wasn't it?" Polly said. "He told us folks always call their guns pet names."

They had planned to meet the girls at Staunton, but were not expecting any reception. It was late Saturday afternoon when they came leisurely along the main road from Lexington into Staunton. It was so good, Polly said, to strike a stretch of macadamized road that she took the wheel herself, and just went along at low speed to enjoy every minute of it.

Suddenly a car shot out of the road ahead of them with pennants flying bravely, and before they could guess who it was there was a blast from a deep-toned horn, and tin carnival trumpets blowing at them, and over all Crullers's excited squeals of delight.

"We came to meet you," she called out. "Oh, girls, we've been waiting on this road for two hours for you to turn up."

"Well, we're here," laughed Polly, as they all

half tumbled out of the car to greet Mrs. Lee and Isabel in the tonneau.

There were three strange girls with them, friends they had made at the hotel, who had wanted to be in the welcoming party, and Isabel introduced them all around. Two were sisters from Kentucky, Vera and Betty Morris, and the tallest one was a Virginia girl like themselves, from Staunton, Margery Lawrence.

"They are coming to Calvert this fall," Crullers announced. "And they want to join our club, Polly."

"The more the merrier," Polly said happily, liking the girls the minute she saw them. "I know you'll love the old school just as we all do."

"Now, over Sunday, you will be my guests," Mrs. Lee said. "Miss Harmon needs a little rest, I am sure, so we will go direct to the hotel, and after that I will play chaperon, if she does not mind."

"Mind?" laughed Miss Penelope. "I haven't had a decent night's rest since we left Richmond. If it hasn't been bats, it has been chicken sandwiches and lemonade at unearthly hours, or Polly would start laying out new plans just as we were all drifting peacefully into dreamland. I shall

be most glad to lay my head on a pillow even for two days."

"I thought the girls would enjoy seeing the famous Grottoes of the Shenandoah while they were so near," Mrs. Lee added. "We have been there several times, and every year I seem to find something more wonderful; so if you like, Monday we will go there, and I can leave you to make the journey on northward."

"And take Hallie and Natalie back with you," Polly said. "They must be delivered safe and sound at Calvert Hall, Miss Honoria said."

"They had better come with me until you return," Mrs. Lee replied, smiling. "I shall be lonely without Isabel, and with the Senator and Mrs. Yates away, it will be lonely for Hallie. I will promise to take good care of them."

Sunday passed peacefully at Staunton. They all went to service, and later wrote home letters, and rested for the new start on the morrow. It was an early one. Patchin said the caves lay about fifty miles northward along the beautiful hill country of the Shenandoah river.

"Thomas Jefferson visited them," Miss Penelope told them. "And it was he who first really told the world of the Natural Bridge we passed

Friday, girls, so you must do homage to the Sage of Monticello.”

“The old dear,” murmured Ted appreciatively, as they neared the caves. “I got some dandy snapshots of the Bridge, and the Lace Waterfalls. I wonder if I can take any pictures in the Caves.”

When they reached the entrance Polly and Miss Penelope led the way. The guide was explaining how the great cave was accidentally discovered by a man who hunted a ground hog to its hole, and found the aperture leading down into the wonderful Weyer’s Cave. A hush fell on the girls as they entered the vast hall of beauty. All about them rose the towering pinnacles of stalactites and stalagmites, some in sentinel form, others bursting over in crystalline splendor like some frozen cataract.

They did not carry torches, as the caves were lighted by electricity and this radiance seemed to add to the brilliancy of the formations.

“I do like the names here,” said Sue, jotting some down in her note book. “The Diamond Bank, and the Leaning Tower, and the Lady Washington Grotto. What was that last, Ted?”

“The Robbers’ Den,” prompted Ted. “I like

the Enchanted Moors in the Cathedral best of all. What do you suppose made all these things take such queer shapes, Miss Pen?"

Miss Penelope smiled, and shook her head.

"The wise people give us many explanations, but, after all, who knows the truth? How long ago did it happen? As you say, why have they tangible shapes that we can recognize? It is like rambling through some enchanted garden from Doré. I have been in the famous Salt Mines in Austria, and in the strange caves in the Dolomites too, where they have found remains of the cave tiger and of the most primitive people in southern Europe, they say, but these surpass them in beauty."

"And right under our noses too," exclaimed Polly. "I never realized they were so wonderful and so near. Did you notice that one lone figure wrapped in a cloak back in Cathedral Hall? The guide says they call it Washington."

When they emerged from the caves it was close to two o'clock, and Mrs. Lee produced a well-stocked hamper for lunch to be eaten under the broad pavilions at the foot of Cave Hill. Sue and Isabel pored over the local roads on Polly's precious maps, for it was all new to Lady Van-

itas, and she had already forgotten to adjust her pretty shirred silk bonnet every two minutes.

"There are the Luray Caverns too," said Mrs. Lee. "You mustn't miss those either, girls. I am sure they will be on your route."

"They're on the main line, I think," answered Miss Penelope. "We are going to test out a few of the new short cuts, and come back from Harrisonburg to try the old Pike. I thought as long as we were bound that way, we might go a bit further to give the girls a look at the mountain ranges before we go up the National road."

At Harrisonburg the girls found letters awaiting them. One from Cary to Polly was especially interesting. It said that the Senator and Mrs. Yates would return from their cruise that week, and after a week of rest they wanted the girls to be sure to visit them for a few days down at White Chimneys at the end of the trip.

"Randy and I are going, so be sure to come," it ended.

Crullers provided all of the fun during the first few days after her arrival. Even Patchin admitted she was over zealous. Every car they passed she insisted on saluting with the siren, not in a friendly fashion, but in a challenging way.

She yearned to race. She was allowed to carry the laundry to the post office to send by parcel post to Queen's Ferry, and lost it on the way.

"How could you lose such a large parcel?" demanded Ted.

"I didn't lose it, Ted. I just mislaid it," Crullers protested tearfully.

"Where did you go besides the post office?" artfully.

"To the drug store at the corner."

"For ice cream soda?"

"No. For joss sticks to burn and scare away the mosquitoes," faltered Crullers. "Ted, you're almost brutal with me. I know it's in the drug store."

"Then go and get it, goose," Ted insisted.

"But I can't. It's closed for the night, and they say the man who runs it lives miles away."

Ted smiled grimly at the twilight view of Catersville, the meagre little town they had just stopped in to mail the laundry.

"Well, let's break the news to the rest. We stay here over night."

But Polly said no. Time was too precious. So they coaxed a little barefooted youngster to climb in and guide them out to the druggist's

home, routed him away from his supper, and took him back bodily, bareheaded and somewhat indignant to his store, where, sure enough, Crullers found her parcel just where she had left it squeezed discreetly down between the ice cream soda stand and the telephone booth.

It was only two mornings later that Sue rescued the supply of eggs just as Crullers was about to place them in the cosy fireless cooker nest "to boil."

"Why, I knew there wasn't a fire in it, of course," she protested, "but I thought it must be heated in there someway."

"Crullers will grow up and study chemistry, and before we know it, she will have invented a way of concentrating solar rays to boil eggs," said Polly.

But after they had been with the party for three days, both of the girls settled down to real work with the rest, and Isabel became a splendid forager. She had charming manners, and delighted in approaching strange cabin doors and buying supplies. Polly declared she could scent a peach or pear tree a mile away, and deliberately judge its possibilities in passing, all ready to pounce on the owner and buy a supply.

Once they had reached the mountain region above the National Pike, they came across strange ox-drawn "steamboat" wagons, sometimes with small bare-footed lads astride, sometimes with mountain girls, barefooted, with sun-bonnets set low down over their faces, driving along unsmilingly, almost hopelessly.

Up near the state line they met a jolly old peddler with his pack on his back, bound for Kentucky by way of the Gap.

"My name's Happy, and I'm happy by nature too. Sun's always shone right squar' bang in my face ever since I was born," he told them. "My dad was a peddler, and my mother traveled with him on a tin wagon. Yes, siree. Sweetest music I ever knew was them tin pails a-jingling when he jogged down the road. Good-bye, girls. I'm going to give every single one of you a bright new tin cup to drink from at the brooks and springs along the way, jest to remember old Happy by."

And he kept his word. Each one, even Miss Penelope, received a new tin cup, and they came in handy, just as he said they would.

By the time they had turned back to the pike again, they had begun to feel like old seasoned

motorists. Patchin had even taught them how to detect the slightest variation in the throb of the motor, and how to tell the make of the different machines they met by the "tune" of them, as he put it. The irresistible spirit of the open was on them now, and Polly wished they could go straight on with old Happy, through the Gap into Kentucky, and so on westward, over the old trails of the first pioneers.

In one of their mountain climbs they met a man on horseback, riding as hard as he could. His face looked haggard and grey under his broad brimmed felt hat, as he reined up.

"Say, strangers," he said huskily. "You're women folks. My little gal's mighty sick up yonder. I'm goin' down nine miles after the doctor. Mebbe you all'd stop in and see if you can do anything for her. Her Maw's there too, but she's so nervous she's jes' shakin' like a leaf."

Patchin said little, but he always acted quickly. In less than fifteen minutes, he had whizzed the girls up to the cabin, turned, taken the father into the machine, and sped away with him after the doctor, leaving the old grey horse standing in the bare front yard switching flies with its tail lazily.

Indoors, the girls stepped timidly. It was very warm and there were no curtains at the windows. On a bed in the shade lay a girl about nine, sobbing pitifully, and on her knees beside the bed was the mother, her face in her hands, praying.

Miss Penelope's sturdy arm went around her shoulders at once.

"Now, you cheer right up," she said. "We've sent for the doctor with the machine, and he'll be here in a jiffy. It's just a blessing we came this way. What ails the girlie?"

"She's eaten something pizen," moaned the woman helplessly.

Miss Penelope dropped her long silk motor cloak, took off her hat and gloves, and set to work. The child moaned, and seemed alternately feverish, then chilled. She said she had pains in her throat and her head and her stomach, and the girls hurried around doing Miss Penelope's bidding, heating water on the rickety stove, clearing up the dinner dishes that lay tumbled around, and chasing out the chickens and young pigs that insisted on sharing the cabin space.

"They won't do no harm," said the lady of the

house, wearily. "They're kind of pets for Mattie there. She likes 'em to come in."

"Do you really think she's eaten anything poisonous?" Polly asked Miss Harmon when she had a chance.

"I can't say. She's very ill just now, but you can't tell."

"Let me look at her lips," said Polly, remembering the old fairy tale of "The Queen Bee," and how the bee detected which of the princesses had been eating honey. She went softly to the bed, and leaned far over the pallid little face, with the closed eyelids, and beads of perspiration standing coldly on the forehead and upper lip. Cautiously she parted the lips, and sniffed. There was a slight brown discoloration too at the corners of the mouth.

"Well?" whispered Miss Penelope anxiously.

"It smells just like tobacco," Polly answered in surprise.

The two looked at each other for a minute, then Polly patted the child on her shoulder gently.

"Listen, dear," she said distinctly. "Where did you leave the pipe?"

"Up on the chimney," whispered the child

faintly. "I was jes' tryin' to smoke like grand-pop."

When the young doctor arrived, he heard the story and laughed heartily over it.

"These mountaineers all smoke and the women mostly use snuff too," he said. "It is deplorable, of course, but her father wasn't very far wrong. Mattie surely had been eating something 'pizen.'"

Before they went on over Tuggles' Gap, Mattie Tuggles could sit up and wave a weak good-bye after them, and Mrs. Tuggles was scolding fitfully at the old grandfather for leaving his precious old pipe within reach of Mattie's questing little hands feeling along the chimney shelf.

It was only one of the many heart stories the girls found on their journey, and it went down in the "log" opposite the point marked Tuggles' Gap. The next day they turned eastward towards the last lap of the trip, and Polly sent word down to Mrs. Yates that they would be at White Chimneys by the following Monday.

CHAPTER XIX

THE MASQUERADE SURPRISE

“I DON’T know whether to hand in our final report to Senator Yates or to the headquarters of the Roads Committee,” said Ted, looking up critically from a batch of prints she had just received. “I have separated all our personal pictures from those to be submitted to the committee, and will mount and label each one with date of taking. Polly and Sue, you will manage the general write up on conditions—”

“Miss Pen says she’ll help us at the last. I think it has been perfectly splendid for a four weeks’ trip. When you think of the ground we have covered and the way we have zigzagged back and forth over the old unused roads, and had time to spend more than one day in places to rest up, why, it seems like a dream.”

“Polly,” interrupted Crullers with one of her maddening digressions, “do lemon verbenas grow as high as chestnut trees in California? Isabel says they do.”

“If you and Isabel would both drop your arguing and help figure up expenses, it would be far more commendable,” Ted said with dignity. “Who gives a rap for lemon verbenas? Crullers you are really a case.”

Crullers relapsed into passive meekness. They had spent three days making the journey from the Shenandoah Valley south towards Wenoka. There had been such wonderful sights to see, the time had passed like a swift succession of moving pictures. They had spent half a day at the beautiful Luray caverns, wandering through their three miles of splendor, and had visited some of the famous battlefields, but these Polly dreaded.

“It was all so cruel, just like some big family quarrel,” she said, after they had passed over the Wilderness Road.

“Those are always the saddest and most bitter,” Penelope told her.

“But there must have been some other way out than leaving these graves scattered all over Virginia and the other states. I will be glad when we get away from them, for I always get so indignant and heartsick.”

The two last days of the actual business trip

were spent in Washington. Here the girls were on familiar ground, as once each school year, Miss Calvert took her flock up to the Capitol and there was very little she left unseen. Polly wrote to the Admiral from here that she would be glad to turn towards Wenoka, for there was so much to see and write about, she felt like a squirrel in a cage, twirling around.

As they neared Wenoka, though, the girls felt a little chill of apprehension. Mrs. Yates had written cordially, renewing the invitation just as if nothing had happened to their fortunes. Marbury was still at home, and Cary had come down from Richmond with Randy, so it was like a reunion when they all assembled once again in the great hall.

Mrs. Yates met them, and apparently, she had not changed since the day they left Queen's Ferry. There was perhaps a little weary droop to her eyelids when she was not speaking, but her smile was as gracious and cheery, and she watched the tall figure of the Senator like a mother with a child.

Marbury was always close to his father, Polly noticed. While there was no suggestion of invalidism in the Senator's appearance, yet he

seemed oddly changed. His eyes, always so shrewd and merry, had their old glint of humor in them, but the same as with Mrs. Yates, when he ceased speaking, the little mask of courage seemed to fall ever so slightly, and show the sorrow that lay behind it.

“You must make this the happiest visit you have ever had at White Chimneys, Hallie,” her uncle said, pinching her cheek. “Long years back, when we were young people, my mother gave a masque ball for me here. There were very few such affairs then, and I remember how happy we all were. So in talking it over, your visit here this beautiful summertime, we have decided to give you a masquerade. It will be novel and full of old time merriment. What do you say, Polly?”

Polly leaned forward breathlessly.

“Oh, it’s splendid of you and Mrs. Yates, Senator,” she exclaimed. “But we haven’t any costumes or masks.”

“You will find some. Mrs. Yates and Penelope will soon drape you up. I have written to the Admiral, and he may run down. The invitations are out and I think I shall dress as the old White Chimneys pirate myself.”

“Ware the ghost!” Penelope said, warningly. “He may appear, and resent it.”

“I think any old pirate that ever lived should be proud to have the Senator represent him,” Ted declared.

But for two days the girls, in spite of being tired from their trip, plunged into the fun of the masquerade preparations gaily. They followed Penelope up to the third story into the great old attic, and ransacked trunks and chests for costumes. Polly poked around, looking at the wide old oak beams, and seeing how they were all put together with huge wooden pegs. High on the cross beams were the old looms with the linen loops still on them, and spinning wheels, reels, and the little flax wheels stood around, with so many ancient objects the girls stayed up there for hours at a time, looking them over.

“We have plenty of costumes,” Penelope said, sitting in the midst of the upheaval. “Here’s silk, satin, calico, rags, girls. You may be colonial dames, or hoopskirted dames of the sixties. There’s a white mulle with festoons of rosebuds for you, Polly. Here’s an old coat of Judge Yates’. See the funny pointed collar, and the hand cut jet buttons and quilted lining.”

“Oh, Miss Pen,” exclaimed Ted, brushing up her hair until it stood on end in front. “Can’t I please go as the old Judge? I’d love to. I can find an old waistcoat and trousers, I know I can, and this coat. Please let me.”

“Why, I don’t care, child,” Penelope replied. “Go as Methusaleh if you can find a suitable costume. Mrs. Yates has ordered the masks from Richmond, so you’ll have those tomorrow. Sue, that’s an old green riding habit that I can remember Aunt Betty Marbury wearing when she was a girl. It will just about fit you.”

Sue put it on, and buttoned it up from collar to hem with the odd crocheted buttons, black silk over wooden molds. It fit her fairly well, and Crullers discovered the hat and veil that went with it.

“All I need is the crop now,” said Sue, pacing pack and forth. “But what a lot of skirt they did have in those days. Here’s a silk loop to hold it up, girls. I like the cross saddle skirts better that we had out west.”

Polly was passing upstairs the evening of the masquerade to dress for dinner, when she saw the door of the library open, and Mrs. Yates came out. The great hall below was empty. It was

somewhat cool, and a low fire burned in the fireplace. She went over to it, and rested her head on one hand, leaned on the mantelpiece, looking down at the embers. And Polly, with one of her sudden impulsive waves, said softly:

“Mrs. Yates, I’m awfully sorry.”

“Why, Polly, is it you?” Mrs. Yates started, and looked up, but with her quick sympathetic smile. “What is it, dear? Something gone wrong?”

Polly came downstairs, and slipped one arm around her.

“Not with us. I meant about—you know, about the Senator. He has been so kind to us girls, and has helped us realize all our dreams, and now it seems terrible for him to have to suffer in that way.”

“You mean for kindness to a friend?” Mrs. Yates smiled. “I know he was glad to render it, dear, and never has begrudged it. We could not tell that the friend would pass away, and leave the burden for another. If he had been younger, and in better health, I do not think the shock would have been so great, but he is very much attached to White Chimneys, of course, and it must go first, I am told.”

“Then will you live up at Washington?”

“I hardly know. If the Senator’s health fails to improve, we may give up all public life for him, and go away quietly somewhere. It is harder for Marbury than for us, really, but he is a dear brave lad.”

“But that won’t make any difference with his marrying Cary?”

“None at all.” She smiled and looked down at the gleam of the fire, steady and warm. “Theirs is not the kind of love that is dependent upon wordly goods, and they are both young. We will give them all we are able, and I know the way to happiness lies straight before them.”

Polly’s forehead puckered in a puzzled little frown.

“It does seem as if there must be some way,” she said, earnestly. “Whenever one is sure they are really right, it seems there must be some way out.”

“Run and dress now, dear.” Mrs. Yates bent and kissed the eager upturned face. “We can only hope and trust that everything will come out right. The Senator is looking over your account of the trip now in the library, and is greatly amused at the daily ‘log.’”

"But is he satisfied that we did the work all right?"

"Completely. I don't think that he really thought you would keep at it so faithfully for the full four weeks, and follow his directions."

"Don't you? Oh, the girls will all be so pleased if he is satisfied, for they have worked hard. We used to wonder sometimes whether we were doing everything right, but we had Miss Harmon to direct, and Patchin was wonderful. We couldn't have made the trip without Patchin, I know."

Before she went upstairs, Mrs. Yates told her to stop in the library for a few minutes to get the Senator's own opinion first hand.

He sat at his desk, his head bent forward a little, leaning on both hands as though his eyes ached. At first Polly hesitated, thinking he had fallen asleep, but he glanced up at her footfall behind him, and smiled.

"Well, Captain of the expedition," he said, as Polly dropped into the chair beside him. "I congratulate you. The report is satisfactory, and a surprise too. I have never seen a path-finding report so full of local color. You certainly did not miss anything, did you?"

"Oh, there was lots we didn't put down," Polly replied seriously. "But it's all in our own log book. Did you like that?"

"Immensely." The Senator chuckled, half closing his eyes as he leaned back his head. "How many pictures did you take?"

"I'm not sure. Ted looked after that. About twenty cartridges, I think. And there are eight exposures in each cartridge, but Ted used a lot for just personal pictures."

"You can send me the impersonal ones when you have them ready. Those that we can use will go in the bill."

"Will it be—" Polly hesitated, but knew how the girls would question her upstairs. "Will it be a very large bill, Senator Yates?"

"I think you can safely count on a hundred dollars off your expenses, and possibly more. We will know better after we see the pictures. But you have gone over every road marked down for you, and have reported conditions faithfully, besides supplying your own car and chauffeur. We will look after you properly, Polly, for it has saved special trips over these outlying unfamiliar roads."

"I'm glad," sighed Polly. "Now that it's all

over, it seems a little bit daring to have tried it, but we did have such a perfectly dandy time, Senator."

Here Ted called over the upper balustrade for her to come at once and help dress up the rest. They were all in Miss Harmon's room with their "togs" as Ted dubbed the costumes. Piled on the couch they were, riding habit, Judge's suit, white mulle, and a green silk covered with black Chantilly lace that Hallie was to don.

"It belonged to my great-great-great grandmother, Polly," she said, wriggling into its voluminous folds, and settling the billows of narrow ruffles. "Where's my handbag?"

"Reticule, Hallie," Penelope prompted. She handed over a silk lined one, with beaded roses outside, and Hallie tied on a little lace cap with coral loveknots pinning up its ruffles.

"That looks lovely, Hallie," Polly exclaimed. "Can I help you, Crullers?"

"Oh, dear, I don't know," groaned Crullers, trying to squeeze into some high heeled satin slippers. "There's my dress if you can make head or tail to it. These slippers pinch me so."

"Don't wear them then," said Polly practically.

“But I have to, Polly. Everybody’s feet were pinched in these slippers way back. It was fashionable to be pinched. I’m going to wear three prince’s feathers in my hair too, some that the Lady Philippa Yates really wore when she was presented to the King and Queen—which court was it, Miss Pen?”

“George the Third, or maybe it was William and Mary, I declare I can’t keep track of all of them,” Penelope was on her knees beside Isabel, pinning up her Grecian robes. “I wish Natalie could have been in this too.”

“So do I,” said Hallie. “But she had to meet her father in New York when he landed, and so I came straight on here because I wouldn’t have missed this for the world after Aunt Margaret wrote and told me.”

“You’ll trip over this train sure as fate, Crullers,” said Polly, holding up the long narrow garment. It was pink brocaded satin, edged in narrow velvet ribbon and lace. Crullers had slipped on the pretty quilted petticoat, and panniers.

“Yes, I can, too, Polly. Hand me the bodice, somebody, please. Look at all these tiny crystal buttons, Polly.”

“You’ll tumble just the same, buttons or no

buttons," Polly prophesied. "You'll never manage that train in this world, Crullers."

"Well, I'll have a good try at it, and if I do tumble, it's my own doings," Crullers insisted.

Polly was the last to dress. The white mulle had been her choice, with its quaint full skirt, festooned in lace and rosebuds. Penelope dressed her hair in the style of the early sixties, little clusters of side curls, the high comb in the back, and a spray of late pink roses twined into a wreath.

She made a low curtsy before the oval mirror that hung in the upper hall, when they passed downstairs, a habit she had had since almost babyhood. Welcome had always chuckled at her grave curtsies to the other child in the mirrors, and tonight she did it with an odd feeling of dancing away from the reaching arms of grown-ups. The years were passing swiftly. She was fifteen now. Only one more year remained at Calvert, and after that came the real college days, unless the Admiral decided to take her on the world cruise instead.

The girl who bowed back to her seemed a vision of the coming Polly five years hence. Just for a moment, Polly hesitated behind all the other

girls, and returned the long earnest glance of her mirrored self, then she gave a quick sigh, and ran down after Sue, picking up her full skirts in each hand.

The Admiral had been expected on the early train, but Marbury returned in the machine without him. There was another chance of his arriving on the eight-thirty local, the Senator told the girls, and they were on the alert with anticipation.

The great center hall had never looked so lovely. Great jars filled with pink and white stocks stood around in corners, backed with the dark green of mountain laurel. Flowering almond and quince fairly glowed in shadowy spots here and there, and oleanders and azaleas were grouped around the entrances, whose arches draped in southern smilax seemed openings into some woodland fairyland.

Marbury dressed in a Pierrot costume was master of ceremonies. Randy was an Indian chief, and the two stood at the open doors as carriage after carriage deposited young guests before White Chimneys. Polly moved around in a maze. She wore a small white silk half mask, and her lips were parted in a smile of pure radiant

fun. Now a dancing bear tugged at her sleeve, and she turned around to face a laughing pick-aninny picking on a banjo.

When Mrs. Yates seated herself at the piano and played the grand march, the choosing of partners was hilarious. Twice Crullers half tumbled over her long train in the march, but Randy was her partner, and he held her up pluckily.

During the second dance Polly noticed her sitting by herself on the broad staircase.

"My slipper pinches awfully," she said, tugging at it. "I just had to come here and get it off for a minute."

"But they're forming for a grand promenade all around the house and the garden. Marbury's leading, and there's a prize for the one that follows him to the end."

"I don't care, Polly." Crullers was almost sobbing. "It hurts my toe, and I couldn't promenade for seventeen golden prizes on silver trays."

"But they're coming this way." Polly leaned over the balustrade. The music came up in a triumphant swell of melody, and there was the laughter just below in the hall. The Pierrot was leading, twirling his folly stick, and dancing, with

a quaint figure by his side, Evangeline in tender grey and little lace cap.

“There’s Cary now,” exclaimed Polly. “I didn’t know what she was to wear. Do get up, Crullers, so we can get in line.”

But Crullers groaned and shrank against the side of the wall with its heavy old carved wainscoting. The masqueraders were turning at the foot of the stairs. Polly, laughing and trying to hurry Crullers out of the way, almost lost her presence of mind.

“Please, please try, Crullers,” she begged, helping her to her feet. “You can surely carry the slipper and hop.”

“Wait, I’ll try,” said poor Crullers, and she balanced herself on one foot like a stork, leaned against the wall, and tried to put on the offending slipper.

And suddenly the carved wood under her hand seemed to slip away from her. Backward it pressed a few inches, and then moved down perhaps a foot, disclosing a deep, dark recess.

Crullers stared at what she had done with open mouth, and wide frightened eyes. She seized Polly’s arm for support.

“Polly, look there? What is it?”

The rest were crowding up the stairs to see too, but Polly held up her hand, and called out.

“Oh, please wait just a minute. Something’s happened. Where’s Senator Yates?”

But Marbury sprang up the steps three at a time.

“Don’t tell him anything suddenly,” he begged. “We are guarding him against any shock. What’s the trouble?”

“Look!” Polly pointed at the aperture. “Crullers just put her hand on it, and it did that.”

Marbury reached his hand far back in the recess. It seemed to widen on either side. His white sleeve was covered with dust as he drew his arm back.

“There’s something back in there if I can reach it,” he said. “Boys, lift me up.”

Some of the boy guests pressed forward, and raised him to a level with the opening so he could try again, and this time he brought out an old brown canvas bag, tied around and around with heavy cord.

“There’s more than that,” he said, reaching in again.

The music had stopped, and Mrs. Yates hurried to see what had caused the crowding on the

stairs and excitement. The bag was handed from one to another until it reached her, and she held it in wonderment, watching Marbury.

"There's another one," he said, drawing out a dusty head and another bag. "It's packed with them in the back, just packed with them. Here's something different." He held up an old red morocco wallet, worn almost to its original tan. The flap went around it twice. He carried it down to his mother, and they waited while she undid it. Somewhere back in his study, the Senator had retired for a quiet rest. And inside the wallet was a folded parchment, yellow with age, the writing barely decipherable.

Just at that moment of suspense Polly, standing a little to one side, thought how strange they all looked, in their fantastic costumes, grouped close around the table in hushed expectancy, waiting for this long hidden message from what hand?

"You read it, Marbury, dear," said Mrs. Yates. "I can't seem to see the words."

And Marbury obeyed, reading aloud in his clear boyish voice with Cary hanging over his shoulder, standing tiptoe on a stool to see better.

"To the World that hath Denied me My Privileged Rights, I, Humphrey Bancroft, Pirate and

Outlaw and onetime Gentleman of Bancroft Hall, Cornwall, England, do give and bequeath to the family or descendants of Percival Yates, all my Worldly Goods here contained in these Sacks. For that he of God's Mercy and his own Faire Kindnesse did give me Shelter and Succor in great houre of Neede, so do I now give unto him and to his children my share of wealth taken the 16th Day of August, 1679, from the Spanish galleon, Santa Maria Costanza. Peace to my Soul and God's Sweete Mercy. I sign my name in testament,

"HUMPHREY BANCROFT."

CHAPTER XX

A VOTE OF THANKS

THE night was so filled with excitement and merriment, that it was not until the following morning, anything definite could be learned of what was in the sacks of poor Humphrey Bancroft, "onetime gentleman."

The Admiral arrived a little past nine, and rejoiced with them all over the strange discovery.

He patted Crullers on her tawsled head, as she stood ruefully staring at the wreck of the wainscoting.

"Jane Daphne, you surely started something of importance that time if you never did before. You shall go down in history as the saver of destinies at White Chimneys. Bless my heart and soul, Polly, Marbury is bringing down more sacks."

There were twenty-eight in all, each about the size of a salt bag, as Penelope put it, and as each was opened, there lay the dull glint of old, long-hidden gold.

Mrs. Yates went into the study to break the tidings to the Senator. He lay back in his favorite chair, dozing, his eyeglasses slipping off his nose, and Toby Belch, the big Maltese cat, sound asleep on his lap.

No one knew what passed between them in there, but in a few minutes they emerged, the Senator's arm around Mrs. Yates's waist, and he walked without his cane for the first time in weeks, Polly noticed. Without saying very many words, he stood beside the Admiral and looked down at the treasure.

"Bread cast upon the waters," said Polly softly, "shall return after many days as plum-cake."

"The poor lad," the Senator remarked, holding up the faded piece of parchment. "He must have suffered in mind and body too. How could he have dreamt anyone would ever discover the hidden horde unless he intended telling of it."

"Perhaps he did tell, and Percival Yates died before he could pass the secret on," suggested the Admiral.

The girls speculated and guessed about how much the sacks contained. Isabel was sure there

must be millions, but Ted said it was all Spanish money anyway, and would have to be changed into good American eagles. One thing was certain, the Admiral told them later, there was plenty to lift all financial anxiety from the Senator's shoulders.

Crullers was summoned to the study after breakfast, and went half frightened and surprised, but when she came back she was all smiley tears and excitement.

"I can go through college if I like, the Senator says. He wanted me to take some of the treasure, but I knew mother would never let me do that and I told him so, so he said I would always be a ward of White Chimneys, and he would pay for all my schooling. Goodness, I know how handy that will come in right now, too," she added, sagely. "Because the boys are growing like weeds, and will have to go to some good school next year, and I thought I'd have to give up Calvert, girls."

"Give up Calvert, our noble Crullers!" cried Ted. "What would we do without Crullers to scold and put the blame on. Don't you care, Crullers, you are famous forever, you and your high heeled slippers that pinched."

Polly looked up from her packing. Six suitcases lay around on Penelope's floor, almost ready to close. Mrs. Yates had given each girl the costume she had worn at the masquerade for a souvenir, and Polly patted down the white tulle lovingly. It had been such a glorious climax to the summer, this clearing of clouds over dear White Chimneys. Down in the rose garden she could see Marbury and Cary, walking close together through the hedge bordered paths. Randy was out at the garage with Patchin. The girls had all gone down in a body to wish Patchin good-bye, and present him with a gold watch that the Admiral had selected for him under Polly's orders.

Patchin had been surprised and horribly embarrassed, but he thanked them all, and fondled the watch in his hands.

"They were a mighty busy lot of young ladies," he remarked, which was high praise from Patchin, the Senator said. "They all worked like beavers on those roads, but Miss Polly, she's the latest model, and the last word in speed."

"Girls," Polly said now, hugging her knees, and rocking a little, as she always did. "We've made all expenses and a hundred over, the Sen-

ator says. I feel awfully comfy inside somehow, and contented, don't you?"

"Do we?" Sue stood up, and ran her fingers through her hair vigorously. "Polly, we're so happy and puffed up in our own conceit—"

Ted's hand closed over her mouth.

"Madam President, may I make a motion?"

"Fire ahead, but it's irregular," laughed Polly.

"I move that we extend a vote of thanks to Senator Yates for helping us, and to Patchin for helping us, and to Miss Penelope for being patient and true through the whole trip, and to Mrs. Yates."

"You left out one," called Crullers hastily. "The ghost of Humphrey."

And filled with an odd mixture of fun and sincerity, the girls lifted their hands high to pass the vote of thanks to the wraith of that most unfortunate gentleman and pirate who had brought happiness and wealth back to White Chimneys.

THE END

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